The Experiences of White Male Counsellors Who Work with First Nations Clients

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a qualitative study that investigated the experiences of White male counsellors who work with First Nations clients. Five experienced counsellors participated in individual, tape-recorded interviews, during which they described their experiences, yielding written protocols that were thematically analyzed. Results from this study revealed five predominant themes that included the following: (a) encountering difference, (b) establishing relationships, (c) a willingness to learn, (d) evolving professional identities, and (e) impact on self-awareness. Findings and implications for White counsellors and counsellor educators are included.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article décrit une étude qualitative examinant les expériences de conseillers masculins blancs travaillant avec des clients des Premières Nations. Cinq conseillers chevronnés ont participé à des entrevues individuelles enregistrées sur magnétophone, durant lesquelles ils ont décrit leurs expériences. Ces entrevues ont conduit à la rédaction de protocoles qui ont été analysés thématiquement. Les résultats de cette étude révèlent les cinq thèmes principaux suivants : (a) l'expérience de la différence, (b) l'établissement d'une relation, (c) une volonté d'apprendre, (d) l'évolution des identités professionnelles et (e) l'impact sur la conscience de soi. Il est fourni des conclusions et des implications à l'usage des conseillers blancs et des conseillers-éducateurs.

The ethnocentric nature and limitations inherent in traditional counselling theories are well documented (e.g., Katz, 1985; Sue, Bernier, Durran, Feinberg, Pedersen, Smith, & Vasquez-Nuttal, 1982; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue & Sue, 1990; Wrenn, 1985). Despite increased attention to the development of multicultural counselling proficiencies (Pope-Davis & Coleman, 1997), counsellors are generally ill prepared to work with culturally diverse client populations (Atkinson, Thompson, & Grant, 1993; Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994). Although current models of counsellor education integrate multicultural competencies, these competencies are generally based on philosophical assumptions, pre-theoretical concepts, or clinical experience while extant research regarding multicultural proficiency is limited to graduate students involved in newly developed multicultural counselling programs (Ponterotto, 1996; Wehrly, 1995).

There is a need for research paradigms to enhance understanding and knowledge of multicultural counselling (e.g., Merchant, 1997; Ponterotto, 1996) and

the impact of White counsellor's socialization and ethnic identity development on the counselling relationship (e.g., Atkinson & Lowe, 1995; Carter, 1995; Helms, 1995; Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). This discussion reviews the extant literature pertaining to counselling First Nations clients, reports on the findings of a study regarding the experiences of White male counsellors who work with First Nations clients, and outlines implications for counsellors and counsellor educators.

COUNSELLING FIRST NATIONS CLIENTS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

The need to address the sociopolitical context (Green, 1997; Kirmayer, 1994; LaFromboise & Jackson, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993) and economic forces (Hodson, 1990; Kirmayer, 1994) that impact First Nations clients has been recognized. The effects of colonization, oppression, and the residential school experience (e.g., Morrissette, 1994; Morrissette & Naden, 1998; LaFromboise & Jackson, 1996) have received particular attention. Several authors (Carlson, 1975;, 1988; Katz, 1981) have remarked that residual emotions associated with colonization and marginalization of Native populations poses a particular challenge for White professionals who expect to work with Native clients.

To avoid stereotyping Native clients and imposing a definition of community, the diversity among Native cultures must be acknowledged (Choney, Berryhill-Paapke, & Robbins, 1995; Thomason, 1991; Trimble & Medicine, 1993) and clients should be perceived as cultural interpreters (LaFromboise & Jackson, 1996). Atkinson and Lowe (1995) discouraged counsellors from making assumptions about the cultural alliance of clients and underscore the degree of acculturation to dominant society as well as bicultural identity development. To assist in this process, counsellors need to understand the collective identity of clients (Restoule, 1997), adopt a bicultural perspective (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993), and appreciate the importance of cultural identity and renewal for First Nations peoples (Dolan, 1995; France, 1997; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993).

Although the cross cultural literature initially advocated a directive approach to counselling, currently no single clinical approach is preferred when working with First Nations clients (Thomason, 1991). Bennet and Bigfoot-Snipes (1991) found that Native students preferred ethnically similar counsellors who identify strongly with their culture, however, this research is considered inconclusive (Choney et al., 1995). Many factors other than ethnic similarity combine to establish counsellor credibility for Native clients (Atkinson & Lowe, 1995). For example, perceived trustworthiness is considered to be more important than ethnic similarity amongst clients (Heindrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990; Restoule, 1997; Thomason 1991).

Traditional indigenous healing practices are advocated (e.g., Jilek, 1982; Timpson, McKay, Kakegamic, Roundhead, Cohen, & Matewapit, 1988). However, France (1997) cautioned non-Native mental health professionals who contemplate employing indigenous healing practices. This cautionary note is based

on a perspective that ousiders, ". . . can never learn the teaching since teachings are rooted in culture. To remove the teaching from its point of origin is to bring damage to it" (France, 1997, p. 7). This author notes, however, that some Native healers contend that individuals who have come *close to the earth* [italics added] can follow some teachings including vision quest and sweat lodge.

Counselling approaches that are based on dominant society assumptions and values have been ineffective (France & McCormick, 1997a; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993; Thomason, 1991) when treating First Nations clients. Further, counsellors who equate adherence to indigenous values with pathology, or those who assume *expert* [italics added] status have limited success (Choney et al., 1995; Hodson, 1990). Several authors (France & McCormick, 1997b; LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990; Morrissette, 1994) advocate integrating Native and mainstream strategies and encourage a holistic approach that accommodates a spiritual element of well-being (Choney et al., 1995; France, 1997; LaFromboise & Jackson, 1996). Nelson, Kelley, and McPherson (1985) urge counsellors to understand helping as a supportive rather than a change process.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative orientations are particularly well suited to counselling research (Gama, 1992; Nelson & Poulin, 1997). Phenomenological research searches for a deeper understanding and insightful descriptions of experiences that can be shared by co-researchers. Within this process, researchers distinguish features of the experiences and present a perspectival understanding of the phenomenon. The research question asked in this study was: What is it like for you to work with First Nations clients?

Co-researchers

The co-researchers who were selected for this study were the following: (a) active White counsellors working with First Nations clients, (b) professionally registered practitioners, and (c) willing to share salient experiences related to the phenomenon of interest. Co-researchers were selected from the Calgary and surrounding area in Alberta, Canada.

Potential co-researchers were identified through word of mouth, public ads, and contacts with First Nation social service, educational, employment agencies. Aboriginal agencies were asked to identify White counsellors to whom they felt comfortable referring aboriginal clients.

Pseudonyms were assigned to each of the five co-researchers. Two co-researchers were marriage and family therapists, two were psychologists, and one was a social worker. Four of the co-researchers had between 5 and 17 years experience in individual, family, and/or group counselling with First Nations clients. The fifth co-researcher provided direct counselling and supervision in Native communities for two years, had extensive mainstream counselling experience, and had facilitated training programs in Native communities for eight years.

<div align="center">PROCEDURE</div>

Each of the five co-researchers participated in two tape-recorded interviews conducted by the first author. Each interview was semi-structured, conversational in style. Interview locations varied according to the convenience of the co-researchers. Reflective comments were made and/or probing questions were used to encourage co-researcher reflection. A third non-recorded interview was conducted following the identification of the themes.

The data analysis adhered to guidelines proposed by Colaizzi (1978) and Osborne (1990). First, immediately following each initial interview, the audiotapes were carefully reviewed to gain a holistic impression and emerging themes were tentatively noted. Second, the interviews were transcribed into written protocols and were read in their entirety. Third, statements, phrases, and sections that formed the meaning units (descriptions of co-researchers' experience) were highlighted. Fourth, the meaning units were then paraphrased and associated themes were identified. Finally, themes with conceptually related meanings were clustered into meta-themes to develop a master list. An understanding of the essential themes was developed from these thematic clusters. A synthesis of perspectives found in and between the protocols revealed shared experiences.

To facilitate co-researcher reflection and avoid researcher bias, an attempt was made to bracket and set aside a priori assumptions. To enhance study credibility, co-researchers were offered the text of the transcribed interviews and in the third interview co-researchers were asked to verify and comment on an outline of the themes that had been identified. Field notes from the third interviews became part of the data and were integrated into the findings. In this final interview co-researchers stated that the themes accurately reflected their experiences.

To enhance transferability, the essential structure of the co-researchers' experiences was presented to professionals who were not in this study, yet familiar with the phenomenon. The tentative findings were presented to three groups of predominantly White counsellors who had experience working with Native clients. It was generally agreed that the themes resonated with their experiences. The triangulation process fortified the confirmability of the study.

Finally, the dependability/audibility of this study was based on a decision trail (Koch, 1994) that involved coherent presentation, including the following: (a) information as to background and motives of the researcher, (b) purpose of the study, (c) data collection and time-line, (d) the context of the interviews, and (e) data analysis.

<div align="center">RESULTS</div>

Five themes emerged from the data and included the following: (a) encountering difference, (b) establishing relationships, (c) a willingness to learn, (d) evolving professional identities, and (e) impact on self-awareness. While identified separately, the themes are not independent but are interrelated in the experience of the co-researchers.

Theme 1: Encountering Difference

Understanding the experiences and worldviews of clients was critical to co-researcher development. Despite a fundamental appreciation for cultural differences, the limited scope of their knowledge became evident as co-researchers embarked on their work with First Nations clients. Sensitivity to Native culture increased when clients, community leaders, or Native co-workers identified differences and encouraged co-researchers to consider a different perspective. Client non-verbal behaviours also alerted co-researchers to important cultural differences.

> I anticipated the issues [cultural differences] but not to this magnitude. As I work here more, I appreciate the differences, especially the language difference. It's not only the different words but the concepts and their world view are markedly different. . . . I didn't realise that it had such a profound effect on how they viewed issues/problems and how they viewed solutions — Fred

Exposure to client worldviews prompted different clinical approaches. Further, honouring difference, remaining flexible, and working creatively was perceived as critical to effective counselling. An integral part of the co-researchers clinical work involved understanding the historical, cultural, and socioeconomic context of First Nations experience. It was discovered that clients and community leaders wanted professionals to understand how their personal and cultural histories contributed to their current conditions.

The traumatic history of Native people since colonization became a working frame of reference. Appreciating the resiliency and worldview of Native clients, however, provided a positive framework in which to work. The diversity among First Nations and the differences between urban/reserve experiences, demonstrated the complexity of the Native culture. A better understanding of a Native worldview and relational perspective of the human condition culminated in a greater acceptance by Native clients and colleagues. Understanding the limited access to mainstream resources, in addition to varied degrees of disconnection to traditional healers, enhanced the co-researcher's appreciation of client experiences.

The counselling context provided opportunities for co-researchers to recognise and articulate personal values that they brought to their work and the strengths and obstacles they presented. Opportunities to consider different worldviews were appreciated as opportunities for growth.

> I think at one time I used to have this sense of being a professional and I hid behind that. . . . Here there is a greater expectation to be who you are. It's sort of this holistic or broader view of who I am and there is greater room to just be yourself. — Fred

While the attention to cultural difference was a critical aspect of their development, co-researchers found that an exclusive focus on difference presented the risk of being overwhelmed and unable to act.

> Sometimes I'm in awe of the differences . . . I wonder if I become almost immobilised in terms of being so respectful [to difference]. — Sam

Identifying a common ground for the client and counsellor became important. The shared experiences within the human condition underscored attempts to attain common ground and a starting place for their work. As a result, it was essential to learn about client culture and how values are internalized.

Theme 2: Establishing Relationships

I think my most challenging work here is not intervention, more [it is] engagement. — Fred

Developing trusting relationships was particularly challenging. Being White carried meaning into the counselling relationship that could not be ignored.

So he came into the third session and said, "So who are you, who is [Joe]?" I gave him maybe two minutes of who I was. He just blew up — he became enraged and I had a diatribe about how I was another f-ing White man and I was just living off the back of the pain that was caused by ourselves in the first place. — Joe

However, for the most part, client anger was not personalized but was directed at dominant society's power structures.

Co-researchers recognised that their own values and attitudes as well as the client's affected the counselling relationship. Stereotypes were detrimental. Understanding individual clients involved developing an understanding of their families, communities, and cultural identity. The inclusion of extended family members, elders, and traditional healers during the counselling process sometimes proved helpful and enhanced relationships. However, expanding the clinical circle and integrating existing resources was challenging and not always possible.

Over time, the co-reseachers discovered that clinical effectiveness was limited when focus was restricted to individuals. In fact, individual progress was often unsupported by family and community. Consequently, there were ongoing attempts to achieve a relational balance between the individual and the community. Efforts included community development, training and preventative programs, as well as therapeutic programs which addressed community wellness.

It is a relationship with the community . . . a relationship with the community rather than the individual. — Fred

The co-researchers described their need to be confident in the community's ability to solve problems. Nevertheless, supporting individual clients while serving the community was a constant struggle. Finding a balance between the historical legacy and their current helping relationship as well as their ability to attend to individual and community needs, however, was fundamental to establishing a helping relationship.

Theme 3: A Willingness to Learn: A Teachable Spirit

You have to have a certain level of knowledge but you also have to have a very teachable spirit — Bob

The foundation of the co-researchers' credibility was their professional training and credentials. However, a willingness to relinquish an expert position, sustain

humility about one's knowledge and role, and remain receptive to learning about the First Nations culture was deemed essential. Moreover, interaction with clients, elders, Native co-workers, and the community as a whole was the primary source of cultural education. Client diversity precluded prescriptive clinical approaches. A willingness to have one's knowledge challenged, to work with uncertainty, and seek guidance from the Native community was important.

> I'm really a student when I'm meeting with them. Hopefully I can bring some expertise into the room also. — Sam

Listening to stories became an integral part of the counselling relationship and central to co-researcher development. Initially, some co-researchers were impatient with stories that did not appear to relate to a presenting problem straightaway. As they became more attuned to the cultural context of their work, the shared stories influenced how co-researchers understood the individual and collective history and values of their clients. The use of stories influenced how the co-researchers interacted and intervened. Stories were used to share information, facilitate disclosure, or offer alternative perspectives. Individual stories helped avoid stereotypes.

> . . . showing respect, not being as directive in my questions, sometimes listening to a story in many ways may not be relevant to what you think the issue is but . . . the story may be important. I think story telling is a very important way for First Nations' individuals to communicate their concerns. Even in my suggestions or alternatives I oft times use stories as opposed to being directive. — Bob

The need for co-researchers to remain flexible and creative was underscored. There was a continual challenge to incorporate this cultural information into practice. Responsible practice and professional integrity necessitated the reexamination of counselling theories and methods of change. Amongst the co-researchers there was a gradual integration of their concepts of change, values, and practices with the First Nations cultures. Stylistic changes often involved leaving the office more often, working in the community, and sharing tea.

Working with extended family and/or elders involved a paradigm shift for many co-researchers. Values also became more important in their work. Clients were often encouraged to reflect on how they internalized values or teachings espoused by elders. The co-researchers emphasized the need to play a secondary role in community interventions. While some co-researchers described their inclination to take on the responsibility to identify social priorities and develop programs, most found that in order to develop effective interventions the community needed to identify and address issues independently without external interference.

Theme 4: Evolving Professional Identities

An evolution in professional identity occurred among the co-researchers as they began to realize their clinical limitations. Many underlying assumptions were not universal and the degree of self-awareness demanded of the co-researchers was greater than anticipated.

> I was really quite naive, when I came here, in terms of the differences. And I had the belief, and I was trained, that the brand of therapy that I was given, I was led to believe you could take this anywhere and it could fit into any culture, any situation. — Fred

Subsequently, to enhance their effectiveness, the co-researchers sought the assistance of Native mentors in an effort to expand their knowledge and skill base. Openness to a spiritual dimension of human experience became more important. With the progression of clinical work, however, there was a corresponding sense of isolation from mainstream colleagues. Co-researchers found few opportunities for support and/or supervision from amongst their professional peers. Blatant racism and apathy was sometimes encountered among non-Native mental health professionals. One co-researcher described colleagues who described First Nations communities as *black holes* [italics added] where problems were overwhelming and unresolvable.

In response to community needs, the co-researchers assumed a variety of roles (e.g., advocate in the Courts, counsellor, trainer, and community development consultant). These professionals described themselves as intermediaries, facilitating understanding between the dominant society and Native communities, or providing the bridge between traditional healers and mainstream counsellors. They were surprised to find that sometimes client perceptions of confidentiality were enhanced because the co-researchers were not a part of the community and, therefore, less likely to disclose information to family members.

At times, co-researcher involvement in the area of community activism would threaten relationships between the co-researchers and their clients or community leaders. Therefore, non-directive approaches on both individual and community levels became important. As outsiders to the Native community, co-researchers were often reminded of their status and informal limits were placed on clinical intervention. The invitation to work within Native communities precluded addressing perceived community injustice. Determining the appropriate level of intervention (e.g., individual or community) was a major question and underscored cultural differences.

Co-researchers experienced an implicit expectation that they expand their role and participate in community life. Attending community events, for example, served to enhance relationships and provided the co-researchers with opportunities to develop a greater understanding of client culture and to observe the work of elders. The participation in community activities often involved dual relationships with clients. Consequently, the co-researchers realized a need to negotiate changes to their traditional concept of role boundaries.

> I think in some ways I do represent the powerful White community. . . . it is certainly not a position that I want. . . . but sometimes I have the feeling that they see me as the authority figure but they resent it. — Fred

To avoid assuming power and privilege reminiscent of historical paternalistic relationships, attention to clinical style was also important. Therefore, effort was made to create respectful relationships in counselling, supervisory, and consultative roles. During this process, however, the co-researchers grappled with estab-

lishing egalitarian relationships while remaining mindful of the power differential inherent in both the counselling relationship and the historical context of Native/White relations. The co-researchers were actively involved in the training and development of Native counsellors to better meet the needs of First Nations communities and to influence mainstream mental health professions.

Theme 5: Impact On Self-Awareness

Increased self-reflection was common among co-researchers who examined their beliefs, values, theories of change, and experience of White privilege. During this process, they were conscious of the risk of acting on ethnocentric perspectives and personal agendas in their work. Without opportunities to include the reflection process in supervision, co-researchers relied on their personal resources to make meaning of their experiences.

The co-researchers did not specifically set out to work with First Nation clients, nor did they see this as an exclusive area in which their careers would develop. However, when reflecting on their commitment, the co-researchers expressed attitudes such as *wanting to make a difference* [italics added], or *wanting to be a part of the solution* [italics added].

> The term they use in [Community name] is prairie nigger. That's how they're referred to, prairie niggers. When I hear things like that it motivates me even more to do research and to write about the atrocities that have happened to these folks. But anyhow for whatever its worth it has touched my soul. — Sam

A protective attitude toward clients was expressed by the co-researchers which appeared to develop from an awareness of racism and historical injustice. Moreover, the profound power imbalances between privileged members of dominant society and their clients were underscored.

To varying degrees, the co-researchers grappled with unsettled feelings about the nature and extent of the problems they witnessed. The individual and collective trauma of racism and oppression experienced by their clients left its mark on the co-researchers in the form of a vicarious traumatization. The co-researchers were cognizant about how their work influenced them and ultimately, impacted their families.

Frequent references were made to the importance of personal identity and not assuming a Native identity. The co-researchers described the importance of being themselves in developing effective counselling relationships. A genuineness about personal values and identity, an acknowledgment of differences, and a willingness to hear how clients defined themselves was instrumental in developing relationships.

> ... your presence matters. Who you are matters to what is going on. I've had that lesson many many times: that who you are really really matters. — Joe

While respect for Native culture was important, over-identification with Native culture was described as an impediment to effective work. Appreciating and respecting rather than appropriating Native culture were key considerations. In

effect, co-researchers experiences marked the beginnings of their own cultural identity development. In this way, co-researchers could explore the meaning of their client's identity while remaining grounded in their own identity. This reflection on their identity was noted particularly in the realm of personal spirituality. Co-researchers described how their work with First Nations stimulated the development of their own culturally relevant spirituality.

<div align="center">DISCUSSION</div>

This study revealed that counselling First Nations clients can be complex and demanding for White counsellors. It illuminates the co-researchers' experience when: (a) dealing with difference, (b) developing relationships with First Nations clients and communities, (c) encountering non-traditional forms of learning, (d) coping with an evolving professional identity, and (e) developing self-awareness. It was revealed that the co-researchers worked at the edge of their professional knowledge and in relative isolation. The co-researchers gradually examined their attitudes and values, abandoned an expert role, and learned to listen to stories to develop their knowledge about Native values. This experience affected how they saw themselves as counsellors and as cultural beings.

The literature on counselling native clients offers a foundation on which prospective counsellors can develop their knowledge of First Nations clients. However, this study also reveals how the person of the counsellor and their response to cultural difference plays a fundamental role in the ability to develop effective cross-cultural practice. The co-researchers' experience reflected many of the themes found in the literature on multicultural counselling competency. This suggests that the multicultural counselling perspective may offer an effective foundation for practicing counsellors and students.

The need to understand an individual in the context of their community emerged as a central feature in the co-researcher's experience. Therefore, not only facilitators of individual change, co-researchers also worked in service of First Nations communities. LaFromboise and Jackson (1996) emphasize this need to understand larger socio-political and cultural relationships. LaFromboise et al. (1990) note that since the problems of the individual are often the problems of the community, the goals of indigenous therapy, rather than being focussed on the individual, are to reaffirm culture and consider the individual in the context of the community. The co-researchers found the focus on community as well as individual issues reflected the call for counsellors to expand their roles made by Atkinson et al. (1993).

Rejecting an expert stance was integral to co-researchers' acceptance by clients and communities and was at the core of their ability to enter their client's world. The ability to acknowledge the limits of their expertise and become students of the client's culture reflects the deliberately naive stance advocated by Daniels and D'Andrea (1996) and Ridley (1995). Many writers on multicultural counselling support learning about a client's values and worldview through cultural infor-

mants and the use of stories as a means of transmitting this information (e.g., Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Jones, Locke, Sanchez, & Stadler, 1996; Haig-Brown & Archibald, 1996; LaFromboise et al.,1990; Ridley, 1995).

This study also draws our attention to the need to both honour differences and, in order not to be overwhelmed by them, to find common areas of understanding from which to work. Sue, Ivey, and Pedersen (1996) address this issue when they state,

> The complexity of cultural identity presumes that each client will be able to identify shared features of comembership with each counsellor no matter how different they may appear from one another and that this common ground will provide a useful point of reference in developing a successful counselling relationship. (p.16)

Additionally, the co-researchers found that individual client's stories revealed the idiosyncratic internalization of culture which is addressed by many (e.g., Ho, 1995; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Ridley, 1995; Thomason,1991) and important in moving beyond cultural stereotypes.

The co-researchers' experience emphasizes the critical nature of the multicultural relationship in counselling across cultures and the impact of Whiteness and the historical legacy of Native/White interaction on this relationship. Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, and Wise (1994) have identified the multicultural relationship as a core competency in multicultural work. Sue et al. (1996) noted that " . . . one cannot isolate counseling and psychotherapy from the wider societal forces operating on both the counsellor and the client. Race relations or patterns of dominance and subordination are often played out in the counseling situation" (p.39). Carter (1995) and Ridley (1995) also emphasise the need to attend to issues of race relationships in counselling dyads. While this was an uncomfortable issue for co-researchers, the need to address these issues within the counselling dyad was accepted as a professional responsibility.

Several steps can be taken to better prepare and support non-Native students and counsellors for work with Native clients. For example, counsellor educators can assist students develop multicultural counselling competencies outlined in the literature on multicultural counselling (e.g., Pope-Davis & Coleman, 1997; Wehrly, 1995) and prepare them to serve a diverse range of client populations (Corey, 1996). Moreover, students might benefit from developing a larger sociopolitical perspective (Gonzalez, 1997) to appreciate the systemic issues that impact clients. As well, professional associations can contribute to counsellor development by developing ethical codes and standards that reflect the realities of practicing in First Nations communities and endorsing training programs which place a high value on multicultural competence.

Results of this study highlight the role of practitioner self-reflection and ability to integrate culturally relevant information into interventions. Supervision by experienced multicultural counsellors would offer support to practitioners who are beginning to work with First Nations clients. Unfortunately, the co-researchers experience suggests that access to such supervision is limited. In light of this, prac-

ticing counsellors would benefit from development of professional support groups with others doing similar work. Martinez and Holloway (1997) have recommended a group process model for multicultural supervision and the promotion of cultural awareness and competency amongst practicing multicultural counsellors. Such groups would allow practitioners to explore and process the powerful emotions that the co-researchers identified in relation to the levels of trauma they encounter and the personal impact of the work. The evolving changes in their professional identities could also be processed in such a supportive environment. Additionally, students and counsellors can also be encouraged to formalize networks with elders, Native counsellors, and traditional healers. Such networks can provide support and direction for non-native counsellors working in First Nations communities (e.g., Aboriginal Standards Committee, 1994).

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Despite the steps that were taken to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study, the subjective nature of this research needs to be acknowledged. Additional criticism could be directed toward the sample size of co-researchers. It should be reiterated, however, that smaller sample sizes may afford researchers opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of co-researcher experiences (Morse, 1994; Sandelowski, 1995). Finally, the multicultural counselling competencies of the co-researchers were not formally assessed. Rather, an informal impression of competency was determined by asking Native agencies to identify possible co-researchers. Therefore, an assumption of relative competency was made.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE INVESTIGATION

There is a need for ongoing investigation to better understand the First Nation client and non-Native counselling relationship and the impact of power, privilege and historical legacy on the counselling relationship. These issues have been identified as either ignored or understudied aspects of cross-cultural counselling (e.g., Pinderhughes, 1989; Ponterotto,1988; Sodowsky et al., 1994). Supervision practices in cross-cultural counselling are ripe for further investigation as well. It may also be valuable to investigate the compatibility of mainstream counselling approaches for clients from First Nations cultures. Ultimately, information gathered from such research can be helpful to counsellor educators, students, and practicing professionals.

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