
Applying Racial Identity Models in Multicultural Counselling

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ABSTRACT

In order to provide competent counselling services to an increasingly diverse clientele in Canada, counsellors must attend to cultural variables in the counselling context. Racial identity models emphasize the assessment of clients' racial identity and its dynamic interaction with counsellors' racial identity. With an emphasis on Helms' (1995) model, this article discusses how racial identity models may be applied to support multicultural counselling practice.

RÉSUMÉ

Afin d'offrir des services de counseling compétents à une clientèle canadienne de plus en plus diverse, les conseillers doivent tenir compte des variables culturelles dans le contexte thérapeutique. Les modèles d'identité raciale mettent l'accent sur l'évaluation de l'identité raciale du client et sur l'interaction dynamique entre cette identité et celle du conseiller. En s'appuyant notamment sur le modèle de Helms (1995), cet article examine les applications éventuelles des modèles d'identité raciale dans la pratique courante du counseling.

The increasing diversity of North American society challenges counsellors to be prepared for working with clients whose cultural background is different than their own (Arthur, 1998; Sue & Sue, 1999). Canada is a country founded on cultural diversity. Aboriginal people currently represent approximately 3% of the nation's population, and the Aboriginal population is growing more rapidly than the total population (Statistics Canada, 1996a). In addition to Aboriginal people, there are a wide variety of ethnic groups living in Canada. Patterns of immigration during the past 20 years show that the source countries of immigrants have expanded. The largest ethnic groups in Canada are still British and French. However, since the 1970's, there have been increasing numbers of immigrants from non-European nations, including Asian, Middle Eastern, Caribbean, Central and South American, and African countries (Esses & Gardner, 1996). Of particular interest is the increasing numbers of persons living in Canada who are visible minorities. As defined by the Employment Equity Act of Canada, visible minorities are "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1987, p. B-3). Since the 1970's, more than half of Canada's immigrant population has been a member of a visible minority group, increasing to more than three quarters of the immigrant population in the 1990's. In the 1996 census, more than 11% of the total population identified themselves as a visible minority (Statistics

Canada, 1996b). The total population of Canada's visible minority population is expected to reach 20% of the adult population and 25% of children by the year 2016 (Statistics Canada, 1995).

These changes in Canada's population underscore the importance of counsellors developing multicultural counselling competencies for clients who are visible minorities. Although the emphasis on multicultural counselling competencies has been primarily based in the United States (e.g., Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1998), counsellors in Canada are also concerned about effective practices with culturally diverse clients (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001). Given the growing numbers of visible minorities in the Canadian population, it is timely to consider the relevance of racial identity for the professional practices of counsellors in Canada.

Racial identity is a core cultural variable that impacts the counselling process (Helms, 1990, 1994; Parham & Helms, 1981). This article focuses on practical applications of racial identity models in multicultural counselling. First, Helms' (1995) model of racial identity is described to familiarize counsellors with an example for possible use. Next, the focus is placed on the assessment of clients' racial identity, counsellors' racial identity, and creating a therapeutic environment conducive to the exploration of race-related cognition, emotion, and behaviour. Following the discussion of how to apply racial identity models in counselling interventions and strategies, training considerations for promoting multicultural counselling competencies are outlined. It is hoped that the article will encourage counsellors in Canada to consider the ways in which racial identity intersects with multicultural counselling competencies.

WHAT IS RACIAL IDENTITY?

Racial identity is defined as "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perceptions that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms, 1990, p. 3). It refers to the psychological implications of racial group membership, such as how one thinks, feels, and behaves in regards to self, people within one's identified racial group, and people outside one's identified racial group. Racial identity is affected by how race is discussed, denied, or avoided in family, church, school, or other socializing agencies (Carter, 1995). Racial identity differs from ethnic identity in as much as members of the same race may belong to different ethnic groups and members of the same ethnic group may belong to different races (Helms, 1990).

Helms' Racial Identity Model

Racial identity theories are based on the belief that racial groups differ, not on the basis of biological distinction, but through the endurance of different conditions of domination and oppression (Pinderhughes, 1989). Helms' (1995) model of racial identity is one of the first frameworks for psychotherapy that incorporates social constructions of race. Helms initially defined each stage of

the model as a distinct worldview resulting from the interaction between cognitive maturation and the environment. Stages were later revised and relabeled as statuses to illustrate their dynamic nature. The worldview statuses involve attitudes, behaviours, and affective states that may evolve at different rates. With the dynamic interplay between cognition and emotions, an individual may exhibit attitudes or behaviours reflective of blended statuses. One status may be dominant, in that it usually governs the person's racial reactions, and others may be secondary, accessible when the dominant status does not seem to be working (Helms, 1995). The following sections summarize the White Racial Identity Statuses and the People of Color Identity Statuses (Helms, 1995).

White Racial Identity Statuses. The White Racial Identity Statuses outline a developmental process for developing a non-racist White identity. The theme of abandoning racism is predominant in the first three statuses (*Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration*) and the development of a positive, non-racist identity is predominant in the last three statuses (*Pseudo-Independence, Immersion/Emersion and Autonomy*) (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996).

It is proposed that a White person in the Contact status is oblivious to racism and is satisfied with the racial status quo (Helms, 1995). The person seems unaware of their Whiteness and may judge others from monocultural standards (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996; Tokar & Swanson, 1991). In the Disintegration status, anxiety about racial dilemmas may be experienced as the reality of racism sets in but the person copes by engaging in suppression and maintaining ambivalence. At this point, a person may feel torn between one's own group loyalty and humanistic concerns (Helms, 1995). In the Reintegration status, selective perception operates through the idealization of one's own group and negative distortion and intolerance of other groups. Underlying beliefs in this status revolve around the presumed superiority of Whites and the notion that people get what they deserve (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). The Pseudo independence status refers to still being committed to one's own group but engaging in deceptive tolerance of other groups (Helms, 1995). The person may have a genuine interest in cross-cultural relations but only have an intellectualized acceptance of diversity. A person who exhibits these attitudes may simply lack understanding that the experience of being White is not an appropriate criterion from which to judge others (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996; Tokar & Swanson, 1991). In the Immersion/Emersion status a White person begins to look at the personal benefits of racism and seeks a redefinition of Whiteness. A monocultural view is replaced with multicultural ideology. This person may become involved in racial activism as a shift occurs from changing People of Colour to encouraging Whites to abandon racism (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). In the final Autonomy status, the capacity to let go of privileges of racism is evident along with a positive racial group commitment (Helms, 1995).

People of Color Identity Statuses. People of Colour, including people with bi-racial backgrounds, have faced various forms of oppression. Although the nature of oppression varies between groups and due to individual circumstances, there is

a shared experience associated with being perceived as other than White (Helms, 1995). On the basis of the negative racial stereotypes attributed to People of Colour, there are binding issues for racial identity development. The People of Color Racial Identity Statuses (Helms, 1995) outline the developmental process for overcoming internalized racism. It is proposed that People of Colour can overcome negative self and personal group conceptions and develop positive racial self-concepts.

The People of Color Identity Statuses begin with the *Conformity* status that involves devaluation of one's own group and allegiance to the dominant White group. A person in this status who adapts and internalizes White society's definitions of their group may conform to existing stereotypes and internalize racism (Helms, 1995; Pinderhughes, 1989). Alternatively, they may reject affiliation with their own group and attempt to "become White." Along with this external self-definition, there may be oblivion to the influences of sociopolitical histories on personal development and barriers to opportunities (Helms & Piper, 1994). In the *Dissonance* status, confusion about the meaning and significance of one's socioracial group leads to an ambivalent self-definition. Anxiety provoking racial information tends to be repressed. As a person moves into *Immersion/Emersion* status, idealization of own group and denigration of the dominant White group is evident. Group loyalty in this status is highly valued and may result in exclusive participation and an energized collectivism. In the *Internalization* status, flexibility and analytical thinking become more apparent. Positive commitment to one's own racial group is maintained but there is an increased ability to assess and respond more objectively to the dominant group. In the *Integrative Awareness* status, a person values both one's own racial group and other oppressed groups. Flexibility and complexity are now evident in how racially related information is processed. People moving into this status are able to express a positive racial self-identity, recognize and resist pressures that discourage positive self-conceptions and group expression (Helms, 1995).

CONSIDERING RACIAL IDENTITY IN COUNSELLING

Over the last two decades, an abundance of literature has been developed regarding the importance of racial identity models for multicultural counselling competencies. The central concern of this article is to provide ideas for counsellors about how to integrate racial identity into the counselling practices. Competent multicultural counselling practice requires two specific competencies regarding racial identity (Sue et al., 1998). Counsellors should be familiar with racial identity models for both dominant and non-dominant groups, and the influence of racial identity on the counselling relationship and the counselling process. In addition, counsellors are expected to develop skills for tailoring their relationship-building strategies, assessment, interventions, and referral considerations to the client's racial identity, while taking into account their own racial identity. The following sections outline practical considerations that can facilitate the application of racial identity models in multicultural counselling.

Understanding Clients' Worldviews

Racial identity is one portion of a person's worldview or ways of perceiving and understanding the world. Effective counselling depends upon the ability of counsellors to assess the client's worldview, conceptualized as a combination of individual uniqueness, group experiences, and human universality (Sue, 1996). Racial identity provides information about the ways that clients experience the world around them (Carter & Helms, 1987).

Parham (1989) elaborated upon the developmental nature of racial identity. This view suggests that racial identity can stagnate, progress, or recycle rather than simply moving in a linear fashion. Yet, Cross (1995) made an important point when he described racial identity as difficult to change as all incoming experiences are filtered to fit the current understanding of self and world. Experiences with racial events may lead to the strengthening of worldviews and only if necessary, the emergence of new perspectives (Helms, 1995).

To promote client change, Helms (1995) suggests that counsellors use racial identity models to respond to both interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics. Racial identity models promote valuing both the individual and the environment (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996) as the models involve consideration of the individual in relation to other cultural and contextual influences. Clients can explore the messages they receive from society about themselves as individuals and also as members of a specific group. Including a strong focus on the environment challenges clients to look beyond individual experience and challenges the counsellor to look beyond the client to understand the many variables associated with counselling concerns.

Counsellor-Client Relationships

Counsellors need to be conscious of racial identity, its influence in their lives, and in the lives of clients. Attending to the dynamic interaction of the combination of client and counsellor racial identity attitudes is paramount (Helms, 1985). Studies of Black and White dyads (e.g., Carter, 1990) found racial identity attitudes had a greater impact on the counselling process than race alone, with racial identity attitudes accounting for counsellor preference. Parham and Helms (1981) found that as client comfort with personal race increased, the importance of counsellor race decreased and other variables (counsellor racial attitudes, counsellor skill level) became more important for clients in the counselling process. Considering the interaction of statuses in a counselling relationship can lead to an increased ability to anticipate problems and develop appropriate strategies to strengthen the relationship (Thompson, 1997).

Helms (1990) outlined an interaction model to explain cross-cultural relationships where power differential exists. The racial identity interaction model allows for various combinations of majority/minority, minority/majority, minority/minority or majority/majority counselling interactions. Helms (1995) described relationship types as parallel (same status if similar race, analogous status if differ-

ent race), progressive (counsellor operates from a more sophisticated ego status), regressive (counsellor operates from a less sophisticated ego status) and crossed (predominately operate from opposing statuses). Relational types refer to the predominant theme underlying most of the reactions to shared racial identity events. Progressive relationships can foster growth, parallel may enforce status quo and parallel in lower stages or regressive combinations may in fact lead to harm to a client (Pope-Davis, Menefee, & Ottavi, 1993). In using this type of analysis counsellors are forced to look again at both sides of the counselling relationship: their own racial identities as well as the racial identities of their clients.

It is important to focus on cultural variables at the initial stages of counselling and not wait for a racial incident or cultural clash before discussing them. Counsellors' nonjudgmental stance may encourage clients to bring up race-related issues (Ochs, 1997). However, there is a great risk of unspoken factors becoming a barrier to the therapeutic alliance, and consequently the change process for clients. The therapeutic bond is enhanced through attending to racial issues while eliciting client information. Clients who talk about themselves in the context of their environment seem to reveal themselves more fully (Thompson, Worthington, & Atkinson, 1994). When counsellors understand racial identity statuses, their interactive nature, and their impact on counsellor behaviour, both rapport and interventions can be enhanced (Bagley & Copeland, 1994).

Assessment of Racial Identity

Racial identity is a normal developmental process involving the importance of race in peoples' lives (Helms, 1995). Counsellors need to be cautious about denying, minimizing, or exaggerating their client's race-related issues (Thompson & Carter, 1997a). Most clients will present with particular problems rather than social issues, and counsellors should be aware that racial identity issues may be interwoven into the client's presenting issues (Carter, 1997). Counsellors should be capable of assessing: (a) client's race-related socialization, (b) client's internalized experience of such socialization, (c) implications of each of these components on the quality of client's functioning, and (d) the impact of their own race on the quality of functioning with each client (Carter, 1995).

In order to facilitate discussion of topics involving race, a climate conducive for counselling must be established (Thompson, 1997). First, the comfort level of counsellors to acknowledge race as an important cultural variable is very important. Second, in assessing clients' profiles for racial identity, counsellors need to use effective probes to explore clients' attitudes, behaviours and defenses to determine their range of racial identity schemata and identity dominant statuses (Thompson & Neville, 1999). Third, assessment strategies may include racial identity attitude scales, interviews, direct observations (Greely, Garcia, Kessler, & Gilchrest, 1992), and exploration of clients' familial and extra familial influences (Thompson & Neville, 1999).

The assessment of clients' racial identity may be useful for establishing a working alliance. As previously noted, counsellors can attempt to understand clients'

racial identity as an essential aspect of their worldview (Carter & Helms, 1987). Counsellors may also want to understand clients' racial identity as an important component of their overall personal identity (Cross, 1995) and the basis for particular attitudes, emotions, or behaviours. Problem solving can be enhanced with knowledge about the characteristics and etiology of the client's presenting issues (Helms, 1985; Parham, 1989). Knowledge of racial identity models can also help counsellors identify clients' strengths in dealing with race and racism that can be emphasized for building resilience (Thompson & Neville, 1999). Ultimately, assessment of clients' racial identity may assist counsellors to enter clients' frame of reference and lead to a more effective use of culturally sensitive interventions (Carter & Helms, 1987).

Given the dynamic nature of the racial identity development, ongoing assessment may be useful. Assumptions about which status is dominant are premature until several samples of race-related behaviours have been observed (Helms, 1995). Additionally, if behaviours and attitudes can be identified in various statuses, those reflective of a higher status can be reinforced (Thompson, 1997). Counsellors can explore cognition and affect separately as they may evolve at different rates. Adjustment in a particular status cannot be inferred from stated attitudes; emotional adaptations must be explored as well (Parham & Helms, 1985). The Immersion-Emersion status provides an excellent example of this. Despite strong manifestations of pro Black attitudes, security with Black identity may be low and counsellors can continue to reinforce positive feelings of clients' self-identity (Parham, 1989).

When working with groups of clients (e.g., Greeley et al., 1992; Helms, 1995) and families (e.g., Gushue & Sicalides, 1997; Wehrly, Kenney, & Kenney, 1999), the assessment of coalitions and subgroups of racial identity attitudes can be helpful. The racial climate of a group can be characterized by the prevailing racial identity status of the leader or group of leaders but most often it is defined by influential coalitions within the setting and interactively with the prevailing racial climate of one's community and larger society (Thompson & Carter, 1997b). In working with families, racial cultural maps that include predominant racial identity statuses of the various subsystems in the family as well as the counsellors' can be useful. Considering the interaction of the subsystems may help counsellors predict the kind of interactions likely to occur amongst family subsystems or between themselves and a given subsystem (Gushue & Sicalides, 1997).

Enhancing Intervention Strategies

Appropriately designed interventions are key to meeting clients' levels of cognitive and affective readiness (Wehrly, 1995). Counsellors familiar with racial identity development may be able to plan more effective intervention strategies. For example, the experience of feelings of isolation/alienation may require different intervention strategies depending on the client's assessed racial identity status(es) (Sue & Sue, 1999). To foster racial identity development, clients can be encouraged to identify their race-related issues and the underlying dissonance in

their thinking and behaviours (Thompson, 1997). When considering intervention strategies, counsellors may find it useful to reflect on the following questions as suggested by Sue & Sue (1999): (a) What are the cultural values of this group?; (b) What is the historical experience of this group?; (c) How may cultural values/historical experiences affect behaviour, motivation, and their perceptions of counselling?; (d) How can the concepts of racial identity and worldviews be applied?; and (e) In reviewing the generic characteristics of counselling, which seem to be potential barriers?

Racial identity models can be used in conjunction with traditional counselling models. Suggestions for interventions include readings to understand the role of racial groups (biographies, history, theoretical models), reinforcing those attitudes and behaviours reflective of higher statuses, corrective parenting or socialization interventions (gain insight of what went wrong in socialization with respect to race and introduce alternate ways of thinking about race), journaling race-related reflections (Thompson, 1997), identifying feelings in interracial situations, self exploration exercises, discussing how cultural norms and assumptions influence an individual's experience, making normative unspoken racial norms explicit, and recognizing defenses to race-related stimuli (Regan & Scarpellini Huber, 1997). Case studies using psychoanalytic concepts (Grace, 1997), cognitive behavioural techniques and insight-oriented therapy (Och, 1997) are interesting examples of racial identity related interventions. Interventions designed to meet specific needs of White clients and clients of Colour in various stages of racial identity development are elaborated upon by Wehrly (1995) and Sue and Sue (1999).

Racism and Unintentional Racism

The existence of racism, whether it is acknowledged or not, plays an important role in the psychological development and functioning of all racial groups and does enter into the practices of counsellors (Pedersen, 1995). Unfortunately, counsellors often do not know how to address race and racism in therapy interactions, even when their intentions are benevolent. Because of the difficulty and defenses surrounding it, race needs to be teased out from other factors influencing identity. Racial identity models are useful in addressing racism as they emphasize within-group differences, and help to avoid racial stereotyping (Parker, 1998; Thompson & Carter, 1997a).

Throughout the literature on multicultural counselling, self-awareness has been named as the basis of competent practice (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1998). Racial identity models strongly emphasize counsellor self-awareness as racial beings (Pinderhughes, 1989). The recognition of discomfort with racial differences that exist between counsellors and clients has been proposed as an integral part of multicultural competency development (Arredondo et al., 1996). Not attending to or underestimating the impact of our own socialization may lead to covert racism which is difficult to recognize or change because of its unintentional nature (Pedersen, 1995). Counsellors need to work through rather than

deny or suppress race as an integral part of their identities. Counsellors, using racial identity models, are encouraged to consider how they react to culturally similar and diverse clients, and how their biases infiltrate their work. Although Carter (1990) called for the consideration of how racist attitudes may be related to variations in racial identity for White counsellors, this suggestion is extended to all counsellors. Visible minority counsellors are no less prone to experiencing and acting out feelings related to racial issues with their clients (Jackson, 1995).

Racial Identity Attitudes and the White Counsellor

An overwhelming majority of counsellors are part of the dominant White majority (Sue et al., 1998). White people often have difficulty perceiving themselves as members of a cultural group in regards to race which leads to a passive stance in exploring the personal meaning of race (Helms, 1990; Sue et al., 1998). Consequently, White counsellors may be less able to recognize and understand the worldviews of clients who embrace racial identity. Despite limited research, it has been shown that White people do possess and display attitudes characteristic of the racial identity process (eg., Brown, Parham, & Yonker, 1996). The benefits of White counsellors developing advanced racial identity attitudes are beginning to be articulated. Self-actualizing tendencies are positively related to developmentally advanced White racial identity attitudes (Tokar & Swanson, 1991), White racial identity attitudes are predictive of racism (Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994), and higher levels of racial identity development have been moderately correlated to self-reports of higher levels of multicultural counselling competencies (Ottavi, Pope-Davis, & Dings, 1994). White women were found to be more intellectually and emotionally understanding of racial differences than White men (Carter, 1990; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994). Age was also found to be an important variable, suggesting as one becomes older, there is an increased comfort and acceptance of racial differences (Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994).

A White counsellor's worldview and racial identity attitudes can have a profound impact on both counselling process and outcomes in a White counsellor – Person of Colour client counselling dyad (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). A White counsellor in the Contact status may be colourblind, holding the view that all clients should be treated equally without acknowledging culture or race (Pedersen, 1995). This attitude prevents an empathetic understanding of the client as well as any integration of culturally relevant interventions. In the Disintegration status, a counsellor may have difficulty dealing with intrapsychic and environmental variables that are linked to clients' concerns, and risk overgeneralization about their respective influences. A counsellor in the Reintegration status may have limited empathy for the client due to a belief in White superiority and their lack of positive regard for racially diverse clients. The counsellor's ability to listen and respond effectively may be inextricably hampered by racial bias (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). A counsellor in the Pseudo-independent status may want to genuinely understand and assist culturally diverse clients but their effectiveness will be limited by White monocultural standards

and unintentional racism (Pedersen, 1995). A counsellor with this type of identity continues to operate from the belief that diverse clients should adopt White cultural standards of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Diverse cultural resources may not be encouraged or even recognized as potentially helpful.

The counsellor in the Immersion/Emersion status is interested in learning more about the influence of cultural variables on the counselling process. There is an increased ability to empathize and consider interventions that are appropriate to the client's cultural worldview. A counsellor in an autonomous status consistently and appropriately uses culturally relevant interventions (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). These examples illustrate the potential impact that White racial identity attitudes have for the counsellor's understanding and response to culturally diverse clientele. Due to the potential for negative effects, deliberate effort by the counsellor needs to be directed towards the development of more advanced identity statuses. The importance of counsellor self-awareness, particularly with respect to racial identity, must be emphasized as an essential multicultural counselling competency (Arrendondo et al., 1996).

Training Considerations

Research suggests that racial identity development accounts for counselling students' self-reported multicultural competencies beyond other demographic, educational, and clinical variables (Ottavi et al., 1994). These results suggest that attention must be paid to racial identity in curriculum design of counsellor education and training programs (Brown, Parham, & Yonker, 1996; Neville, Heppner, Louie, Thompson, Brooks, & Baker, 1996).

Training towards increased competence in multicultural counselling in general, and specifically racial identity development, should not be limited to new students entering the counselling profession (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001). Additionally, the attention paid to the acquisition of multicultural competencies needs to expand to include people in training roles. Concern has been raised that many people in supervisory positions were educated prior to the development of multicultural counselling training models (Pope-Davis & Coleman, 1997). Without deliberate efforts to access professional development activities and resources, practicing professionals may not be knowledgeable about the ways in which racial identity impacts multicultural counselling competencies. Counsellors (Helms, 1990), supervisors (Cook, 1994) and faculty members (Pope-Davis et al., 1993) cannot support clients or students further along in the racial identity process than they have personally experienced.

When race is viewed as an identity issue for clients, students, or counsellors, racial identity development becomes an integral part of both therapeutic and supervision work (Cook & Hargrove, 1997). Ultimately it is the supervisor's response that is key to determining the extent that racial identity will be processed in the supervisory relationship (Cook, 1994). Whether involved in direct client services, training/education or supervision, counsellors are encouraged to pursue multiple educational opportunities (continuing education, supervision,

consultation) to further develop their multicultural counselling skills (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001). For example, Wehrly's (1995) comprehensive five-stage model for developing multicultural competence including racial identity development, is a valuable resource as it was designed for use by students, trainers and counsellors in professional practice settings.

LIMITATIONS OF RACIAL IDENTITY MODELS

Racial identity is a core consideration in exploring cultural influences on the counselling process (Helms, 1994). Although racial identity models have much to offer, there are precautions that warrant discussion. For example, counsellors must not presume that high or low racial identification means maladjustment (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 1996). Even though negative attitudes and feelings may be present, pathology need not be inferred (Parham & Helms, 1985).

Counsellors must also guard against becoming blind to other variables that combine to account for an individual's worldview (Pedersen, 1995). The client's total experience must be taken into account rather than a single aspect of identity (Thompson & Carter, 1997). In addition to important variables such as level of acculturation and social class (Carter, 1995), the dynamic interplay of racial identity, sexual identity, gender identity and general self-concept need to be considered (Casas & Pytluk, 1995; Carter & Akinsulure-Smith, 1996). "Thus the skillful therapist should work toward helping the client affirm not only her or his racial and ethnic identities, but also those other aspects of self (i.e., ideological, gender) that contribute to a fully functioning human being" (Helms, 1989, p. 645).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As counsellors in Canada work increasingly with diverse clients, it is important to consider the cultural factors that impact effective professional practices. Multicultural competencies include counsellor self-awareness and recognition of the ways in which racial identity accounts for differences between the worldviews held by counsellors and clients (Arredondo et al, 1996). In working with racial identity, counsellors must first consider their own racial identity development. Counsellors' racial identity impacts aspects of the counselling process such as the ability to develop rapport, to develop a working alliance, and, overall, to be culturally empathetic. The use of racial identity models in counselling offers the potential to better understand both the clients' and counsellors' worldview and to set up and maintain an atmosphere conducive to exploration of the often unspoken topic of race. Racial similarity may be a factor in the perceived credibility of counsellors by some clients from non-dominant groups. There is unequivocal evidence that counsellors' capacity to respond to cultural factors is perceived more favorably than when cultural factors are ignored (Atkinson & Lowe, 1995). Counsellors who are informed about the influences of racial identity may be in a better position to overcome racial barriers and negotiate a positive working alliance with clients.

Despite attention paid to the recruitment of helping professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds, the overwhelming majority of counsellors and psychologists are White (Sue et al., 1998). This bespeaks the need for graduates from counsellor education programs to understand and develop strategies for addressing the ways in which White racial identity impacts professional practices. Although the models exemplified in this discussion primarily emphasize a White counsellor/Person of Colour client dyad, it is acknowledged that this focus is a restricted view of the possible impact of racial identity in counselling. Further investigations are needed to understand the ways in which minority identity development models (e.g., Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989; Sue et al., 1998) can be used to understand the experiences of both counsellors and clients. The experiences of visible minorities who are working in counselling roles should not be ignored. For example, it has been suggested that the experiences of counsellors from non-dominant groups are strongly influenced by perceptions of racial identity and role appropriateness held by members of the majority White culture (Jackson, 1995). As counsellors in Canada consider the multicultural counselling competencies that support their work with clients, it is also timely to consider strategies for recruiting more visible minority counsellors and ways to support diversity within the counselling profession.

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