

**How do the perceptions of visible minority counsellors regarding race, impact the counselling relationship with majority (white) clients?**

**By**

**Nirmalla (Nirrie) Kistan**

**B.A., University of South Africa, 1998**

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**University of Victoria**

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Supervisor: Dr. Honore France

ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative heuristic study that attempts to explore and analyze the experiences of minority counsellor's perceptions of their own race in a therapeutic relationship with White clients. The lived experience of each participant as a racial being is essential to understanding the minority counsellor as a professional. Participant's accounts describe the meaning making process of racial development and race negotiation in counselling situations.

Five participants who work extensively with White clients were interviewed. Their experiences illuminate the challenges and provides a deeper understanding of minority counselors. This study provides information for professionals in all human services fields, for educators in higher learning institutions and for counselling professionals in management positions.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

There have been numerous studies in psychology and counselling therapy that have explored culture and its variables. Some of the variables are counsellor race, client race, ethnicity, accent, gender, sexual orientation, counsellor education, social status, language, collectivism, and individualism (Richardson & Helms, 1994; Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Davis & Gelsomino, 1994; Helms & Carter, 1991; Constantine 1999; Moodley & Dhingra, 2002; Redmond & Slaney, 2002). Paying attention to these issues is both necessary and an ethical obligation. The exploring of culture and its variables is comparatively new to the field of psychology and its importance has only been recognized in the past few decades (Davis & Gelsomino, 1994). Research regarding the influence of culture and ethnicity in the therapeutic process focused on the client in the counselling dyad. This has led to culture being examined in the context of the culturally different client who is envisioned to be Black therefore reinforcing the stereotype that Black people are clients in the mental health field. These studies particularly focused on White counsellor/Black client dyad examining the advantages and disadvantages of this type of matching (Atkinson, 1983; Simons, Berkowitz, & Moyer, 1970). The advantages, disadvantages, characteristics and effectiveness of Black counsellor/White client dyad have received very little attention. This may be due to the fact that there are only a small number of ethnic minority counsellors and the existing notion is that they are best suited to work mainly with clients who are of the same cultural

background as the counsellor (Moodley & Dhingra, 2002). However, this is rapidly changing as more ethnic minority counsellors enter the field of counselling (Davis & Gelsomino, 1994).

### **Impetus for Study**

My curiosity and more often intrigue, in multicultural counselling has stemmed from my lived experience as an ethnic minority person. This may not seem any different from another person's lived experience except that being born in South Africa in the sixties meant being born into a White supremacist country. Born brown and classified legally as "Black" I automatically assumed a sub-status with no power or privilege. The first words I learned to read were signs posted at bus stops, restrooms, restaurants, parks, public benches, and public beaches that read "Blacks Only" or "Whites Only". As a child I intuitively understood where I was accepted and learned to understand geographically which areas were safe and unsafe. As an adult, I navigated the system with ease and a fierce pride of my race and culture. My ease in the system resulted from the fact that there were no gray areas to contend with; it was either Black or White. Legislation decreed that a Black professional, immaterial of what his or her profession was, was not allowed to treat a White person. This legislation did not apply for White professionals who were allowed to treat Blacks. With dismantling of apartheid in the nineties came confusion for all races with an urgency to redefine self, race and society. However, at that point I decided to immigrate to Canada but immigration has not diminished my intrigue in cultural

issues. To the contrary, as a counsellor it has fueled my curiosity since Canada has afforded me the opportunity to work with White clients.

My expectation and often naive belief of North American society was that cultural variables that had negative inference would not play a role in general life or in the counselling relationship. However, some of my experiences in all levels of Canadian society have suggested that my race, accent and ethnicity negatively impact me in a covert fashion, this being especially true in institutionalized systems. Gladly, my daily experiences have been more positive than negative. The counselling relationship is not excluded from sometimes negative impacts, as confirmed by Fuentes and Gelso (2000): "In counselling, physical features, such as race, have been found to be salient 'markers' that are easily encoded and powerful in shaping initial impressions, and to affect the process and outcome of psychotherapy" (p 212). In a study by Moodley and Dhingra (2002) this is more clearly shown by the following excerpt from Mary, a client who had an Asian counsellor:

When I first realized that you are a different race to me, I did think she can't be able to help me you know she, eh especially, I used to live in, eh, a big Asian community around a big Asian community in [...] and they were just so very different to me.

Clearly Mary was able to establish sufficient confidence and trust in the relationship with the Black counsellor to share these thoughts knowing that they show her prejudice of the Asian community. In moving from the first person to the third person pronoun – 'I did think she can't be able to

help me you know she...’ – Mary was able to reduce her anxiety and also attempted to protect her counsellor from her ‘race’ based remarks (p196).

These studies bear witness that variables such as race do influence the counselling relationship and warrant further studies. Never-the-less, I believe that variables such as race may go unchecked or unnoticed if the client is in crisis as the sense of urgency is the crisis and not the counsellor’s race. The urgency of the moment pales all differences as insignificant. This is supported by the boundaries theory used by social anthropologists to explain interaction between different groups. Ayonrinde (1999) names such things as food, religion, history, clothes, class, culture and gender as examples of differences used to define boundaries. Social boundaries are said to be fluid because the attribute that defines the boundary, which is significant at any one moment, will depend on the present context. Hence, the same difference can have different meanings in another context. Ayonrinde (1999) makes this concrete in the following example:

A multi-disciplinary mental health team meeting in a room discusses the medication regime of one of the patients. There is only one occupational therapist and a social worker in the room full of doctors and nurses. To both the occupational therapist and social worker, a non-medical identity may be painfully primary. To another person in the room perhaps men/women are the significant division. A few minutes later an agitated patient barges in shouting threats at a doctor. A new marker is introduced and the old differences pale into insignificance as the team faces the intruder. As the patient is led back to the ward, new divisions may then

emerge along patient/mental health professional, class or even colour lines (p194).

This does not mean that every therapeutic relationship that involves cross-racial dyads is doomed to problems. As an ethnic minority counsellor in Victoria, ninety percent of the clients I see are White and the therapeutic relationships have been healthy with positive end results. My intrigue has left me with a desire to better understand how ethnic minority counsellors' view their race, hence; my research question focuses on the minority counsellor's relationship with White clients.

During the counselling process the client will provide confidential information from their perspectives about themselves and/or significant others as it relates to the problem. Skilled counsellors/healers can assist the client to draw on inner resources and strengths thereby promoting growth and adjustments to life changes. Counselling addresses the personal concerns of the client requiring the counsellor to have a good knowledge and appreciation of a range of behaviors, attitudes, and feelings that might surface as people develop (Hackney & Cormier, 2001).

The counselling relationship is characterized by trust, genuineness, empathy and positive regard for the client (Hackney & Cormier, 2001). Empathy means the counsellor is able to accurately sense the client's meaning and feelings and is able to communicate this meaning back to the client. This sets the foundation for problem solving which requires an assessment of the problem by the counsellor. In assessment, the counsellor probes for clarifications of the

client's world, and this process benefits both the client and counsellor. Once assessment is complete, both the client and counsellor agree on identifying strategies that are most likely to work for the client. This process of problem solving is an interactive one that empowers the client and makes him/her an active participant in his/her recovery.

### **Statement of the Problem**

My research question reads as follows: How do the perceptions of visible minority counsellors regarding race, impact the counselling relationship with majority (White) clients?

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study attempts to explore the racial perceptions of visible minority counsellor. This in turn may enlighten us on how the meaning making process of the counsellor influences the counselling relationship with a White client regarding race.

In addition, this study will add to the current collection of multicultural literature by attempting to discover the minority counsellor's personal meaning of cultural variables in the counselling relationship. More specifically, the study is intended to discover how the ethnic minority counsellor attributes meaning to his or her own race within the counselling relationship with a White client. Research has only explored cultural variables as they pertain to the ethnic minority client. There is a scarcity of literature that investigates the ethnic minority counsellor's experience, specifically, issues encountered in a counselling relationship with White clients. Ethnic minority counsellors are often unprepared and ill equipped

to handle issues of race. Racial/ethnic identity development levels were only assessed in ethnic minority clients and its influence discussed in White counsellor and minority client dyads. There are scarcely any studies that examine the racial perceptions of the minority counsellor and the resulting impact on the ethnic minority counsellor /White client dyad.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The important terms are those associated with the variables of the study, which are ethnically diverse, counselling relationship, White clients and race. According to Richardson and Helms (1994) *racial identity* refers to a sense of group identity based on one's perception that one shares a common racial heritage with a particular group. The development of racial identity occurs in stages and individuals may recycle through earlier stages. *Ethnic identity* is defined as an individual's identification with a portion of society whose members have a common origin and whose culture has similar traditions, behaviors, values and beliefs (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Ethnic identity is associated with a sense of well being and high self-esteem.

Tinsley-Jones (2001) define *race* as sociopolitical construct and incorporates factors of phenotype (skin colour) untranscendable by social and cultural distance. Race is also hierarchical in nature. *Ethnic minority counsellor* is defined as a counsellor who is Non-White but this does not mean all Non-Whites are dark skinned (Davis & Gelsomino, 1994). *White* is any person who is Caucasian (Ayorinde, 1999). Whiteness is associated with power, privilege and control of resources. *Cross-racial practice* refers to the ethnic minority counsellor

who counsels a White client or White counsellor who counsels an ethnic minority client (Davis & Gelsomino, 1994).

The *counselling relationship* is a unique scenario in which an individual in distress meets with an approved or socially sanctioned healer. The healer helps to deconstruct a problem and construct a plan to bring relief to the suffering person (Redmond & Slaney, 2002). It is characterized by trust, genuineness, empathy and positive regard for the client. *Status expectation effects* are experienced when Black counsellors are thought of as less professionally capable (Davis & Gelsomino, 1994). The stereotypical belief is that Blacks are not endowed with superior cognitive capabilities that permit them to be professionals.

### **Delimitations**

The study will be limited to participants who are visible minority.

Participants will be limited to those who can answer the following questions:

1. Tell me a little about yourself and what brought you to counselling?
2. What have your experiences working with White clients been?
3. How do you view your race in the counselling relationship (in other words is there any thing that makes you more or less conscious of your race with a White client?)
4. How has your ethnicity influenced your views on race (in other words your traditions, behaviors, values and beliefs).
5. What role has the socio-political climate played in how you view your race?

6. Is there anything that you would do differently when working with White clients?

The study will be limited to the following variables: ethnically diverse, counselling relationship, White clients and race. The study will be limited to data collected from 20th January to 30th June, 2004. All variables, conditions, or populations not so specified in this study will be considered beyond the scope of the investigations. The study will be conducted with counsellors who live and practice in a Western province in Canada.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions are expected to prevail. It is assumed that participants will be honest with their responses. Participants are expected to accurately carry out the instructions provided by the researcher. In addition, it is assumed participants that will stay for the duration of the interview.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have touched on the weakness of current research to explore the ethnic minority counsellor in counselling relationships with White clients and I have outlined my motivation for this study. As well I have discussed my intrigue regarding race as a variable in counselling relationships. My research question is stated as follows: How do the perceptions of visible minority counsellors regarding race, impact the counselling relationship with majority (White) clients? In stating the problem I have explained the counselling relationship as a unique relationship between two people, one seeking help and the other offering it. I have discussed the purpose of the study and assumptions.

Chapter two provides an overview of pertinent studies that consider the multicultural counselling relationship and chapter three examines the research methodology that will be utilized to gather and analyze data.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Overview**

This chapter highlights studies that examine the multicultural counselling relationship and its relevancy to my research. I will also review the theoretical model of ethnic identity development, which has assisted in understanding the importance of ethnic identity.

#### **Race in the Counselling Relationship**

There are various multicultural studies that have examined race as a variable in the counselling relationship. This variable has been explored to determine differences in cross-racial practice experience of White and minority counsellors, as well as client preference for same race counsellor in White counsellor/Black client dyads as it relates to ethnic identity development (Davis & Gelsimino 1994; Richardson & Helms 1994; Ayorinde 1999; Helms & Carter 1991; Fuertes & Gelso 2000; Redmond & Slaney 2002). In depth studies are lacking in the area of Black counsellor and White client dyad. Some British authors such as d'Ardenne and Mahtani (1989) and Lago and Thompson (1996) have explored some multicultural issues but not to any depth. This is predicted to change in the near future as the number of ethnic minority counsellors increase (Dana 1998, Davis & Gelsomino 1994). There are a significant number of counsellors who have written narratives of their experience of race and racism and these narratives have served the purpose of delineating the author's

experience which is a stepping stone to further research (Durodoye 1999; Gladding 1999; Constatine 1999).

Redmond and Slaney (2002) investigate the influence of information, counsellor race and client race on counsellor attribution in the counselling process. In a counselling relationship both the client and counsellor work to deconstruct a problem with the hope of constructing a plan that will bring relief (Gladding 1999, Redmond & Slaney 2002). In this process the counsellor assesses the cause of the problem. Redmond and Slaney (2002) focus on the assessment process as it involves attribution of cause to either environmental or dispositional factors which they seek to isolate. They sought to determine whether difference in worldview between client and counsellor result in dissimilar attribution as a result of different cultural backgrounds. One hundred and thirty five trainee counsellors participated in the study, 83 of whom were Caucasian and 52 who were African American. Participants were asked to view one of four videotapes where a client revealed that the cause of the problems was either environmental or dispositional. Two videotaped vignettes consisted of two African American clients, one who attributed his problems to dispositional factors and the other to environmental problems. The other two tapes consisted of vignettes of two Caucasian clients, one who attributed problems to dispositional factors and the other to environmental factors. The results Redmond and Slaney (2002) discovered, indicated that the race of the counsellor is an important variable to consider and that the experience of being raised as African American or Caucasian may have an influence on the way information is constructed and

organized. If culture influences the construction and organization of information, then race as a phenomenon should be researched as phenomenological inquiry to discover how counsellors make sense of race as a variable in the counselling process. Phenomenological inquiry about race from the ethnic minority counsellor's view is a starting point in understanding Non-White counsellors. It sets the foundation for further research in assisting to understand themselves as ethnic counsellors in the counselling relationship. To acknowledge that culture influences information processing, leads the logically minded curious researcher to investigate the differences between White and minority counsellors' cross-racial experiences as endeavoured by Davis and Gelsomino (1994).

### **Cross-Racial Counselling Practice**

The research by Davis and Gelsomino (1994) attempted to investigate the differences in the cross-racial practice experiences of White and minority social services practitioners. The researchers give some solid reasons and evidence in support of the relevance of the research question. They contend that in the past, social and counselling work was practiced from a "color blind" perspective but it has changed to acknowledge, "that racial dynamics critically affect helping relationships" (p116). Further they suppose that as minority populations increase in North America the number of minority counsellors will also increase and "significant numbers of minority clients will continue to be seen by White counsellors, and increasing numbers of White clients will be seen by minority practitioners" (p116). Research in the area of the counsellors' experiences in cross-racial practice is limited and questions such as: "what race-related

problems do counsellors expect to encounter?” and “what are their most common cross-racial fears?” have not been researched. The aim of the researchers in investigating differences in the cross-racial practice experience of White and minority practitioners is clarified as follows by Davis and Gelsomino: “knowing the answers to these questions would have considerable usefulness for those who attempt to better prepare themselves for cross-racial practice” (p116). The researchers also posit that cross-racial experience varies depending on the race and worldview of the practitioner and they attempt to answer this in their research. This view is also shared by Redmond and Stanley (2002) as discussed in the previous paragraph. The perceptions of White and minority clients are investigated on five different dimensions namely, their effectiveness in cross-racial helping situations, their perceptions of the source of client problems, difference in experience of race-related difficulties, difference in the amount of time spent working with clients and experience of differences in cross-racial difficulties. The researchers use the descriptive non-experimental research design, which attempts to examine the differences of the five dimensions listed above. There were a total of 53 participants, 43 of whom were men and 10 were women. Thirty-three were White and 20 were minority. Seventeen of the minority were Black and three were Native American. The average age of the counsellor was 43 years with an average of 10 years of experience. The results obtained by Davis and Gelsomino (1994) show that minority counsellors should develop strategies to successfully deal with perceived racist behaviours of clients, and White counsellors should obtain knowledge about minority clients

and find ways to exhibit this knowledge. The results also indicate that both White and minority practitioners need to be aware of their class biases in their perceptions of client problems and to be conscious of how class socioeconomic factors interact with race.

Davis and Gelsomino's (1994) study testifies to the fact that race is a variable that causes the counselling experience to be different for the ethnic minority and White counsellor. Since much of the research in multicultural counselling deals with the White counsellor and Black client dyad there is now a rising need for research to illuminate issues facing the ethnic minority counsellor. Theorists and researchers cannot venture to provide strategies to help ethnic minority counsellors unless they first seek to understand the cross-racial experience from the minority counsellor's point of view. This understanding demands more research to be focused on the ethnic minority counsellor's lived experience with emphasis on racial identity development. For the minority counsellor, racial identity involves stages of development that the counsellor has to journey through, with each stage being characterized by particular feelings that determine the reactions of the minority counsellor. The following study by Richardson and Helms (1994) underscores the importance of understanding racial identity of counsellor and client in the therapeutic relationship.

### **Racial Identity**

Richardson and Helms (1994) examined the perceptions that Black men have of parallel dyads involving a Black male client and White male counsellor. The word "parallel" is defined by the authors as individuals who share similar

racial identity attitudes about themselves relative to Black and White groups. The purpose of the study was to involve the 52 Black males as participants in vicarious participation of the counselling situation between the racially mixed dyad to ascertain their racial identity attitudes. This study focused on the participants' reactions to racial issues in the counselling process, which were interpreted and explained according to Helm's racial identity development model. Helm proposed that Whites and Blacks negotiate their race by going through different stages of racial awareness which may involve conflict and guilt but which eventually culminated into the final stage of acceptance of one's own race. Culmination; however, does not mean an individual remains in one stage but they may recycle through other stages in the course of life (Helms & Carter, 1991; Richardson & Helms, 1994). This means that an individual who is in the last stage of development may find themselves back in the earlier stages depending on their experiences at that time. A Black person who is in the last stage of development, for example, may have a negative experience involving the Black community. This negative experience could move the person from feeling positive about one's blackness to devaluing Blacks and Black culture. Recycling of racial identity stages is also true for Whites. A White person who is in the autonomy stage may find themselves back in reintegration if their experience with a Black person is negative.

The four stages of the **Black racial identity** model according to Helms (Helms, 1984; Helms & Carter, 1990) are as follows:

- *Preencounter* is characterized by internalization of White culture and devaluing of Blacks and Black culture;
- *Encounter* is a stage of transition initiated by a critical event which challenges frame of reference which results in quest for new interpretation of identity;
- *Immersion-emersion* is typified by idealization of Black and Black culture and growing sense of Black pride;
- *Internalization* is characterized by incorporation of positive Black identity.

Helms' (Helms, 1984; Helms & Carter, 1990) **White identity** model

consists of six stages of development and the stages are:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Contact</i> is distinguishable by the obliviousness of one's Whiteness and naiveté about racial problems;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Disintegration</i> is a stage of confusion about racial injustice and guilt about being White;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Reintegration</i> is characterized by superiority of one's Whiteness and a disparaging of other races;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Pseudo-independent</i> is differentiated by acceptance of one's Whiteness and an effort to help other Whites understand other races;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Immersion-emersion</i> reflects an aspiration to redefine Whiteness in positive terms;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Autonomy</i> is typified by racial transcendence and an appreciation of Whiteness and Blackness.</li> </ul>

Richardson and Helms (1994) hypothesized that racial identity attitudes would predict the participants perception of counsellor credibility, cultural competence and session evaluation reaction. This quantitative study used five measures which were the short form of the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale, the Counsellor Rating Form Short version, the Cross-Cultural Counselling Inventory and the Counselling Reactions Inventory. The results of the study indicate that emotional reactions to the counsellor were predicted by racial identity attitudes and the higher the Encounter attitude (stage characterized by

upset of individual's frame of reference causing the person to be open to new interpretations of identity) of the Black men were, the more negative the emotional reactions to the White male counsellor were. This study implies that for the counsellor to be effective, they should be aware not only of their client's racial identity attitudes but they should also understand how their own racial identity is a variable that influences the counselling dynamics. The second implication is that counsellors should be able to accurately assess racial identity variables that influence the counselling relationship.

Successful facilitation of the counselling relationship requires that the counsellor be aware of their client's racial identity status as well as their own. Knowledge of the racial identity model enables the counsellor to sensitively vary their approach of interaction regarding race related issues so that the client's needs are met (Richardson & Helms, 1994). Current research is enlightening in the sense that it highlights the process of Black and White client's racial identity and the expected reactions, but there is a scarcity in literature that explains how the racial identity of the counsellor influences the counselling relationship. This scarcity is magnified for the ethnic minority counsellor who as a result, is often ill equipped to deal with racial issues with a White client. Further, the models do not explain how individuals develop attitudes about race in relation to themselves and others. In investigating the ethnic minority counsellor's perspective regarding race it is hoped that some understanding will be gained in how the counsellor thinks and develops attitudes about race. The study by Redmond and Slaney (2002) saw culture as influential in the construction and organization of

information, and, Richardson and Helms (1994) saw the development of racial identity as a result of group association. Both these studies seem to indicate that culture is an element that exerts influence on how individuals make sense of themselves and their world, hence, it is necessary to consider the development of ethnic identity. My belief is that the ethnic minority counsellor's perception of race is influenced by his or her ethnicity.

### **Theory of Ethnic Identity**

Ethnic identity is viewed as an individual's identification with "a segment of a larger society whose members are thought by themselves or others, to have a common origin and share segments of a common culture and who in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients" (Yinger, 1976, p. 200). Ethnic identity is a means by which individuals share a common bond because of similar traditions, behaviours, values and beliefs. In this way individuals are able to make sense of their world and find pride in who they are. However, if there are negative public messages about a group, an individual may feel shame and may disconnect from ethnic identity. Chavez and Guid-DiBrito, (1999) state, "Ethnic identity development consists of an individual's movement toward a highly conscious identification with their own cultural values, behaviours, beliefs and traditions" (p. 41). The ethnic identity model is a theoretical structure for understanding the individual's negotiation of their own and other cultures.

Sue and Sue (1990) define five stages of development that ethnic minority experience as they try to understand themselves in terms of their own culture,

the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures.

The five stages of the **ethnic identity** model are outlined below.

- *Conformity* is a stage where people of minority groups identify more strongly with the dominant culture and tend to lack awareness of their own ethnicity; show negativity to themselves and others of similar ethnic background; accept stereotypes about themselves passively.
- *Dissonance* is characterized by confusion and disillusionment about their previously held values, with an awareness of racism, sexism and oppression. They search for their own group role models and often feel loss and anger.
- *Resistance and Immersion* is typified by rejection and distrust of the dominant culture and greater identification with own culture with an interest in own group's history, traditions, foods, languages and beliefs. Individuals also challenge oppression and express wishes to separate from the dominant culture.
- *Introspection* is distinguished by questioning of out-right rejection of the dominant group's values, which cause conflictual feelings about loyalty to one's own cultural group which is part of the struggle for self-awareness.
- *Integrative Awareness* is a stage where the individual expresses resolution of previous conflicts and reaches a sense of fulfillment in the search of cultural identity. Dominant and other cultural values are appreciated with a desire to get rid of all forms of oppression.

Research has shown that the development of a secure ethnic identity and a sense of belonging are associated with greater acceptance of other groups, positive multicultural interactions, cross-cultural relationships, and personal adjustments (Phinney, 1996; Helms, 1984). This was confirmed in a study by Phinney, Ferguson, and Tate (1997) where they found adolescent students who rated members of their own cultural group positively were also inclined to rate members of other groups in the same light. In addition, advances in the area of ethnic identity development have revealed that psychological well-being is related to positive ethnic identity. In support of this, Goodstein and Ponterotto (1997) found that higher ethnic identity in African Americans is connected with higher self-esteem. This was further supported by Martinez and Dukes (1997) who found similar results in a study with Whites, Native Americans, Blacks Hispanics and Asians. Higher levels of ethnic identity were associated with higher levels of self-esteem, purpose in life, and self-confidence for all ethnic groups.

### **Summary**

The studies by Redmond and Slaney (2002), Davies and Gelsomino (1994), and Richardson and Helms (1994), have all highlighted the role that culture and race play in the counselling relationship. The ethnic identity theory is explained and its role highlighted in how individuals make sense of themselves and their worlds. These studies confirm that race is a variable that needs to be considered as it plays a role in how clients react in the therapeutic relationship. In reviewing these studies it became obvious that there is lack of research on the

ethnic minority counsellor in all facets of counselling. In the context of the literature, this study will fill a gap that exists regarding minority counsellors' perceptions of their own race and the impact in the counselling relationship.

The methodology used to implement this study is explained in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology of research and offers a general overview of the qualitative research approach. Further, it describes heuristics as a qualitative design, including sampling, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis and a summary.

#### **General approach of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is defined as a research that observes people in action in their natural setting within the framework of human science (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). Qualitative research supposes that social reality is continually constructed in local situations and prescribed human intentions play a major role in explaining causal relationships among social phenomena. Individuals are seen as creating and constructing meaning of phenomenon, which the researcher endeavors to understand, explain and interpret (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). In qualitative research the individual and the meaning they create is studied in the natural setting. Meaning is a subjective experience that is created by the individual that depends on the perceptions they hold of themselves, others and the world. Qualitative research is further defined by the subjective interpretation of the individual's experience and behaviour depends on the meaning they make of it (Polkinghorne, 1983). In the qualitative approach the researcher attends to the uniqueness of each case and makes holistic observation in total context in which the actions occur. The researcher analyses collected data to discover concepts that throw new light on the phenomenon.

### Heuristic Design

Heuristics was chosen as a design for this study because it proved effective in discovering the internal experience of participants regarding the phenomenon that was researched. The term “heuristic” means to find or discover and is derived from the Greek word “heuriskein” (Moustakas, 1990). According to Moustakas (1990) this design requires the researcher to be an integral part of the discovery that becomes the heart of the research by being directly and personally involved with the phenomenon. This requires the researcher to be intensely involved in the search for meaning, using one’s senses, perceptions, beliefs and judgments. In an effort to find meaning, the researcher engages others in dialogue employing scientific process aimed at discovering human experience.

I engaged in the first five stages of heuristic design as suggested by Moustakas (1990) to connect with the process of research. This created a framework that allowed me to connect with participants and analyze their experiences in order to shed light on information for the community of professionals.

The process of heuristic research is comprised of six phases, namely, the initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1994).

The *initial engagement* phase is characterized by the researcher’s awareness of an intense interest in the problem or topic. “The task of the initial

engagement is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27). The intensity of the interest captivates the researcher into self-dialogue, meeting the self and elements that construct the social context. Willingness to engage with oneself, ones experiences and relationships assists the researcher in clarifying and expanding knowledge of the question.

*Immersion* finds the researcher being mobilized by the question. This drives the researcher to resource other people, things, situations and any material that hold a hope of understanding the question. The researcher develops an intimate relationship with the question, which allows the researcher to grow in understanding. The key for advancing, “the immersion process include spontaneous self-dialogue and self-searching, pursuing intuitive clues or hunches, and drawing from the mystery and sources of energy and knowledge within the tacit dimension” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).

An abdication from immersion propels the researcher into the *incubation* phase, which is characterized by cognitions that occur outside the researcher’s awareness. The researcher ceases to be directly involved with the topic. According to Moustakas (1990) the researcher is not consciously aware never-the-less the, “inner working of tacit dimension and intuitions” continue to clarify in a silent way (P29).

The silence of incubation gives way to *illumination* that occurs spontaneously when the researcher is open to tacit knowledge. “The illumination

as such is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question” (Moustakas 1990, p. 29).

Illumination brings the person into conscious awareness that highlights new understandings. Understandings may bring disclosure of hidden meaning, correction of distorted thoughts, or add a new dimension of knowledge.

*Explication* is the fifth phase and is characterized by the examination of “what has awakened in the consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning” (Moustakas, 1990, p 31). The result of explication is the development of comprehensive dominant themes that discover meanings. The researcher organizes them into comprehensive description of the essences of the experience.

The last phase is the progression of creative synthesis that takes the form of a narrative depiction using verbatim data. This requires the “researcher to move beyond any confined or constricted attention to the data itself and permit an inward life on the question to grow, in such a way that a comprehensive expression of the essences of the phenomenon investigated is realized” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32).

### **Sampling**

Six participants who reside in Western Canada were selected by word of mouth. All participants met the following criteria, namely, being Non-White in race, counsellors with a graduate degree and experience working with White adult clients in a counselling relationship. A concerted effort was made to recruit an equal number of males and females for gender balance, however; only two

males who fit the criteria were located. One male (First Nations), after reading his transcripts withdrew from the study because he feared that publication, even in part, may reveal his identity. The participant was a victim of extreme racism in the agency he works for and was wary of repercussions that may result, were he to be identified. Although he was assured that his anonymity would be protected by every possible means, he chose to withdraw.

The age of the five remaining participants ranged from 34 to 55 years, all of whom have been practicing in the field of counselling for more than ten years. One of the participants immigrated to Canada as a young child; two were born in Canada and lastly, two were immigrants who have been practicing counselling in Canada for 11 and 24 years each. I made a conscious attempt to recruit participants that represented each racial group equally but this proved to be a challenge. Two participants were Black (male and female), two were of South-East Asian descent, and one was Asian (female).

Each participant had extensive experience of being engaged with an adult White client in a helping relationship, resulting in all participants having common shared experiences. I sought to examine the common shared experiences of the minority counsellor's perceptions on race and the resulting impact on the counselling relationship. These common experiences attribute homogeneity to the participants in keeping with the heuristic design.

### **Instrumentation**

Six open-ended questions were asked that allowed participants to share their experiences of what their perceptions were of working with White clients. The following questions were asked:

- Tell me a little about yourself and what brought you to counselling?
- What have your experiences working with White clients been?
- How do you view your race in the counselling relationship?
- How has your ethnicity influenced your views on race (in other words your traditions, behaviors, values and beliefs).
- What role has the socio-political climate played in how you view your race?
- Is there anything that you would do differently when working with White clients?

Open-ended probes were used for detailed explication, such as:

- Please tell me more about that.
- Can you explain that in more detail?
- What was your response to that?

These questions were devised as a result of Davis and Gelsomino's (1994) study in which they assessed the practitioner's cross-racial treatment. A pilot study was conducted and as a result questions were revised and refined.

### **Data collection**

The instrument for data collection was a set of six open-ended questions. My unit of analysis was the ethnic minority counsellor and race. Once the researcher received formal approval from the University Human Ethics Committee, six participants were contacted. Once oral and written consent was obtained for each selected participant, tape-recorded interviews were conducted with each individual. The list of questions which served as the instrument were asked and when the researcher deemed it necessary, open ended probes were used to solicit more information.

Semi structured in-depth interviews were the main source of data. Each participant completed an interview, taking about 45 minutes to an hour. Informed consent was revisited throughout the interviewing and research process. At the end of the interview, participants were invited to revisit any question that they felt a need to clarify. Interviews were then transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. These transcriptions were shared with the participants for verification and only then did the researcher proceed to the next step. Field notes were also taken to supplement the recorded data.

Participants were informed that their confidentiality would be protected by storing interview audio-tapes, the transcribed data, field notes and other information relating to the data in a locked filing cabinet. They were also assured that only the researcher would have access to the raw data, and that audio tapes from the interviews, the transcribed data and any notes taken during the interview would be destroyed in two years.

To preserve participants' anonymity and ensure confidentiality, their names were not recorded on the transcribed data and any identifying information revealing names of people or places were removed. Participants were given pseudonyms in verbatim quotations to further protect anonymity. The key to the identification information was kept separately from the interview data and signed consent letters were also stored separately from the data. Participants were informed orally and in writing of each of these terms of anonymity and confidentiality.

### **Data analysis**

Data that was recorded and transcribed by me as the primary researcher. Data was analyzed for thematic content and relevant issues, according to an analysis framework designed by Moustakas (1990). The verbatim transcripts were read repeatedly, in an effort to comprehend it. According to Moustakas this is a necessary immersion step with the data, to ensure it is understood. Notes were made to form initial codes, which were developed by searching the data for patterns that represented specific ideas. These codes were grouped together to form categories, which were further bracketed to form themes that overarch most of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Once themes and patterns were highlighted the researcher returned to reading and listening to the recorded raw data to ensure that it contained the themes and qualities that were essential to the experience. When it was established that the themes and qualities were essential to the experiences, the researcher moved to the next set of data and repeated the process for each participant.

The themes were then examined as a whole and those that appeared most important were included. The importance was examined through commonality or the number of times it was mentioned by participants, through metaphors, emotional weight or tacit knowledge. The data was separated according to themes and colour coded. The themes were broken down and examined in the context of all the participants. The material was reconstructed as a synthesis to illuminate the meaning of the experience. Patterns were scrutinized for final results of the research.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the general qualitative approach and discussed in particular the heuristic research design. This design was utilized in researching the question in an effort to discover personal meanings held by the ethnic minority counsellors. The next chapter will present the data results according to qualitative, heuristic procedure outlined in Moustakas (1990) in a way that addresses the research question and purpose of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

The purpose of this research was to examine minority counsellors' perceptions of race, and the impact in the counselling relationship. This specifically includes understanding how minority counsellors' view their race in a counselling relationship, the influence of ethnicity and sociopolitical climate on their views, and their experiences working with White clients. Five minority counsellors who worked in different agencies were interviewed.

The following sections of this chapter present the results from participants' research interviews. The verbatim quotations were taken from the interview data to correspond with each category. Each quote begins as a new paragraph and is indicative of a different participant voice. The quotations were organized this way to protect the anonymity of the participants. The intention of the verbatim quotations is to elucidate and illustrate the essence of the participants' own words. In order to do justice to the participants' experience, reflections from journal entries were used to best illuminate what they intended.

The three overarching themes were: 1) Racism, 2) Worldview, and 3) Sociopolitical factors. Eleven different categories comprise the three themes as illustrated in Figure 1. Each category possesses sub-categories that participants identified as illustrated in Figure 2. These sub-categories are reflected in the descriptions of the participants' experience and reference is made to them in the introduction of each category.

Figure 1

## THEMES AND CATEGORIES

<b>Themes:</b>	<b>Theme One: Racism</b>	<b>Theme Two: Worldview</b>	<b>Theme Three: Sociopolitical factors</b>
<b>Categories:</b>	Race		
	White privilege		
	Uncertainty		
	Discrimination		
		Philosophy	
		Disclosure	
		Professional Practice	
		Diversity	
			Environment
			Professional Barriers
			Hiring Practice

Figure 2

## Theme One

## RACISM

Race	White Privilege	Uncertainty	Discrimination
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Counselling relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power</li> <li>• Respect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apprehension</li> <li>• Initial reaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effort</li> <li>• Recognize racism</li> <li>• Judgements</li> </ul>

## Theme Two

## WORLDVIEW

Philosophy	Disclosure	Professional Practice	Diversity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Human being</li> <li>• Passion</li> <li>• Human connection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience</li> <li>• Self</li> <li>• Minority client</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for client</li> <li>• Agency rules</li> <li>• Client education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of minority client</li> <li>• Client needs</li> <li>• Client education</li> </ul>

## Theme Three

## SOCIOPOLITICAL FACTORS

Environment	Professional Barriers	Hiring Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exclusion</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Lack of support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgement</li> <li>• Isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tokenism</li> <li>• Cultural competencies</li> </ul>

### **Theme One: Racism**

Racism as the first theme encompasses all four categories namely: Race, White Privilege, Uncertainty and Discrimination. Racism appeared to be salient and ran through all the participants' stories on different dimensions that varied in the degree of emotional intensity. The emotional experience depended on situations that ranged from harsh realizations to speculations of the presence of racism. The experience of racism, whether direct or indirect seemed to impact the participants on a personal level.

#### Race

All participants expressed an awareness of their own race in everyday life and that awareness permeated the counselling relationship. Participants varied in their approach of how they brought race into the counselling relationship with one participant beginning the relationship with his racial and ethnic difference. Another participant took the direct opposite approach and held race at neutral ground unless it were of benefit to the client. The balance of the participants saw race as always being present in and relevant to the relationship. The following verbatim quotations describe the participants' experiences:

*Well, I think it's always in the room and I think it's always a part of my work, sometimes more so than others but always there. I grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood and so I am used to being the different one and used to being in that kind of relationship. I think it also allows me to bring culture or an element into people's relationship that they may not get elsewhere or may not have thought about. Not to say I always ask them about what their*

*experiences of being White or whatever is, but I think it allows them to ask questions sometimes that other people may not have thought about or see it as relevant anyway. And I always think that part is always relevant.*

*So, you know, being I guess, ethnic background of Indian in the struggle, it's about race. So it makes me very aware of race. I am not blind to race, I wouldn't say I am colour blind at all. I see peoples race and I do see as far as I am allowed to see what that means for them in a general way, and what it means for me in a general way as well.*

*I am always aware of my race that way, except in my own office, I mean I am way more comfortable here. But walking into other places or being in trainings or being in larger meetings I am very aware that I am a minority.*

*One, as I said earlier is to introduce myself. I make sure that they know I am different. So I see myself as being different from them and I let them know that right way. And I also say, you know, "do you feel comfortable talking to a man, a Black man, an immigrant man of your problems?" I have to ask them that. If a person is a female I will ask them that. If a person is a man I would ask: "how would you like sharing your story with a Black man, particularly an African man, who really doesn't articulate the same way as you do of your problem? Do you feel I will understand what you say or do you question that?"*

*So I will ask them all those kind of things to get them to know me...the differences...my uniqueness, in terms of service providing.*

*I certainly have had a few experiences where I think people were surprised upon seeing me initially, and I think from there I would say there were just a couple people who were uncomfortable... just a couple in my career. So I haven't had a lot of sort of negative experiences with that. Certainly I think it's always in the room initially and, I think always obviously, but I think in terms of its impact of the work...I don't see much of an impact in the negative way.*

*I do hold it at neutral ground because I don't think that...I don't want to go there with my stories and I don't want it to trigger who I am. I guess what I am trying to say is that, I see this as smaller steps...into the bigger vision and the bigger vision is moving my clients forward. And so my colour might be a part of that but if I put it in with my own personal story it might not be...it might change the relationship because I am giving them something that they don't need or it might interfere with where they at. So I hold that at pretty neutral ground.*

*I remember thinking that just in the last two years I have had clients that have probably...more clients that are Non-White than ever before. And I remember thinking in that moment that I could...especially when they come and talk about things...I had a young women who identified as South Asian and her parents sent her here from India to come here and work and what not...things*

*like that...and she came in and started to speak and a part of me thought about...my race came into it because I can identify so much with what was happening for her in terms for her cultural context of her life. And so I think from that perspective, not that it was easier but I have a lot more insight into it for myself into what was going on. Not to say I can't do that with White clients because I certainly can. I was raised in Canada so I feel like I have a bit...a lot of the Canadian...because that has been my experience here and then a lot of the Indian because that's my family experience. So I think, yes, I think from my own experience its richer, I think in that way that I can go between the two worlds and kind of move between the two places of being...adapting to the different places in terms of race and ethnicity.*

*So I find my race actually bears more of an impact with clients of colour as opposed to clients who are White.*

### White Privilege

Participants talked about White privilege within the research context. There was an acknowledgement of the power of White privilege that automatically awarded an individual freedom of choice and respect. Some participants reflected their uncertainty of power in the counselling relationship when clients did not return to continue with counselling, while another reflected on the client holding air space with association of power. All participants saw some form of White privilege whether it was blatant or subtle.

*And I think that sometimes with clients who are White working with me...I often wonder if there is that place...how can she be a counsellor because of who she is because she is just a Brown girl and I am White...and wonder how many clients come in with that kind of power...holding power over me in a counselling session...not that I have ever seen it blatantly but when the clients who don't continue with counselling... that come for one or two sessions and don't come back...Sometimes I do think about the power dynamics and whether they thought...oh...that I don't deserve to be in that position so how could they possibly see me if they see me less than them. So I think in that perspective I do see it. But I think I am very aware of it in my own power especially around the race power-privilege stuff...I am really...I am aware of it and....most of the time it hasn't come up for me in counselling at all.*

*That people who are White, you know, live with that privilege which people that are Non-White do not have and so, you know, it's hard for us to know that's what we have to do...what we need to do in order to compensate for that lack of privilege. So there's that that I hold with me around race.*

*I think a lot of...my visible minority clients see this more of a conversation, they see it as very much as a partnership and we walking down this path together. I see clients who are Caucasian...they come from a value system that more ego-centric and much more...I don't want to use the word...they like to talk*

*more...and sometimes I stop them because I want to move them to a certain place, just because we are supposed to be doing brief therapy and...I need to move them to the next step but if I am just quiet we could...they would go on and on and on...and they would just talk more. And you know, sometimes I think I should be...just let them do it...right, instead of trying to intervene and I wonder because I am sort of more goal driven or whether I am trying to pick some spots for them to work on...I don't know, I am not sure...sometimes....I guess I am wondering whether...is that me saying...and I am curious of your reaction too...am I going to the place where I say, is this the place of where the White male or White female holding their space?*

*You know, as a White person they have White privilege. They can access whoever they want, whereas a Black person will be assigned whom to see, you know what I mean. It has happened to me many times myself. When I needed a counsellor I been told that this is the only person you can see...no-one else. If you don't like him, that is your problem. And when you go to that counsellor and maybe, you know, they provide you with information that is redundant and unnecessary or ask you questions that has nothing to do with the problem that you have come for. And when you get frustrated, you want to stay away from that person but you have no choice. But, if I was a White person and I say: "no, I don't want to see you, because I have the right to somebody else" it would be respected immediately. I mean, I am not blaming but that is the reality anyway.*

*So I will start, I will change the fact, that you know, is it their choice or have they been just assigned, and they have no choice.*

### Uncertainty

The category of uncertainty seemed to be embodied in the descriptions of three participant's experiences. They expressed apprehension about the client's initial response to the discovery of their race. When participants met the client for the first time they were vigilant for facial reactions to gain some information of what the client was experiencing. The following descriptions express the participants' uncertainty:

*Because my name is not obviously White, and so that little apprehension about how I was going to be received if someone was going to refuse to have counselling with me because I am not White. And that's kind of the initial thing that I was always weary of but it never happened. In fact it happened with an Indian client in a small community who felt that because I was Indian as well, her confidentiality wouldn't be kept. But it never happened with a White person...that they refused to have counselling with me. But it was my own apprehension that having lived in an apartheid state that I would almost be expecting to be rejected because I was not White.*

*I wonder how it's going to go with them feeling comfortable with me because I am not White. I think about things like...I wonder if they will be able to feel like they can open up to me and speak from their heart and tell me what's*

*going on or share their issues with me because I am not White. Those are the things I think about for them.*

*I wonder what goes through their mind and I think it's mainly from their facial reaction when they see me...and they see me that I am not a White person seeing them and I kind of wonder. So I have always, you know, thought about should I tell them that I am not White and I thought "no" I am not going to do that. I am just going to greet them like I would everyone else and go from there.*

*Let me think. I don't know if I have seen...if I have paid a lot of attention to it initially...and more so in the last few years I think what comes up for me around it is...is my name...it is very Anglicized. And I don't speak with an accent at all so when I talk to people on the phone and when I book appointments with them, I think they expect to have a White counsellor when they come in. So when I greet them in the waiting room...in the reception area and introduce myself as Simi I think their faces give it away the most. Because I see the looks on the faces like "Oh, is this your Simi?...you're Brown, you're not White". So I see in that perspective, I see on their faces more. And I don't know if I have become...so used to that, that I kind of ignore it or if I am just...if I just notice it more and adapt myself in the counselling session. So I think about when I meet them and see the reaction on their faces, I think the things that go through my mind is...*

*I think I start from a place of...part of my brain wonders what they think about...because often they have never met me before and often they don't know who they seeing before they get there...and there is still kind of...ohho...how do they feel about the fact that I am Black. So that's sort of what I think about that...and then...but I don't know if that that then informs how I work differently.*

### Discrimination

Every participant experienced discrimination at various levels. Two participants made direct reference to the counselling relationship while others referred to it as a factor in the counselling profession that required them to worker harder as counsellors of colour. One participant simply stated that being Black and having an accent was a reason for clients to undermine his competence. The recognition of discrimination and therefore racism led one participant to describe herself as a woman of colour who has power as an "illusion". The following excerpts reflect participants' views on discrimination:

*Well, the first thing in my experience is that they undermine your credentials, okay? As a Black person, English as a second language, having an accent or mispronouncing some words or maybe misreading some words becomes a crucial factor for the recipient to undermine your skills and competence. So you have to work very hard to convince them that you will deliver the same service as the White person. But it takes a longer time. So I have experienced discrimination in terms of my competency or undermining my*

*competency at the beginning but by helping them understand the process you are taking, the steps you are taking, they gradually appreciate and feel privileged to take the service from you. But it takes a long time.*

*And so when he came in he wanted to talk about it and he did. But I remember thinking doesn't he see that I am also Indian and that when he puts down one race and ethnicity and when it happens to be my own that it is also about me. So things like that become more difficult and more challenging and I know that although I am able to put that aside in the counselling session, I do need to get supervision and debrief that with my supervisor at the end of the session because it does impact me in a really hard way. I have made choices around where its been quite hard to work with clients like that, where I have actually ended the therapeutic relationship because its just...I am not being...I don't think I was being fully present or able to work with that person when they had such hard judgments around something that is who I am...my own race and ethnicity. So I have had the both extremes of it, you know. So I think it depends on who comes into my office and how it goes and how much my own race plays into the counselling session.*

*And it wasn't until there was some really blatant racism that happened for me that I went "wow"...that's not okay to not hire me, pick me or choose me because of the colour of my skin and that was probably in my late teens or early*

*twenties when I started to really look at my race and how that impacted me and also my traditions and values and all that stuff.*

*But I think as an adult I am becoming more and more aware of it...that those experiences I had although I tried to negate them and make them like they didn't happen, I think more so now I look at that from a place of "Hmm...I wonder how much that has to do with my race" and before I would have never questioned it or asked it or anything like that. So I think I have become more aware of it and I can say yes, it exists and yes, I have experienced it but before in my early twenties I probably wouldn't have said that because I was so out of tune and touch with all that. I wanted to be Canadianised and White and all that.*

*What was said often in the home was because you are Black you have to work that much harder to get what you want in life. So, you know, education is not optional...it's not optional if you go to university for example...you must go to university...you must try your hardest in everything that you do. And so I bring that with me to everything I do. In terms of how I see race, I think I come from that mind set still of, you know, people of colour have to work harder if they want to get what they want in life.*

*I have done the things, obviously not everything, but I have done a lot of the things that I wanted to do and I feel that I have accomplished some of the things I wanted to accomplish. So I feel good about that and I think that given my*

*habits... "and you're Black"... its kind of... and my race gives me a sense of pride... it gives me a sense of strength, it gives me a sense of celebration and I had to work virtually around the clock but my experiences have been positive. I mean certainly I have experienced racism in my life and... but I think... this is a cliché... but I think those experiences have really made me stronger. I think it makes me feel sort of in the back of my mind I can feel accomplished. I don't know if that make sense.*

*And I have women who came in and say, you know what, not only are you a woman of colour but you are a strong woman... that's what we need to see. But really, guys in some ways that's an illusion, I have no power.*

Racial difference was recognized by minority counsellors, which affected their mental mindset. The act of neutralizing race by one participant highlights recognition of that difference and the need to consciously exclude it from the relationship with the client. Participants who undertook to reveal their race to clients also perceived a need for this disclosure in the relationship, illustrating their view that race needed to be addressed in the counselling relationship. The failure of a White client to return to counselling spawned feelings that made minority counsellor feel that they were inadequate to assist them solely because of racial difference. Counsellors appeared to rely on sustained visits from clients before feeling a measure of adequacy and reassurance that they were successfully accepted. I connected with many of the feelings that participants

had. When a White client did not return for counselling I often wondered whether it was my race that discouraged the client from returning. In hearing the information that participants shared, I had to consciously remind myself that this was a process that I needed to go through in order to get the information I wanted and desired.

### **Theme Two: Worldview**

This theme addresses participants' worldview and all individuals provided ample data to substantiate their outlook. Participants identified four categories that illustrated their view: Philosophy, Disclosure, Professional Practice, and Diversity.

#### Philosophy

In this category participants made reference to different aspects that illuminate their philosophy. They saw themselves as human beings who are passionate about counselling and viewed themselves as equal to any other human being. In the counselling relationship they saw the human connection as the most important and this connection enabled them to work with any client, including White clients. Included in this category is family influence, which played a role in shaping the participants' philosophy.

*So for me I am a human being. I don't see that I am any different from a White person. I don't! I don't care what people say. Yes, I am Black nonetheless a human, okay? I am a thinking, feeling human being like the White*

*person is. The only difference is that they have a lighter skin than I have. So race has never been an issue for me.*

*I have the same education as the White person has. I have written the same topics as they have. I have sat down at the same table or desk as they have, so our thinking process, our models, our pattern of practice is the same. Why would I have to worry about my skin when I am trying to help someone else who is trying to access the service from me? You know, why does it always have to be political as opposed to professional? So those are the things that my worldview has never really been constructed in the practice setting within my ethnicity or race. My worldview is within that of the profession.*

*I need to focus on the line of stories the client is trying to articulate about their problem, the sources of the problem. If they are not comfortable with me I am not going to work with them. I will make sure somebody else whom they are comfortable with will work with them, because I don't want to play games with the person's life. I am passionate about helping people and if I am not able to help them, there has to be somebody who can help them. So my worldview could not be destructive. As I said earlier, I won't undermine who I am. I start from me to provide services as I have always done that.*

*I think I come from a real place of that human connection...human experience...and it doesn't come up for me until I see a reaction from them, from their faces or a comment just made...that to me is inappropriate....*

*You know, I don't think there is because I think I really come from a place of looking to make a connection...in terms of the racial stuff I don't think ....I think I am able to adapt with the client...I can work with the client and I feel like I can meet a client where he or she is at. Yes, so I don't think a lot differently in terms of that human-to-human connection piece. I think I look at it as a human to human connection piece for sure.*

*I don't think about how I will be with them and I think part of it is my philosophy is so much about we are all humans and we here to help each other. I come from a really open place and so I want to make it as comfortable for people as possible.*

*My mom always talked about, you know, walking to school with heads held high, never cowering or slouching down...head held high and shoulders back and to be proud of who we were, to be proud of the fact that we are Black and to be proud that, you know, we are here. So I think definitely that originated from my family and also through example.*

*I think that in terms of pride, I think that again it goes around...I am very comfortable with being different and enjoy actually that role of being different. So there's that piece of it as well. I like being Black, I never tried to be White or I never, you know....I feel comfortable in my skin*

### Disclosure

Participants indicated a willingness to disclose by discussing themselves and their experiences to help clients. Disclosure around racial experience was more common with minority clients than with White clients. However, one participant said that disclosure about his difference was important to the relationship and addressed this at the beginning of the counselling relationship.

*My religion is different, my culture is different, my language is different and my shape is different. So I let them know that I am passionate in what I do and I am determined to do what I need to do to help them.*

*Well, sometimes if I feel like there is something that is not being said, I can use my own experience in terms of, you know...as a Black women sometimes I see the world in this way or have you ever had that experience or I think it also...in some ways being a Black counsellor I think it means...I am thinking about how to say this....I think that it affords me more openness around race or around culture or around heritage because in a way the environment is already there between myself and the client so it's kind of not a big leap, I guess.*

*I will broaden that out and I will share more experience...but usually we have to come to a place where they feel I have enough common ground so I can be there to walk besides them as partners.*

*It's comes up with almost every client of colour that I have had and that's probably been because I got them.... and because there is the comfort level between two people of colour to actually discuss those things openly...about what it looks like to be a visible minority as we are called and what it's like to be not of the dominant culture or dominant race and how that impacts who we are and what we do and how we deal with our struggles and what struggles we have.*

*I find that the racial issues come out with clients who are not White. Either Me'tis or Indian or Chinese or somebody who is not White, where the issue of race is more openly talked about. Because then I am able to talk about it being an issue for them in this culture as it is an issue for me in this culture. And often times if we are dealing with identity issues, that is not one we can escape with clients of colour*

### Professional Practice

All participants interviewed saw themselves as advocates for the client, even when agency rules worked against them. They recognized that advocating for the client meant going outside of the office, which created difficult situations in the agency. Their professional practice also embraced client education

*And counselling for me, my style or my model of counselling is not office based, okay. I want to advocate. I am an advocate, not only do I counsel but I advocate, I go beyond the office. Because if you are a visible minority and if you are a professional there is always a belief among the visible minority that not only will you talk to them but you will go and do something for them. So I often go outside my office.....I pick up the phone, I walk and go wherever the solution is anticipated.*

*I like to go beyond that and I will do the same for the White client. And I have done that, it was very effective. Because they expect other counsellors to do the same but other counsellors tend to say they have no time because their caseloads are so large. And you can have a hundred in a case load but if you're not doing anything other than talking to them then that is meaningless for me. It's meaningless. You have to do it, although the session is clinical, are you really an advocate of social justice because the solutions are around social justice, it doesn't matter what it is.*

*So I have a woman who's Korean or I think Asian and she is so afraid for coming for counselling...so afraid of notes being kept, because her belief is that notes being kept are not good. So for her to even sign a confidentiality form...to put a signature on some things is something terrifying. And because of how we work at the agency we have to have consent and we have to have confidentiality*

*signed or else we can't work with them. And that's the agency policy so I was not able to work with her and I remember thinking how unfortunate.*

*I am supposed to doing this therapeutic relationship and this is not my job description. I can't help them if they can't read the calendar...they should be able to read the calendar, why don't they get it? Well, sometimes they don't get it and sometimes you just have to interpret it for them...or sometimes they don't know what to do to go over to records to get the auditing form or whatever...it doesn't matter what it is, right? Or they need to walk down to health services because it's just too scary to go themselves and I flex and say okay, we're partners in this let's go. That's the difference.*

*I step outside the box. I think that that is because I know what it's like to be held to the box or in the box...and I don't think that that's where all clients are, whether they are women of colour or not, but I think especially for clients who identify as a minority...as a visible minority. These are not our parameters, guys, you set these parameters up and I don't have to hold to those but I get told that... I stick my neck out, I get it chopped every time. But you know what, somebody has to do it. I didn't choose this path but this is the path that has opened up.*

*So I will start, I will change the fact, that you know, is it their choice or have they been just assigned, they have no choice. Do they know their right, you*

*know? Do they know their right? Things they can say and things they don't need to say? The same way as I would do with visible minority.*

### Diversity

This category addresses issues of diversity. Participants expressed that they were able to understand minority clients because they were also minority. One participant expressed frustration with agencies rules because it hindered offering help to clients who needed it.

*So, I think I get frustrated around those places when those things happen...I think...here we go again, it's all about this place of power and we can't even meet someone...and I understand it from legal perspective. Okay, I understand legally we need to have consent for liability but it doesn't take into consideration someone's ethnicity or race when they come in for counselling and that is frustrating for me...you know...it's about this person who needs help now and I can offer that help or try to offer that help...and it's too bad that she can't...she doesn't want to sign and doesn't want to stay....right....so...*

*I do see a lot of minority clients here in practice and for example, I have one client who is South Asian and we are a very demonstrative culture and when you meet people you hug and I know that. It's not to do with the therapeutic relationship, it's to do with this is how we greet people and this is just how it is. And so I have one client who is....was an absolutely mutual understanding...no*

*words expressed around....we would just hug each other, right. She came in...she was in stress...she gave me a hug, we sat down, we did the counselling session, at the end we hugged and parted. And I felt very conflicted around that because I know that's her need and that's who she is and that is part of the culture and any other contact would be absolutely fine...and I was feeling conflicted because here under the code of ethics of social work that we fall under, we not allowed to have that contact with the client. And so again, going to supervision around it with management or with my supervisor wasn't helpful because they don't understand that piece.*

*I mean that's only like reasonable. And it's interesting because the number of students that come in and I mean of all nationalities, you know...students from Mexico, Nigeria, India, Thailand, China, Tiawan...you know...they all say, "I am so glad that you're here because I know that you understand". Why do I understand...because I am a person of colour.*

*And who can understand when they say, "oh, gotta...gotta...got to go tell the parents", ...you know about whatever...boyfriend, girlfriend, dropping a course, changing from medical school to art or whatever...right?...what do you think? And I say "you know, it's going to be tricky"...and they say, "yeah, you get it", and that's all it is.*

*And she said well, she said as an international student all we could think of is she had to see Pam, we don't want to see any one else, we just want to see Pam, we have to just talk to Pam about it. And my manager was there and he says, "why just her, there is a whole bunch of us there, there's lot of us in counselling" and he looked at me and said, "why just you?" and I said, "because I am willing to flex"... with an international client or any client.*

*So in those moments I think we are not meeting where the client is at...we not putting the client's needs first. It comes back to this place...I often wonder if it's lack of understanding from the socio-political perspective of how culturally that plays into it versus...you know...the ethics of it...not the ethics.....can't think of the word...you know that person's needs come first.*

Participants experienced frustration working within culturally insensitive boundaries set by agencies. While they appreciated the professional reasons for some of those rules, they felt that the restrictions were spawned outside the agencies walls, a product or manifestation of a culturally selective environment where minority groups were sidelined. The implication is that agency rules by the nature of their insensitivity towards minority cultures, pander to those of the dominant culture. This frustratingly inhibits the quality of service offered by minority cultures.

### **Theme Three: Sociopolitical factors**

Sociopolitical factors as a theme were widely discussed across all transcripts. Sociopolitical factors parallel three categories (race, White privilege, and discrimination) in Theme One. Three categories emerge in this theme. These categories are: Environment, Professional Barriers, and Hiring Practices.

#### **Environment**

Environment as a sociopolitical factor embodied exclusion, anxiety, and a lack of support for minority counsellors. One participant indicated that he was excluded as a professional and was under social scrutiny simply because the environment engendered a White only environment. Three participants expressed anxiety with regard to government and government policy. Two participants expressed a lack of support with various issues in the workplace.

*Well, first and foremost people hate me because I am Black, that's the socio-political factor right there. And there is no doubt anybody will look at me with the same lens as a White professor.*

*In the work place I see White around me and I know what that comes with and I know also the kinds of ignorances that comes with for people of other races.*

*Politically, I am trying to say, I don't have to look like somebody to be respected. I want to be the way I am and respected for who I am. And try me, I*

*can help you professionally, okay? My characteristics or the way I look should not be criteria to socially respect or politically acknowledged that I am part of the big picture. I don't like this city because of that very thing, the socio-political environment or atmosphere is not welcoming. It seems like it is so subliminal, one has to be really engaged to the screen to understand what is going on. People smile at you but they poison you, when you not really aware of it because when you look at their smile you're being poisoned somewhere else. So as a White only environment,..... politically, I don't know whether to name it as a conservative state or liberal state or I don't want to say what setting, but it is a very White only place.*

*And therefore many Blacks tend to have less access not only to the profession but also to the services. And the offices, if you go to any counselling services is not welcoming, you don't see anything who looks like you in the pictures on the walls. You don't see professionals who look like you so you can be comfortable and breathe easy. So the socio-political factor is a big thing for both the client and the professional. For me it's a deterrent from not only accessing services or providing services but also accessing the profession itself. You get scrutinized socially. You get scrutinized through the professional politics, you know. You have to be part of that association who legitimizes your practice.*

*I think the work place is the climate if you take the microcosm...the work place climate outside of clients just in terms of colleagues and different offices and things like that. I am always aware of my race that way, except in my own office, I mean I am way more comfortable here. But walking into other places or being in trainings or being in larger meetings I am very aware that I am a minority.*

*When I think about politics though I certainly see that as an issue in terms of...and get quite fearful actually of what I see in politics and how that plays a role in race...with race and I am sort of seeing more right wing government getting into power and certainly we seeing that right now. That does scare me and what would that mean for me with regard to race.*

*So that is my fear in terms of...we would like to see people continuing to...accomplish what they want to be accomplishing in their lives. Sometimes people of colour have to have other avenues, they have to have programs that are conducive to that, they have to get help in that kind of way that won't be available depending on who is the government. I also think that there is an element of...us against them...that happens with right wing governments more so than other governments.*

*We are at an up swing right now. It's cool and in to be Asian, right...and I go, "ho, aye", but you know what, the scary part of that is well, when will it*

*not...right? So I have to admit that I am always paying attention to that...I try not to because it does interfere and certainly triggers anxiety...So I guess I am always on the alert, I feel that my body is not ever that relaxed...it's always at hypertension...to say okay...we in right now but it just means that we going to be out again, right? That kind of feeling...and I wish I could say that it was a safer place to be here but it is not that safe. I feel that at times that discrimination is by neglect. It's not so active...there are times when it is active, I say that...but there are also times when it is by neglect. We just...you know, things don't happen if we pretend it's not there. It has to be conscious and mindful to move things forward...we have to put time and caring and energy and commitment in it...doesn't just happen. And I think that sometimes we don't put the energy in there.*

*That's when issues around race and diversity come up that I don't want to be the one that's bringing it up because you know, then it becomes an issue on its own. And I do so because of my race not for any other reason. But it is an issue that actually everybody owns. And as an example, there was racist graffiti on our back door and it was on me to talk about it first whereas everybody came through the same door. And then you know, I did say I was not going to do anything about this. This somebody else needs to do and they did. So it got addressed but it was also an opportunity to bring up the whole issue of how these issues are being placed in my court because I am the one that looks*

*different. And, you know, that this might be more focused on, whereas it is actually as you know, a whole office issue or community issue...*

*I am not the gatekeeper for issues of diversity and inclusiveness and anti-oppression and anti-racism.*

*I forget about that because I love my job so much and I know how to look for support outside of my work place when I seek it, and debrief it with my friends who are also minority counsellors and it's like, oh yeah, okay, that's what it's about and I get the support outside of here and I forget that it should automatically come with the job from within. But it's not until times like this when I am meeting and speaking with you that I think, right, I forget I do that. Part of my understanding now is I need to go outside to get support and just do it automatically for myself but really it should come from within and it doesn't.*

### Professional Barriers

Professional barriers as a category address the lack of acknowledgement and isolation as expressed by participants. Professional barriers are also reflected in the next category (Hiring Practices) as tokenism. One participant felt isolated because of a lack of understanding in the agency.

*You know, you have to be registered with some professional association. Yes, you could register, you could get that acknowledgement but then would you*

*really be acknowledged the same as another person? Would you be able to get referrals? Unless you get a visible minority requiring the service, you are lost! You are not going to get White people to take services from you if you open your own practice....you're dreaming! The only time they will really look at you through the phone book or call you is because they have found somebody they cannot serve because of the language problem, cultural difference, the religious attributes, or whatever they have. That's when they look at you! Until then you're lost! And there is some resistance from them (professional association), they don't want to know.*

*We need to be able to put people of colour in high administrative positions or put them into faculty or put them into staff...you know...I am cool about this, but you know, the international office...the person, the director or coordinator...can't remember what the title was...retired. I was doing all sorts of work with international students but did I get a shot at it? It didn't even get advertised, right? It goes to another White male...how cool is that...like it's not, right?*

*And the other part around that is that no one on staff understands that perspective...from a cultural perspective...so I have to actually access friends outside...friends and colleagues outside the center to debrief with them because for me it's so hard. Because I know the rules and structure here and I have to follow them and yet I am quite vocal about it but it is not met with understanding*

*and sympathy because they don't understand it. We've got people who are White with power and privilege who don't understand their power and privilege in management running the agency so it's so hard to go to them with it when they don't understand. So I get my support around that kind of stuff outside the agency.*

### Hiring Practice

Participants felt strongly about being the token minority in the agencies they worked for. Cultural competencies were only viewed from the perspective of securing government funding. Individuals saw hiring practices of agencies as a sociopolitical factor that exposed minority counsellors to issues that they did to consent to.

*And in terms of professional development the socio-political factor is really bidding me. Now I am stimulated to tell you more about it. If you go to a professional development setting, when there is an issue of culture or ethnicity or gender within that frame, they want the Black, East Indian, Chinese, or somebody who is not White to speak. You know, as if you know it all. You become like a sign post for everybody. Whenever they see you they know you going to talk about this issue and how can we get away from it. That's the socio-political factor which exposes you without your will to do something or to say something in order to enhance their profession or professional practices.*

*I liked to work on competencies but I didn't realize in the beginning that the cultural competency piece came to me because at that time I was the only woman, only person of colour in the agency. And so without being really aware that it came my way because I am Brown that I just felt oh, what a great piece, this is my interest, I love working on this stuff and took it on with being really open about it. And as things progressed, the months went on I noticed more and more sort of under currents of it...comments like you are the token minority, so of course you would be doing that piece, of course that would be who you are and you would have to do that part, right? That was kind of interesting and a bit challenging for me to hear that and also getting really angry about it because that's not how I like to see it, I don't want to be a token minority...it's that tokenness and also that part...oh, is that why you gave it to me... it's not because of my skills or my abilities, it's because of my colour. So I remember thinking that through and having lots of anger around it.*

*That often there is only one of me and sometime you know, I find myself doing a lot of those thought bubbles about you know, I would be saying this and this, but wish it didn't have to be me that talks about these issues because then it's you know...the one Non-White person bringing up the Non-White issue or the issue around oppression or the issue around race or the issue around being diverse or being inclusive, and that irritates me sometimes.*

*I think it's more important for somebody who is White to be looking at those issues and at cultural competencies versus somebody who is of minority background. I think I come with more understanding around it...especially the aspects of power in relationships with my clients whereas some of my colleagues who are White don't look at it from that perspective and don't understand how much power they have in a relationship with a client.*

*So as I was working through it and seeing it, it became so apparent to me that they were doing it because it was something they had to fulfill, it was one of these...we have to be accredited to get the contracts because government wants people who are accredited which means you get the contracts that means the money. It wasn't about really valuing the work around cultural competencies; it was really just about filling a need based on the government's whim.*

*For me it is a lot more about people looking within themselves and seeing how they deal with cultural competencies with all the racisms, where they self locate, how do they...how is it where they are situated in terms of their own issues around it, how does that play out with their clients, how does that impact the counselling sessions?*

The sociopolitical factors that minorities endure are both painful and frustrating to bear, never-the-less, they do not give up in their struggle to be successful in a system dominated by Eurocentric values. In listening to the

stories of the participants, I found myself debating and comparing my past South African context of racism to my present Canadian context and could not decide which is more harmful. I came to the conclusion that the effects of racism are the same despite the manner of delivery and an individual could be harmed equally in both contexts.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary and Implications

This chapter will present a summary of the answers of the research questions for the entire project, limitations of the study and short discussion of the implications.

This study explored the racial perceptions of visible minority counsellors. The research was intended to enlighten the researcher on the meaning making process of the counsellor and the impact this had in a counselling relationship with a White client.

The research employed a qualitative approach utilizing the heuristic design to capture the essence or phenomenon in the experience of the participants. This methodology allowed for insight into the “lived and shared experiences” as presented by the participants. The understood meanings and insights from participants were gained by systematic analyses and the use of direct quotations in the presentation of the results. Multiple sources of evidence, such as the researcher’s field journal and the researcher’s field notes were used to verify the collected data and confirm the finding from the interviews with participants. Recordings of context, feelings and thoughts by the researcher in the field journal and field notes were specifically used to frame and describe the results as closely as possible to how they were described by participants in the field.

The following research questions were answered:

1. Tell me a little about yourself and what brought you to counselling?

This question was intended to gather necessary information for the purposes of demographics. It also created a context for both participant and researcher to work comfortably with each other. Originally six participants, two males and four females, were selected. One participant was First Nations (male) two participants were Black (male and female), two were South-East Asian (two females), and one was Asian (female). However, the First Nations person chose to withdraw for fear of racism. The age of the five participants ranged from 34 to 55 years, all of whom have been practicing in the field of counselling for more than ten years. One of the participants immigrated to Canada as a young child; two were born in Canada and lastly, two were immigrants who have been practicing counselling in Canada for 11 and 24 years each. All participants met the following criteria, namely, being Non-White in race, counsellors with a graduate degree and experience working with White adult clients in a counselling relationship.

## 2. What have your experiences working with White clients been?

The reported experiences varied widely among participants from feeling that their credentials were undermined by clients to feeling that race should be viewed from a neutral standpoint in the relationship. The variety in the participants' experiences working with White clients suggests that cross-racial experiences vary depending on the race and worldview of the counsellor (Redmond & Stanley, 2002). Most participants found themselves contemplating what the client's thoughts and feelings were at the initial meeting and being apprehensive about the client's reflections. All participants unanimously reported

having more positive experiences in the counselling relationship than negative ones, however; they all agreed that race was always present regardless of whether they chose to discuss it or not. Literature suggests that counsellor attributes do impact the counselling relationship and that physical features such as race, have been found to be salient markers that are powerful in shaping impressions, and to affect the process and outcome of psychotherapy (Fuentes and Gelso, 2000). The decision to discuss it with their clients amounted to a personal choice depending on the style and worldview of the counsellor and the appropriateness of the situation.

### 3. How do you view your race in the counselling relationship?

All participants expressed feelings of being comfortable with their race. Although they confirm that race is always present, it was not a source of shame or associated with any negative feelings. Instead they felt that their race was important to them and a source of strength, pride and comfort. According to Helms' (1984) identity model, all participants appeared to have integrated and internalized a positive identity that is a culmination of the final stages of Black racial identity development. The culmination of this phase is described by one participant as follows: "And in terms of how I saw my race I sort of saw being involved and having a strong sense of community, again that sense of pride". A positive racial identity makes it possible for the individual to have a strong sense of self allowing them to work successfully with people of different races (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Participants also believed that an added benefit of being racially different is that it afforded them the opportunity to work successfully with

both White and minority clients. Most of the participants saw their education in a Euro-centric system as equipping them to understand and work with White clients as well as to function at a Euro-centric level of acceptance. Additionally, their race, culture and ethnicity furnished them with the ability to understand the minority experience and to connect with the minority client at a deeper level which was made possible by the shared experience of being Non-White (Yinger, 1976).

When participants were asked what they thought about their race they all responded by saying that they saw themselves as human beings who are no different from any other (Ayorinde, 1999). They emphasized that the most important element in a relationship was the human connection, which is the key to a successful counselling relationship. The success that they achieved in the counselling relationship was attributed to being able to connect with clients at a human level.

#### 4. How has your ethnicity influenced your views on race?

Participants discussed various influences that helped to shape their views on race; however, two influences that were spoken of directly or strongly alluded to were family and community. The community experience of participants varied depending on where they were reared. The present held values, beliefs and behaviours were spoken of as being transmitted to them by their families and communities (Phinney, 1996). One participant expressed such a transmission in response to the researcher's question regarding ethnic influence on race by stating that the country he came from "has never been colonized and I have no

idea of the difference between Black or White". Literature suggests that values, beliefs, behaviours and traditions are passed on from one generation to the next and this enables individuals to share a common bond with each other. This allows them to make sense of themselves and the world (Sue & Sue, 1990; Phinney, 1996; Helms, 1984). Participants spoke of ethnicity as having a grounding effect in how they viewed themselves.

5. What role had the sociopolitical climate played in how you view your race?

Participants unanimously agreed that racism played a role in how they were viewed as people, counsellors, and professionals. The majority of the participants viewed the workplace as unsafe and unsupportive despite their efforts to integrate into the environment. Participants viewed racism as a barrier that prevented them from making progress in the profession and that inhibited them from practicing in culturally sensitive ways with minority clients.

Professional barriers include the denial of racism, the deliberate attempt to keep minority counsellors out of positions of power and unwillingness to genuinely include a multicultural perspective in practice and policy (Dana, 1998; Davis & Gelsomino, 1994). The majority of the participants viewed the profession's attempt to reflect multicultural competencies within agency practice as a ploy to secure government funding and as a result minority counsellors endured backlash for attempting to deliver culturally sensitive service to minority clients. Participants regarded their race in the profession as a political pawn that advanced the agenda of different agencies, organizations, and committees that

they were associated with. Exposed as a token minority in the field meant that they were expected to represent and speak for all minority people.

Understandably, they expressed anger at being exposed without consent to such situations. Participants equated race with politics and expressed anxiety about being a minority, should a right wing government rule the country. They saw racial security as inevitably interwoven with government's policy and agenda.

6. What would you do differently when working with a White client?

The majority of participants did not feel that they would do anything significantly different when working with a White client. They substantiated that conclusion by referring to their worldviews, which differed from one participant to the next. The worldview determined the initial meeting where participants either started the session by discussing their difference in race and culture or alternately, held race at neutral ground. Participants once again emphasized meeting the client at the human level to establish the human-to-human connection.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study sought to illuminate the perceptions of minority counsellors regarding race in the counselling relationship. Generalizability of this qualitative study was not identified as a goal; however, the study's results can be applied to other contexts. There are some similarities between what the participants reported as their experience in counselling and what exists in current literature regarding race as a variable that impacts the counselling relationship.

The participants in this study were limited to only three races i.e., Black, South East Asian, and Asian. These races do not encompass the realm of the many minority races that counsellors hail from. This study describes the experiences of a small number of participants from only one province in Canada. There may exist greater variability among the racial experiences of counsellors if a larger sample of minority counsellors from other races and provinces were included in research.

Another limitation that might exist in this study is the researcher's identity as a minority person. A researcher's experience and identity can impact the research relationship and this remains true for the processes of this study. It is possible that the researcher's relationship with participants was impacted by a shared identity as a minority in Canada. How this shared identity may have affected the study's results is difficult to say because the researcher is an immigrant and minority in Canada.

### **Implications**

There are three implications within the research results. These implications are: 1) Educational Institutions, 2) Counselling Agencies, 3) Counsellor Worldview, and 4) Directions for Future Research

#### **Implication 1: Educational Institutions**

While not referred to directly by participants, there are significant implications for educational institutions to deliver a message of cultural acceptance within their curriculum. Culture has a profound effect which shapes and conditions values, beliefs and traditions that are transmitted from one

generation to the next. The absence of cultural sensitivity and awareness in the development of educational programs and institutions in general, limits not only open relationship between professionals but also inhibits participation and understanding.

The existence of a culture sensitive philosophy in higher learning institutions inspires awareness that involves a broader understanding of the unique and common characteristics of ethnic and racial difference in humans, and encourages acceptance and respect for the complexity in the rich differences. Such an approach would transform students' perceptions, values, and worldview about self-in-relation and the unique differences between themselves and others. Consequently, this will allow for the learning and teaching environment to become a network where individuals and groups can share experiences, ideas and relationships, and develop a spirit of connectedness and appreciation for both ethnic and racial differences.

Educators could be encouraged to endorse and promote awareness in individuals' racial and ethnic identity development, encouraging an environment of open introspection, curiosity and empathy. It challenges student professionals to explore, discover and understand who they are, what histories brought them to where they are and differences from other students in terms of colour, ethnicity, traditions, worldviews, and beliefs. Racial and cultural awareness will give students the opportunity to dialogue, reflect and participate, as well as explore and understand the rationale that makes one culture different from another. A culturally sensitive teaching philosophy and curriculum will help student

professionals to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that embrace diversity and encourages inclusiveness in all levels of the counselling profession and in society in general.

### Implication 2: Counselling Agencies

The results of this research hold potential implications for professionals in management positions that are responsible for the quality of service delivery. A suggestion that is concluded from this study is that authority figures should embark on a personal journey of education that illuminates diversity issues such as racism, inclusiveness, and culturally sensitive service delivery. As figures that have authority and power, it becomes imperative for them to develop culturally sensitive practices and increase awareness about the diverse nature of minority populations. In addition, agencies need to strive to include the minority counsellors in agency policy and regulations as genuine partners in goodwill.

Cultural sensitivity and awareness is about human relationships, interdependency, differences and points of connection. A cross-cultural model provides a way for an individual to understand and examine one's own culture, values, beliefs, and identity in order to respect and accept the unique differences they encounter in their professional practice. This study adds a cross-cultural approach that encourages White professional counsellors and figures in authority to be sensitive and alert when communicating with minority professionals and minority clients. It prepares them to be mindful, flexible and open in their interactions thereby creating an atmosphere and space of inclusiveness. These

are necessary elements to eradicate professional barriers encountered by minority counsellors.

### Implication 3: Counsellor Worldview

The results of this research indicate that the counselling style of minority counsellors is influenced by their worldview. Their worldview determines whether racial differences will be discussed in the counselling relationship or not. The implication for counsellors is to be aware of their worldview and to be conscious of how it influences their counselling practice. Conscious raising regarding their worldview may require meeting in support groups designed for minority counsellors so that they can explore and openly discuss their thoughts and feelings about racial issues and counselling White clients. Raising the minority counsellor's level of consciousness of their worldview may also help to eliminate doubts about the decision they make regarding race in the counselling relationship.

### Implication 4: Direction for Future Research

Future cross-cultural research investigating the perceptions of minority counsellors might include a larger sample of various racial groups of counsellors from across Canada. Since research on the minority counsellor is still in its infancy, future research may want to examine the worldview of different racial groups of counsellors i.e., Aboriginals, Asians, Blacks, South East Asians, etc., with a greater focus on how their worldview enhances or negates the counselling experience. For example, researchers could attempt to illuminate the

counsellor's worldview in relation to racism focusing on the resulting impact in the therapeutic relationship.

### **Summary**

This study is an initial step in understanding the perceptions of minority counsellors and must be acknowledged as such. This research provided information for professionals in all human services fields, for educators in higher learning institutions and for counselling professionals in management positions. The information in this study may enhance the understanding of the minority counsellors' experience in the counselling profession and the barriers they encounter in making progress within the profession. For example, this research has found that the salient challenge minority counsellors have to contend with at all levels in society and in the profession is racism. Despite their best efforts to climb the profession ladder and to provide culturally sensitive service they were only partially successful. Authority figures in the profession were unwilling to admit the existence of racism therefore making it impossible to change present practices and beliefs in the counselling system. Consequently, minority counsellors have to contend with barriers such as tokenism, exclusion, professional stagnation and backlash for attempting to deliver culture sensitive service. Minority counsellors have to work harder than their White counterparts to prove that they are competent and capable, and are worthy of being considered as professionals. However, this does not ensure them an equal place with equal opportunity in the profession.

This study also revealed that counsellors were comfortable with their race and were proud of their racial and cultural heritage. Their view of racial pride was equated to the final stages of racial identity development that is favorable to working with White clients. Their philosophy expounded the belief that they are “equal as humans” and the most important point of contact with a client is the human-to-human bond. Counsellors differed in their approach to racial issues in the counselling relationship, which was determined by their worldview. The worldview of the counsellor was dependant on their childhood experience of growing up which was influenced by family and community. Counsellor worldview is an important element given that it determined how the counsellor approached racial issues in the therapeutic relationship.

This research creates a foundation for future research to investigate racial perceptions of minority counsellors at a more in-depth level. The minority counsellor’s racial negotiations and worldview warrants further investigation.

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