

Increasing My Cultural Competence

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Counselors working with a diverse population of clients must be culturally competent, knowledgeable, and sensitive to do so. Additionally, counselors must be aware of their own implicit biases towards people of all races, ethnicities, genders, cultures, ages, socioeconomic statuses, and abilities as well as people who struggle with mental illness. Implicit bias can be defined as internalized, unconscious beliefs that often lead to discriminatory behavior (Pritlove et al., 2019). Because implicit bias can affect the competence of the care provided, counselors must actively work to reduce their biases through education to provide equitable care for diverse clients (Kruse et al., 2022). In this paper, results of two Implicit Association Tests (IAT) that I have taken, along with my strengths and opportunities for growth, will be discussed. The self-awareness and cultural diversity counseling dispositions, why it is important for counselors to account for their own racial and cultural biases, and my plan to increase my cultural competence will also be discussed.

The Implicit Association Tests (IAT) Taken

I took both the Hispanic IAT and the Race IAT. In the Hispanic IAT, I was asked to categorize positive and negative words along with Hispanic and European surnames. Similar in the Race IAT, I was asked to categorize positive and negative words with Black or White faces. Each test was evaluating my reaction time to measure the association between races and ethnicities being good or bad. This is done to determine if one has an implicit preference to one race or ethnicity.

Summary of the Test Results

In the Hispanic IAT, my test results determined that I do not have an instinctive preference towards Hispanic or White Americans. This means that I was nearly or equally as fast at associating Hispanic surnames with good or bad adjectives as I was with associating White surnames with good or bad adjectives. Likewise, my Race IAT test results indicate that I was about equally as fast at categorizing White and Black people with good and bad. Thus, both of my test results indicate that I do not have an implicit preference towards Hispanic or Black Americans compared with White Americans.

Strengths and Opportunities for Growth

My impression of both tests is that they are straightforward in assessing implicit associations and implicit preferences towards people of color and White people. The results show that one of my strengths is being impartial to these races and ethnicities by not naturally associating one with being better or worse. Although my results show no implicit preference over any race or ethnicity, I will always strive to continue to be culturally sensitive throughout my career as a counselor. These tests will also motivate me to consciously consider any unconscious associations I have between people of color and further my education to determine how I can consciously diminish any biases.

Why Counselors Must Understand their Cultural and Racial Biases

It is imperative that counselors understand their biases towards people of a certain race or culture because they may have implicit beliefs about these people that lead them to unconsciously discriminate against them (Pritlove et al. 2019). As a result, this can lead to unequal treatment of clients. Sue et al. (2022) describes a study where an individual with an African American name received less outreach from therapists than an individual with a White

name. This is a perfect example of why we, as counselors, must constantly evaluate our own biases because if we do not, our clients will suffer. Even worse, we are at risk of perpetuating a history of racial inequities when we should be actively working to dismantle them. In a systematic review by FitzGerald & Hurst (2017), it was found that, “healthcare professionals exhibit the same levels of implicit bias as the wider population” (pp. 1). As mental health providers, we have to strive to not only be more aware of our implicit biases than the general population, but actively work to challenge these biases because we will be working with diverse clients that deserve equal treatment.

My Plan to Increase my Cultural Competence

There are several ways in which I plan to increase my cultural competence. Firstly, I will strive to understand the history of oppression that people of color have faced, and continue to face, in this country (Sue et al. 2022). This can be done by acknowledging and validating their stories. Another way is to be aware of any microaggressions that various races and cultures face, being cognizant and sensitive to my word choices, facial expressions, and behavior. Lastly, I can explore my client’s cultural identity and continue to educate myself on the appropriate assessments and treatments for each culture (SAMHSA, 2016).

Dispositional Values of Self-Awareness and Cultural Diversity

The dispositional value of self-awareness states that counselors must evaluate how their personal values may affect their relationships with clients; counselors set these values aside when a client has differing views (GCU, 2022). This value supports my plan to be a culturally competent counselor by encouraging me to be accepting of all views. Self-awareness is important when considering how my spiritual and cultural views may affect my client. Although

my cultural and spiritual practices may seem normal to me, I will remember to never impose these beliefs onto my client because my beliefs are not more salient than theirs. The cultural diversity disposition states that counselors embrace diversity, understand how their own culture may affect their relationships, and do not discriminate against clients for any reason (GCU, 2022). This disposition will support my cultural competence by encouraging me to be mindful of how I can support each client within their culture. My spiritual and cultural identity may unfortunately influence how my client feels they can relate to me, affecting the therapeutic alliance, but I will do everything in my power due to my training and education to be sensitive and validating towards their own cultural and spiritual beliefs without projecting mine onto them.

Although the results of my Implicit Association Tests indicate that I do not have an automatic preference towards certain races and ethnicities, I can still increase my cultural competence by continuing to be aware of any implicit biases I may have, by educating myself on diverse populations, and by being cognizant of my behavior towards diverse people. The self-awareness and cultural diversity counseling dispositions remind counselors to be aware of how our own beliefs may affect our clients while being respectful and honoring people of all cultures. It is imperative for counselors to evaluate their personal cultural and racial biases to prevent unconscious discrimination towards diverse people.

References

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