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THE SPIRIT EMPOWERING COUNSELORS TO BE CULTURALLY COMPETENT IN A RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY CHANGING SOCIETY

SANDRA K. RICHARDSON *Salubritas* 2 (2022) 105–130

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Abstract

Significant change in the counseling field begins in counselor education programs. Concerns of biased, incompetent, and ineffective counseling services for culturally diverse clients plague the mental health profession (ACA, 2021; Sue & Sue, 2016). Rapid shifts in the racial and ethnic demographic composition of American society and the overt expression of hate and violence on the lives of People of Color place a greater demand on mental health professionals to pursue and acquire multicultural competencies (Brown, 2020; Embrick, 2015). Cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills are needed to establish meaningful therapeutic relationships, to provide effective treatment, and to effectively advocate for culturally diverse clients (CACREP, 2016; Sue & Sue, 2016). These competencies assist counselors in positively impacting client relationships, therapeutic progress, and overall well-being. Counselor education programs should be taking the lead in preparing students to effectively serve these increasingly diverse populations. Christian counselors and Christian counselor educators have an even greater responsibility in this endeavor which is fundamentally rooted and anchored in the commandments and principles of love (AACC, 2014).

Introduction

Communities throughout the nation are frequently being stunned and traumatized by witnessing the overt mistreatment of lives of men and women representing

racially diverse populations. Incidents of violence and racially charged hate crimes against People of Color continue to plague the nation (Brown, 2020; Embrick, 2015). George Floyd was publicly killed by a police officer who knelt on his neck, Ahmaud Arbery was fatally shot while on jogging through a neighborhood, Breonna Taylor was shot to death by police raiding her home, Freddie Gray sustained a severed spine leading to his death while being transported by police, and Sandra Bland was found dead hung in her jail cell three days after being arrested for a traffic stop. Recently, ten Black people were shot and killed in a grocery store and this “mass shooting was the deadliest in the United States so far this year, and one of the deadliest racist massacres in recent American history” (Fadulu, 2022, para. 7).

While Black Americans remain the most targeted group in terms of hate crimes, anti-Asian hate crimes have increased 339% in the past year (Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, 2021). More than 9,000 anti-Asian incidents have been reported since the Coronavirus pandemic began (Tang, 2021). Hate crimes against Latinos have pushed the overall number of such crimes to an 11-year high (Gamboa & Associated Press, 2020). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (2021) reported that 61.8% of victims were targeted because of the offenders’ race/ethnicity/ancestry bias.

In addition to being hate crimes, the crimes listed above are racist because they are acts of violence perpetrated against People of Color (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2021; Kendi, 2019). Kendi (2019) asserts that acts of racism are born from racist ideas and policies that permit inequality and discrimination. Several definitions suggested by Kendi further define racism and racist ideas. Kendi indicates that “racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequalities” (p. 17). Racist ideas are considered “any idea that suggests one racial group is inferior or superior to another racial group in any way” (p. 20). Therefore, “racism is a powerful collection of racist policies that lead to racial inequity and are substantiated by racist ideas” (p. 20), which ultimately lead to and foster acts of violence against People of Color.

Several decades of widely pronounced concerns and activism highlighting racist and discriminate clinical practices against racially diverse populations have risen to the forefront of the mental health profession (Jones & Seagull, 1977; Rosenthal & Berven, 1999; Sue, 2010; Wampold, Casas, & Atkinson, 1981). Consequently, the American Counseling Association’s (ACA, 2021) position statement on nondiscrimination urges its members to “help advocate for equity and fair treatment for all people and groups in order to end oppression and injustice affecting clients, students, families, communities, schools, workplaces, governments, and other social and institutional systems” (para. 3). Therefore, ethical standards of professional behavior and educational guidelines have been developed stipulating that counselor educators are required to train students to counsel through the lenses of multiculturalism (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016).

Educators also have an ethical responsibility to demonstrate and model multicultural competencies in order to prepare students to effectively respond to these widespread concerns (ACA, 2014; Sue, 2010; Sue & Sue, 2016). However, what has been repeatedly demonstrated is that many counselor educators were not sufficiently trained themselves in multicultural counseling (Carter, 2001; Hill, 2003; Sue, 2010; Wallace; 2000).

The need for cultural sensitivity and training in multicultural counseling is even more critical for Christian counselors who are called upon to go into every person's world taking God's healing power (AACC, 2014). This endeavor ultimately represents an explicit demonstration of one's Christian character, values, and genuine care for others as an imperative and intentional response of love. Christian counselors have been given this loving capacity as "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Romans 5:5). The Spirit also empowers us to witness and demonstrate love to people of all races and nationalities (Acts 1:8).

Rapid Diversification and Demographic Shifts

Training and education in multicultural counseling begins with an understanding of race and ethnicity in the United States as well as the demographic shifts that have occurred. Becoming aware of and sensitive to the impact of these changes can help prepare and equip students to effectively work with culturally diverse clients (Meyers, 2017; Sue & Sue 2016).

Race and Ethnicity in the United States

"Every U.S. census since the first one in 1790 has included questions about racial identity, reflecting the central role of race in American history from the era of slavery to current headlines about racial profiling and inequality" (Parker et al., 2020, para. 1). Race is usually associated with biology and linked with physical characteristics, covering a relatively narrow range of options. Ethnicity is a broader term than race. The term is used to categorize groups of people according to their cultural expression and identification. Commonalities such as racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin may be used to describe someone's ethnicity (Morin, 2021).

From 1790 to 1850, U.S. census takers chose from only three racial categories: "free Whites", "all other free persons", and "slaves". "Free colored persons" was added in 1820 and in efforts to count the multiracial population, "Mulatto" was added in 1850 (Parker et al., 2020). Most notably, census takers

determined the race of Americans up until 1960. They were instructed to determine race by how individuals were perceived in their community or by their share of “Black blood” (Parker et al., 2020.) Using the “one drop rule,” by deliberate design, anyone with even one Black ancestor was counted toward the “Negro” race. This categorization scheme had several economic and political benefits for “Whites” and significantly restricted the rights and boundaries for People of Color (Hickman, 1997).

Beginning in the year 2000 when the categories listed under “race” expanded while others were removed, Americans finally had the option to identify with more than one race. In the most recent census of 2020, respondents had the option for the first time to enter detailed origins in the write-in fields (Parker et al., 2020). Today, the U.S. Census Bureau collects race data for a minimum of five racial groups: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and a sixth category—Some Other Race. Noticeably missing from the list of racial groups listed on the 2020 census is the largest minority population in the United States, Hispanics. Federal policy does not define “Hispanic” as a specific race but two-thirds of Hispanic adults say being Hispanic is part of their racial background and when given the option they identify as “other race” and write-in “Latin American, Hispanic, or Mexican” (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2020, para. 1).

Demographic Shifts in the United States

With shifts in American demographics, society, and culture, the categorization and identification of race in the United States has changed over time. The U.S. population continues to become racially diverse and all of the nation’s population increase since 2010 is the result of minority population gains (Frey, 2021). According to a Pew Research Center analysis of the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau population estimates, the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in the U.S. from 2000–2019 is Asian American which grew by 81% (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). The 2020 census bureau estimates that White people are still the majority race, representing 60.1% of the U.S. population. Although, for the first time in decades, the White population diminished in growth in 2019 (Johnson, 2020). Demographic growth among other racial groups were 18.5% Hispanic, 12.5% Black, 5.8 % Asian, and 2.2% of two or more races, and .9% native peoples (Johnson, 2020; Krogstad, 2020). By 2045, it is estimated that these racial and ethnic minority populations will outpace the White population and there will no longer be a single majority racial group (Poston, 2020).

Sue (2008) responded to these demographic shifts predicting that:

Overt expressions of racism and hate crimes may be increasing as the demographics of the United States changes toward a majority of Persons of Color. Many Whites are beginning to realize that in several short decades, they will become a ‘numerical’ minority and that demands for change in our economic, political, social and educational systems may result in a revamped society that alters the power structures of this nation. (p. VI)

More recently, Courtland Lee, a previous ACA president, declared that there has been “a culmination of White reaction to the changing demographics in this country” as the U.S. continues to become more diverse (Meyers, 2017, para. 5). He notes that “racist viewpoints have become more publicly prevalent and acceptable” with increased reports of intimidation and harassment as part of what is termed a “national outbreak of hate” (para. 6).

Counselor Education Training Programs—The Call to Lead

As cries of racial bias and social injustice against People of Color are heard throughout traumatized communities and the mental health profession, they are also being echoed in the classrooms of higher education training programs. Ciercie West-Olatunji, former ACA president asserts that “Bias in the counseling field begins in counselor education programs” (Meyers, 2017, para. 18). If emotional awakenings of one’s knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to race, culture, and ethnicity come only after repeatedly witnessing painful incidents of racial violence, injustice, and discrimination, then institutions of higher education have waited much too long to act in preparing students to effectively treat and advocate for culturally diverse clients (Sue & Sue, 2016). Researchers contend that colleges and universities should take the lead in educating and training students in acquiring knowledge, awareness, and skills necessary to effectively address numerous difficult racial and social challenges facing people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Meyers, 2017; Ponterrato et al., 2001; Richardson, 2008; Wallace, 2000).

The Early Call for Multicultural Counseling Competence

As far back as the 1960s there have been concerns about the need for providing effective culturally sensitive treatment in the mental health profession. Numerous findings during the 1960s documented traditional counseling practices from the

dominant culture as being irrelevant, demanding, and oppressive toward those who were culturally different (Lee, 1991; Sue, 1982; Sue et al., 1982). The 1980s witnessed unprecedented growth in the attention devoted to multicultural (cross-cultural) issues in education training programs, and in the counseling literature (Ponterotto & Casas, 1991). Sue (1982) developed a tripartite model of multicultural competence that has served as the dominant framework for how mental health professionals can provide effective counseling services to individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. In the early 1990s, Sue et al. (1992) called attention to the diversification of America, as evidenced by a growing multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual U.S. society. However, the disparities in service delivery had not changed. Sue's tripartite model was transformed in 1992 into a set of competency guidelines called the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) (Sue et al., 1992). "The MCC operationalized multicultural counseling as a multidimensional construct with 31 original competencies undergirding the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary for therapists to be able to provide culturally competent services" (Shin et al., 2016, p. 1189). The MCC competencies were adopted by the ACA and were later revised to incorporate a connection between multicultural and social justice competencies (ACA, 1995, 2015). They have continued to provide guidelines for multicultural counselor training as well as the criteria by which multicultural training outcomes are assessed (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2013).

Professional Counseling Associations

Professional counseling associations are independent associations that set standards of professional conduct for practicing counselors (Sangganjanavanich & Reynolds, 2015). Over the last 30 years, the ACA has progressively responded to the call and need for culturally sensitive practice as evidenced in the various revisions of its ethics codes. The 1995 ACA ethical codes suggested counselors respect cultural differences, and the 2005 edition expanded the guidelines of multiculturalism (ACA, 1995, 2005). The current 2014 codes further promote "honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts" (ACA, 2014, p. 3). The Association of Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC), a division of ACA, shares and promotes these same ethical values (ACA, 2014).

Christian Professional Association Standards and Principles

Christian mental health associations have also gradually acknowledged the disparities in mental health treatment of culturally diverse groups and the need to address racial and ethnic cultural issues and shifts in the United States. The Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS, 2005) ethical principle 4.2 states that "members do not condone or engage" in any form of discrimination.

The National Association of Christian Counselors (2008) and the American Association of Christian Counselor (AACC, 2014) ethical standards highlight the importance of counselors being culturally competent and valuing the dignity and worth of clients as being created in the image of God acknowledging culture, racial, and ethnic diversity as factors to be considered in delivering counseling services.

Counselor Education Accreditation Standards

Counseling accreditation agencies set minimal educational standards which counseling training programs must meet in order to receive accreditation for university degree programs (Sangganavanich & Reynolds, 2015). The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (2016) has recognized the need for culturally sensitive practice and requires counselor education training programs seeking accreditation to integrate multiculturalism and diversity content into their curriculum including teaching “strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination” (p. 9).

Even with this increased emphasis on cultural diversity training by CACREP, in a recent study of 500 ACA practicing counselors, Barden, Sherrell, and Matthews (2017) indicated “that there were no differences between the self-perceived multicultural competence of counselors who graduated from CACREP accredited programs and those who did not” (p. 209). Students from CACREP accredited schools are expected to receive ongoing exposure and training in multiculturalism, therefore it was unclear how the educational programs of the participants actually approached this training and preparation.

Developing Multicultural Competence: Awareness, Knowledge, Skills

Many of the racial and ethnic concerns pertaining to multicultural competencies emphasize the importance of properly training the dominate culture because of the disproportionately large number of White practitioners in the mental health field compared to other racial minority groups who are working with diverse clients. However, the journey of becoming culturally competent is a lifelong process that exists on a continuum of learning, growing, and self-reflection for all helping professionals regardless of race and ethnicity (Sue & Sue, 2016). For many counselors, this uncharted territory can be filled with obstacles of apprehension, defensiveness, and fear.

Culture consists of patterns of human behaviors, attitudes, customs, thoughts, languages, values, and beliefs that bind a racial, ethnic, social, or religious group within a society and is communicated from one generation to another (Jones, 2004; Matsumoto, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2016). Multicultural/Diversity Competence is a “counselor’s cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge

about self and others, and how this awareness and knowledge is applied effectively in practice with clients and client groups” in order to promote their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing (ACA, 2014, p. 20).

Sue and Sue (2016) suggest that learning to effectively counsel diverse populations requires intentional self-reflection, a broadening of perspectives, as well as changes in behavior. This ongoing developmental process whereby no one actually “arrives” consists of acquiring multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills. Multicultural awareness necessitates becoming aware of one’s own biases, prejudices, assumptions, and values related to racial and ethnic minorities and other diverse groups (ACA, 2014; Sue & Sue, 2016). This task often evokes defensiveness and resistance within individuals who, though are well-intended, have not understood how their differences and views can and will affect the manner in which they serve culturally diverse clients. When counselors are not aware of their own prejudices, stereotyping, discriminate worldviews, or bigotry, counseling may serve as an instrument of cultural oppression rather than liberation (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue & Sue, 2016).

“Multicultural knowledge refers to a counselor’s knowledge about various cultural norms and values that affect the counseling process. Counselors demonstrating cultural knowledge understand how cultural norms influence personality and manifestations of psychological symptomatology” (Barden et al., 2017, p. 203). This also means striving to understand the worldview of each client without making negative judgments about individuals and counselors acknowledging how their own worldview is helping or hurting clients (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue & Sue, 2016).

Counselors can then work to develop skills and implement culturally sensitive interventions that aid in the client’s well-being within his or her context (Sue et al., 1992). These multicultural skills are demonstrated behaviorally, such as when counselors actively seek out culturally sensitive educational workshops to enhance their training and proficiency, or when counselors practice culturally sensitive counseling strategies and develop goals consistent with the life experiences of clients (Barden et al., 2017).

Cultural Diversity Courses: Challenges and Attitudes

Although the development of multicultural competence among many counselors has been insufficient, some dimensions have changed. Barden et al. (2017) replicated a study by Holcomb-McCoy and Myers (1999) which assessed the multicultural competence of professional counselors. The results of their national study 20 years later had similar results when surveying 500 ACA members. Their findings indicated that professional counselors appeared to be competent in *awareness* of their own cultures and of their own cultural biases, although counselors were still limited in their *knowledge* related to specific cultures (of

others). Therefore, effective training and development are still needed in the areas of multicultural knowledge and multicultural skills. The researchers noted that this discrepancy may indicate that counselor training programs continue to be focused on “increasing counselors’ awareness of their cultural background and personal biases, but are deficient in training counselors to be cognizant of their clients’ worldview” (Barden et al., 2017, p. 208).

Undertrained Faculty

For several decades, most higher education training programs were initially slow to respond to the call for multicultural training and failed to effectively integrate such competency training into their curriculum (Carter, 2001; Carter, 2003; Hill, 2003; Hobson & Kanitz, 1996; Ponterrato et al., 2001; Sue et al., 1992; Wallace, 2000; Whitfield, 1994). Therefore, many professional counselors and counselor educators who were trained during the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and early 2000s were not beneficiaries of the current professional standards and mandates for competency training in multiculturalism. Unfortunately, some faculty who are currently assigned to teach cultural diversity courses are actually incompetent themselves and lack self-awareness, sensitivity, knowledge, skills and cultural humility (Barden et al., 2017). They struggle with knowing how to teach, support, and interact meaningfully with a culturally diverse student body dealing with serious personal and systemic concerns (Meyer, 2017; Sue, 2010). Consequently, serious concerns still exist that counselor educators may not fully understand the devastating repercussions of implicit bias, racism, oppression, and prejudice that plague society, clients, and the mental health field (Brown, 2004; Sue, 2010; Sue & Sue, 2016).

Cultural Diversity Courses

Most higher education counselor training programs currently offer one or two cultural diversity courses (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Vazquez & Garcia-Vazquez, 2003). Even though these cultural diversity courses offerings are beneficial for students, they are not sufficient to gain the level of cultural sensitivity and competencies necessary for developing a broad conceptual framework for viewing diversity and multiculturalism (Barden et al., 2017). When investigating the multicultural competence of practicing professional counselors, Holcomb-McCoy and Myers (1999) found that even though the participants viewed having a multicultural course as helpful, they generally perceived their multicultural competence training to be less than adequate. Given that participants perceived themselves to be culturally competent, the results of the study indicated inconsistencies and highlighted gaps in understanding of how professional counselors actually acquire cultural competence. The researchers found that

“professional counselors’ counselor preparation programs did not adequately prepare them to work in diverse settings” (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999; Barden et al., 2017, p. 205). Therefore, many practicing counselors continue to struggle with resistance, defensiveness, self-exploration and understanding themselves and others as racial/cultural beings and are threatened by conversations, worldviews, and life experiences of culturally diverse clients (Sue & Sue, 2016).

In a study evaluating the self-perceived cultural competency of practicing helping professionals and their cultural competency training, Richardson (2008) noted some participants expressed disapproval about the controversy sparked by the tone and language used in the multicultural competency survey itself including specific terms such as “race”, “discrimination”, “cultural deficiency”, and “prejudice” (Richardson, 2008). Some participants complained that actually asking the questions themselves perpetuates the racial and cultural problems we are currently experiencing. Resistance and reflective discomfort such as these depict attitudes and beliefs that can perpetuate additional barriers to effective teaching and learning (Sue & Sue, 2016).

The Holy Spirit’s Role in Multiculturalism

The resistance and reflective discomfort described above is nothing new. Scripture reveals challenging attitudes, resistance to change, and the lack of acceptance of culturally diverse people were also prevalent in the early days of the church. As God began to establish and expand the church, the Holy Spirit took the leading role in reaching people of all backgrounds to create a multiracial, multiethnic church called the body of Christ (Acts 2). The Spirit was actively involved in bridging the distinct racial and ethnic gaps which separated people from each other and from God. As the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit was being manifested and on full public display on the day of Pentecost, Jews and converts to Judaism were present in Jerusalem from every nation. They heard these newly Spirit-filled believers from Galilee speaking about the wonderful works of God in their own diverse native languages. As with many people today, when unexpected (perhaps unwanted) and sudden change occurs, they too were amazed, perplexed and wondered, “What can this mean?” It was very obvious that these racial, cultural, and spiritual shiftings were uncommon and disturbing to them. As the Apostle Peter boldly spoke up to this multicultural, multiracial audience, he interpreted what the visitors were hearing by telling them what had been prophesied by Joel centuries ago concerning God’s inclusive plan of salvation and outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32). Peter declared “In the last days, God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon *all* people’”... and “*everyone* [emphasis added] who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Acts 2:1-17). No longer would the previous demarcation lines of racial, ethnic and cultural separation of their day be acceptable.

As the outpouring of the Holy Spirit continued throughout the book of Acts, the heavenly mandate of racial and cultural acceptance did not go without resistance. For example, it took the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to help Peter overcome his own reluctant attitude and cultural bias towards Gentiles as he wrestled with these changes. However, he eventually declared “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Acts 10:34-35). Furthermore, the traditional laws and customs of the Jewish religious society were challenged from within, as vehement disagreements and contention arose between the apostles and religious leaders because God had now opened the way of salvation and grace to the Gentiles (Acts 15:1-2). It seems as if these religious leaders wanted everyone *to be like them* and *act like them* in order to be fully accepted in the church and to be considered righteous (by their standards). Further evidence of the difficulty of the early church managing cultural differences can be found through the remainder of the New Testament.

As the Holy Spirit was instrumental in initiating the removal of discriminating racial and religious cultural barriers in the early church, the Spirit continues to be actively involved in God’s plan for accepting, loving, helping, healing, and saving people of every race, ethnicity, and nationality (John 3:16).

The Commandments to Love: A Greater Mandate

Christian counselors are professionally trained and governed by secular requirements, principles, and standards of the mental health profession. Many of these secular codes are fundamentally consistent with biblical standards of Christian professional associations and are rooted in Judeo-Christian principles (Sanders, 2013). However, the highest standard and mandate for the Christian counselor to aspire to in multiculturalism is rooted in the commandment of love. Love and compassion are (or should be) the intrinsic motivators for accepting, interacting with, and providing treatment to others, including those who are racially and ethnically diverse (AACC, 2014). As Christian counselors, obeying the commandments to love is a Christian mandate and personal responsibility.

When Jesus was asked to answer what he considered to be the greatest commandment, He identified not one, but two: Love of God and Love of neighbor (Matthew 22:35-40, 46; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28, 40). Jesus was not the first or only teacher to highlight love in Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18); other Jewish near-contemporaries coincided with the idea (Dunn, 2011). However, for Jesus, love seems to have functioned as a type of ‘lens’ or ‘worldview’ through which he not only read and interpreted scripture—a hermeneutic of sorts—but also for how he used this perspective to relate and interact with others.

In fact, Jesus elevated love to be the standard by which Scripture interpretations were upheld or suspended (Dunn, 1990).

The Lens of Love

Love can be defined as the lens through which we see all humans as worthy of respect, dignity, and wholeness (Calhoun, 2018). Love is self-giving and is the personal disposition for the good of others. Turning love into concrete actions towards our neighbor is what seems difficult. C. W. Vanderbergh's pithy poem is quite telling:

To love the whole world
 For me is no chore;
 My only real problem's
 My neighbor next door (Sweeting, 1995).

So, Who Then is My Neighbor?

Most people find it quite difficult to love their neighbor and “others” as Jesus did. Even among Christians, this unselfish requirement can be very selective and challenging especially when one is socially conditioned to think that one's neighbor is racially and culturally inferior and insignificant (Zou & Cheryan, 2017). A lawyer asked Jesus how he might inherit eternal life. After Jesus asked him to reflect on scripture, the lawyer proceeded to recite the dual love commands—love of God and neighbor—so Jesus replied: “Do this and you will live.” The man then famously answered, “And who is my neighbor?” (which may reveal his reluctance and defensiveness towards the acceptance of “others”) (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Luke 10:25-29). The lawyer wanted to know the profile of his neighbor, perhaps as a simple follow up to his original question, but Blight (2008) notes that various commentators suspect he wanted to justify his lack of love for others. Instead of describing the “generic profile” of a neighbor, Jesus answered his question by sharing a parable that depicts the profile of true love among brothers—a love that crosses the boundaries of heritage or race. In some contexts, the lawyer's question may have been shrewd, but from the vantage point of love, it was misguided and irrelevant. The parable depicts a Jewish man who was attacked, stripped, beaten and abandoned to die, but is unselfishly rescued by a Samaritan. The origin of the Samaritan people is disputed, but their heritage and culture were without doubt despised by Jews of the first century (Anderson, 1992). The wounded man was ignored by neighbors that not only shared his cultural heritage, but being priests and Levites, they were perhaps more morally liable to help than others. In this parable, the Samaritan who was hated and marginalized is the one

who actually displayed love for his neighbor. The one who was not considered a brother, indeed ‘stuck closer than a brother’ (Proverbs 18:24).

The Competency of Love

The capacity, ability, skill, or ‘competency’ of love for Christian counselors should be the core moral and spiritual principle that is foundational for all cross-cultural counseling relationships (AACC, 2014). In fact, the original call to love others as oneself was embedded in the commands to look after the rights of the alien, the poor and marginalized, and those in need (Leviticus 19:33-34, 25:35-36). For if you only love those who love you, what reward will we get? And if you only greet (serve) your own people, what are you doing more than others? (Matthew 5:46-47). No matter how “other” or diverse our neighbor may be, from the vantage point of love, they are still a dignity-deserving neighbor.

Jesus did not regard the differences of people as a barrier for connection, but rather as the very thing that qualified them for relationship with him. To that end, Jesus did not conform to the social or religious institutional standards of his day. He went around doing good and healing all people who were oppressed (Acts 10:38). Perhaps as Christian counselors, we too can act with beneficence as Jesus did, and challenge the attitudes and institutions that would demarcate people, keeping them marginalized, victimized, and oppressed (AACC, 2014; Sanders, 2013). Perhaps we too, like Jesus, can reach out to connect and serve those who are suffering—regardless of our racial and ethnic differences—and further demonstrate the full competency of our love. Perhaps that is the mandate after all.

The Spirit of Love

Love is not reserved for Jesus alone. It becomes the *sine qua non* (indispensable, without which nothing can be done) among his disciples—especially in light of Jesus’ own example (Bretzke, 1998; John 13:34; 1 John 4:7-11). Jesus had indicated how much God loved the world (John 3:16), how much he loved his sheep (John 10, 17), and the radical extent and outworking of that love—to lay down one’s life (John 15:13). The disciples further witnessed the humility embedded within Jesus when he washed their feet (John 13:12-17) and provided an example of how they should love and serve each other (John 13:34-35). The ultimate expression of His love was later demonstrated when He died on the cross for everyone (John 19-21).

This love, the type that compelled Jesus to surrender his life is not exactly “human love”—but Godly love. Godly love is a longing of the human heart (Christian, 2007, p. 171; Lee & Poloma, 2009; Lee et al., 2013). Of course, human love is better than no love at all; but Godly love is ultimately grounded in who God *is*. Christianity asserts that the “center and sustainer of all reality is a

thoroughly loving God. God is love.” Indeed, God’s love is unconditional and “showers... [on] his children beyond measure” (Christian, 2007, p. 171).

Jesus makes provision for the disciples to follow his example of love by giving them the Holy Spirit’s empowering presence. Godly love is impossible for disciples to practice without the sending or receiving of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit *is* Love. In describing the essence of the Spirit, Jürgen Moltmann (2001) writes, the “Holy Spirit is the loving, self-communicating, out-fanning and out-pouring presence of the eternal divine life of the triune God” (p. 289). Therefore, Godly love is not the acceptance of others by an exertion of the will, but a consequence of the Spirit’s present nature. It was through the empowerment of the Spirit that Jesus surrendered his own life (Ellingworth, 1993; Hebrews 9:14), and it is with the Spirit’s help that we too must surrender ours. Even in personal relationships, choosing to love is a radical surrender of the selfish self-preserving barriers that Moltmann (2001) calls, “self-sufficiency” (p. 287). Without these segregating barriers between human relationships, the Spirit can move freely through us as a wellspring of life towards others.

The presence of the Spirit is not only to the advantage of all disciples in general (John 16:7), but of the individual counselor in particular, since it is the Spirit that can lead to *all* truth (John 16:13). It is the Spirit who convicts persons, structures, institutions and anything in the “world” of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8); and it is the Spirit’s presence that ultimately brings freedom to the blind and the bound (2 Corinthians 3:17; Dunn, 1970). It is the Spirit that brings to the counselor the capacity to love. As people are hurting due to racial hatred, violence, and social injustices, it is the healing power of Godly love, the delivering power of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit-empowered loving *presence* of the Christian counselor that brings comfort and relief.

The radical nature of this love in Jesus’ praxis and ministry is what we believe should be the foundation, core motivation, and empowering dynamic for all Christian counselors and counselor educators in their pursuit of multicultural competencies and professional relationships. Godly love is the Christian counselor’s mandate. Inasmuch as the Holy Spirit materializes Godly love, it is the Spirit’s presence that equips and empowers the Christian counselor today.

Accomplishing the Mandate to Love

It is our responsibility as Christians in the counseling profession to earnestly reflect upon what we already know, may already be doing, or need to do to contribute to the mental health field as Jesus radically changed the world by fully demonstrating God’s love (John 3:16). We have been gifted with the Holy Spirit’s presence who equips us to follow Jesus’ example by enabling us to accomplish the mandate to love in our own clinical practice and beyond (John 14:26).

As we know, professional counselors are capable of complying behaviorally with many of the professional codes and standards without having a genuine conviction, conversion, or loving persuasion of the heart. However, the Christian counselor's actions towards others should be intrinsically motivated by God's higher standards of love and compassion. "A spirit-empowered disciple selflessly demonstrates the love of Jesus with those in need of hope and justice—sharing God's compassion..." (Snead, 2019, p. 23). Therefore, we recommend various ways Christians can demonstrate the mandate to love in their own counseling practice, especially when working with racially diverse clients.

Initially, this process should begin with viewing all clients through the lens of God's love by acknowledging the inherent value and worth of all people and their need to be treated with dignity as God's creation because He made everyone in His own image and likeness regardless of race and ethnicity (AACC, 2014; Genesis, 1:27; Sanders, 2013). Therefore, counselors need to realize that "multiracial and multiethnic individuals and families illustrate the cultural richness of our diverse nation" (Waters & Asbill, 2013, para. 6), and they will likewise be represented as worshipers in heaven around the throne of God (Revelation 7:9-10).

Christian counselors need to acquire and maintain a posture of cultural humility in response to the mandate to love. Cultural humility consists of a dynamic and lifelong process of focusing on self-reflection and personal critique, acknowledging one's own biases about culturally diverse people, which is an act of true love for the sake of others (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). It can be difficult to evaluate one's own heart and motives (Collins, 1980), but for Christians, this requires inviting the Holy Spirit to help us engage in an honest self-appraisal and evaluation of the deeply held assumptions, personal views, biases, and prejudices we may possess about racially diverse people (Romans 8:26). This degree of self-exploration can be an intimidating process; however, it would provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to search the heart, reveal and remove the hidden fears, apprehensions, and the reluctances that prevent us from truly loving, valuing, and accepting people who need and are deserving of our professional services (Romans 8:27). Christian counselors who are willing to embark upon this kind of sobering self-appraisal should do so in the context of a "discerning and wise accountability group that includes consultation and supervision" necessitating a willingness to be open and receptive to feedback (Sanders, 2013, p. 64).

Additionally, accomplishing the mandate to love consists of pursuing specific multicultural training and education with a genuine interest to learn about the unique differences of racially diverse people. This training should include learning ways of adjusting traditional counseling approaches and techniques to provide more culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions (Barden et al., 2017).

Making a conscious decision and effort to expand our awareness, knowledge, and skills conveys a sincere interest and concern for the well-being of clients within their own cultural context to effectively care for their specific treatment needs (Sanders, 2013; see also CAPS, 2005).

Christian counselors can further demonstrate the mandate to love by pursuing opportunities to serve clients who they may not typically accept or otherwise counsel due to racial and ethnic differences, following Jesus' example of stepping out beyond the cultural norms of his day such as when he went to minister to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). Reaching out and going beyond the narrow confines of one's own racially segregated social environment and clinical practice parameters to embrace diverse clients helps counselors resist the conveniences of catering to the partiality and favoritism that has historically plagued the mental health field (Acts 10:34). Therefore, Christian counselors must pursue meaningful relationships (inside and outside of their professional settings) with racially diverse individuals and groups, make partnerships with Communities of Color and connect with their community leaders in order to more effectively serve them (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). This relationship building display of Godly love represents one's heartfelt effort to build bridges, close cultural and racial gaps, and begin demolishing the current barriers that prevent potential clients from receiving the help they need (Sue & Sue, 2016).

The love mandate can also be exhibited by carving out a viable financial path for clients to receive counseling services. Understanding and being sensitive to the restraints that financial discrepancies and disparities cause for many culturally diverse clients is imperative. Jesus found ways to provide and meet the needs of the poor, those who were marginalized and less fortunate, and he also instructed his disciples to do likewise (John 6:1-14; Mark 6:32-44). Similarly, finding ways of making counseling services affordable by providing payment options such as a sliding scale and/or pro bono services displays the sensitive and sacrificial efforts of the Christian counselor (Sanders, 2013).

Finally, as both Jesus and the Holy Spirit serve to advocate for humanity and Christians today (1 John 2:1; 1 Timothy 2:5; John 14: 16), the Christian counselor can help bear the burden of clients who may feel helpless in overcoming obstacles on their own. Becoming advocates and intervening to help clients navigate and overcome the complexities and limitations of oppressive systems includes using one's voice, positions of power and influence, and resources to help eliminate the racial and systemic barriers they are facing (Sue & Sue, 2016).

Embarking upon these recommended actions with a heart that is motivated and inspired by Godly love serves as our Christian witness and exhibits evidence that we are truly functioning as disciples of Christ in clinical practice (John 13:35). "For if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, 1 John 4:20b). Therefore, we aim to

view, love, and serve others as we ourselves want to be treated, thereby fulfilling the great mandate to love (Mark 12:31).

Conclusion

Shifting racial and ethnic demographics continue to broaden in the United States, and the need for culturally competent counselors has become even greater. Counselor education programs must be at the forefront of preparing students to become multiculturally competent in order to effectively address the trauma, conflicts, and struggles that are ailing racially and ethnically diverse clients. Effectively training students to be culturally competent will serve as a significant step toward bridging the existing gaps and discrepancies in the mental health profession. Counselor educators can become more effective in teaching students by actively pursuing additional multicultural competency training for themselves. Christian counselors have the highest calling and mandate to love God and to love their neighbor. They also have the unique opportunity to be first responders in serving and advocating for culturally diverse clients by intentionally demonstrating a competency of love that is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

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