

Teaching Implicit Bias in Multicultural Counseling Courses: Framework, Tools, and Limitations

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Enabling counselor trainees to recognize their own implicit bias and its impact on potential counselor-client interactions is an essential part of every multicultural counseling curriculum. This article describes the research and rationale for incorporating implicit bias into training programs, as well as the use of implicit bias tools, techniques, and activities used in a graduate-level multicultural counseling course that align with the American Counseling Association-endorsed Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competency (MSJCC) framework (Ratts et al., 2016). Benefits and challenges for counseling faculty and students are reviewed, with sample implicit bias activities shared.

Keywords: counselor education, multicultural, implicit bias, unconscious bias

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According to the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity (2016), two principal forces operate in our society that energize widespread racial and ethnic inequality: structural racialization and implicit bias. The Kirwan Institute defines implicit bias as “attitudes and group stereotypes that affect our actions and decisions in an unconscious manner” (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2016). Whether such bias is positive, neutral, or negative, its unconscious nature means that it largely operates *without one’s conscious control or permission*. Thus, unless we are made aware of and conscious of our own bias, it can unconsciously impact decisions in how we respond to, connect with, and behave towards others.

For counselors and counselor trainees, such behaviors can mean everything from split-second decisions on which terms and labels to use when identifying clients; how they provide and receive feedback in session; the methods they employ to develop rapport; assumptions and judgments about clients’ ethnicity, gender, social identity or life situations; self-disclosures they choose to share; resources they offer to clients; and how they choose to advocate on a client’s behalf. Because counselors engage in some or all of these choices without any conscious awareness that bias is playing a role in their decisions, they may outwardly adhere to committing to multicultural competency and social justice advocacy in practice while simultaneously—and *unknowingly*-- thwart their very efforts to do so.

Given that a counselor’s primary role is to connect with clients in non-judgmental, non-biased, authentic, and meaningful ways, it is thus imperative that counselor educators strive to make both themselves and their counselor trainees aware of their implicit bias and their potential impact, and to make conscious efforts to mitigate their effect. One obvious way to do this is to integrate implicit bias training in required graduate courses and curricula specifically grounded in multicultural

counseling. Yet despite the understanding that implicit bias may not be conscious to the counselor trainee *unless specifically addressed in training*, a review of the literature in the field indicates counselor educators have a long way to go in advancing such training explicitly and consistently within in a counselor education curriculum.

Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competency (MSJCC) Framework

Within counseling training programs, most counselor educators consider the use of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competency (MSJCC) framework (Ratts et al., 2016) to be best practice as a basis for teaching multicultural competency in their courses and supervision work. Endorsed by the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD), the MSJCC framework outlines multicultural competency as encompassing a counselor's *knowledge, skills, attitudes* and *actions* in four distinct areas that directly address the role of privilege and marginality among counselor-client interactions: counselor awareness, client worldview, counselor-client relationship, and counselor advocacy and interventions. Multicultural competency efforts are further outlined and delineated at the micro- (inter- and intra-personal), meso- (institutional and community), and macro- (global/international and public policy) levels, amidst a world in which the "isms" (racism, sexism, colonialism, classism, ageism, etc.) are identified and actively challenged (Ratts et al., 2016).

In addition to the MSJCC framework, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) requires counselor education programs to infuse "the effects of stereotypes, overt and covert discrimination, racism, power, oppression, privilege, marginalization, microaggressions, and violence on counselors and clients" within their foundational

counseling curriculum (CACREP Guidelines, p. 13). Moreover, CACREP standards add that counseling programs should incorporate within the curriculum “guidelines developed by professional counseling organizations related to social justice, advocacy, and working with individuals with diverse cultural identities”, such as the ACA’s MSJCC framework.

Although many counselor education programs adhere to the ACA-endorsed MSJCC framework and to CACREP standards, there has been a dearth of research indicating consistent implementation and operationalization of the updated 2016 MSJCC framework (vs. 2010 version) among counselor education programs. In 1996, Arredondo and colleagues attempted to operationalize the original 1992 Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) endorsed by the ACA (Arredondo et al., 1996), but a recent review of counseling research indicates that this has not yet been attempted in a similar, documented way with the updated 2016 MSJCC framework. Though implicit racial bias has been found to have a direct effect on a counselor’s clinical judgment (Gushue, 2004), efforts to operationalize the updated MSJCC framework within counselor education programs may be further thwarted by a lack of clear understanding among counselor educators of the full impact of implicit bias on counselor-client interactions and its relationship to aversive racism and microaggressions.

Yet failing to integrate implicit bias in counselor education is likely to hinder students’ multicultural competency, which “dictates that counselors know what implicit bias is, be aware of their own level of implicit bias, and work to overcome implicit biases” (Boysen, 2009, p. 23). Boysen further notes that implicit bias is a particularly valuable concept for counselor educators given that its existence is “part of the underlying explanation for aversive racism, and therefore, understanding and

addressing implicit bias holds the promise of dismantling mechanisms of discrimination” (Boysen, 2009, p. 23).

Since addressing implicit bias explicitly and systematically in counselor education programs is imperative given its connection to racism and its impact on counselor practice, counselor educators have a call to move the MSJCC framework from *theoretical* competencies to concrete operationalization within their programs.

Research on Implicit Bias and Counselor Practice and Training

A growing body of scholarship has been dedicated to understanding how implicit racial bias can permeate counseling settings, which can often yield negative consequences for students and clients of color (Boykins, 2016; Constantine, 2007; Gushue, 2004; Meyer & Zane, 2013; Roach, 2005; Vaimberg, et al., 2021). Moreover, research has grown in the existence of potential mitigating actions that may decrease levels of implicit bias and lessen reliance on this unique type of implicit social cognition during decision-making (Burgess et al., 2017; Ivers et al., 2021; Kang et al., 2014; Stell & Farsides, 2016). When summarized, the research indicates three fundamental issues, discussed below, regarding implicit bias and its effects:

1. *“No one is immune” to implicit bias; it is present in **all** of us, including counselor trainees;*
2. *Implicit bias has direct consequences on counselor behaviors; and*
3. *Implicit bias is malleable and can decrease with counselor training*

“No one is Immune” to Implicit Bias

Examining levels of implicit bias is done primarily through the use of the Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998), an assessment created over 30 years ago which measures bias by measuring the amount of time it takes an individual to make an association between two concepts displayed as either

words or images (e.g. someone with implicit bias against Whites might take longer to associate the word “good” with a White face than with a Black face). The IAT is readily available to the public, with longstanding use in data collection, as well as validity and reliability (Boysen, 2009). Over the past three decades, the IAT has consistently shown that levels of implicit bias are seen in over 95% of individuals assessed; “no one is immune” (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2016).

In 2008, Boysen and Vogel examined a sample (N = 105) of master’s level graduate students enrolled in counselor education programs in the Midwest using measures of (a) implicit bias toward African Americans, lesbians, and gay men (as measured by the IAT) and (b) a measure of self-reported multicultural competency. The study found that implicit bias was present among counselor trainees despite high self-reported multicultural competency. In addition, while trainees’ self-reported multicultural competency varied by their level of training in the program, their level of implicit bias attitudes did not. The results suggested that implicit bias can be a significant addition in the counselor education curriculum to aid in the understanding, assessment, and training of multicultural counseling competency. The authors concluded that counselor educators should recognize the potential of further integrating the concept of implicit bias into their work.

Implicit Bias Has Consequences

Extensive research over the past two decades indicates that implicit bias can impact decisions and behaviors that are essential to the processes of counseling, including subtle social behaviors, interpersonal difficulties, and the misinterpretation of behaviors (Boysen, 2009). Boysen (2010) noted that a meta-analysis of 184 research studies using independent samples (N = 14,900) using the IAT to measure

implicit bias revealed that implicit bias was found to be a more effective predictor of demonstrated subtle social bias in interactions than was explicit bias (Greenwald et al., 2003, as noted in Boysen, 2010).

Although examining the direct effect of a counselor's implicit bias on clients is difficult to research, there is evidence suggesting that even subtle or unintentional implicit bias can significantly harm the therapeutic alliance and decrease client perceptions of counselor competency (Boysen, 2009; Constantine, 2007).

Specifically, counselor implicit bias has been linked to:

- (a) how much counselors intrinsically “like” or “trust” their clients (affinity bias) and how much clients like/trust/feel supported by their counselors (Meyer & Zane, 2013);
- (b) how counselors respond to and communicate with clients (Hall et al., 2015; Vaimberg et al., 2021);
- (c) how counselors understand and interpret the client's need for counseling and contextualize their behavior (Boykins, 2016);
- (d) how they provide accurate, thorough assessment, diagnosis, and treatment planning (Roach, 2005); and
- (e) how well counselors make decisions on resources and offer culturally-appropriate services (Constantine, 2007), including the amount they advocate to address systemic racism, ableism, or other “isms” that impact clients.

Implicit Bias Is Malleable

Research has demonstrated a number of methods by which implicit bias can be altered. In 2015, van Ryn and colleagues found that the Black-White Implicit Association Test given to over 3,500 medical students at the start of their training remained a statistically significant predictor of decreased implicit racial bias toward

African Americans four years later (van Ryn et al., 2015). Similarly, Burgess, Beach, and Saha (2017) (2017) reviewed empirical studies that examined the effects of mindfulness practices on implicit bias and concluded that mindfulness practices (a) reduced the possibility that implicit biases would occur in one's mind, (b) improved individuals' recognition of biases and ability to modulate them, (c) increased individuals' compassion toward others and self-compassion, and (d) relieved stress.

Studies specifically examining the influence of multicultural counseling training courses on levels of counselor trainees' implicit racial bias as measured by the IAT demonstrated that levels of implicit bias can decrease after effective exposure to multicultural counseling courses. In one such study, Castillo et al. (2007) examined a sample of 84 volunteer first year master's level graduate students enrolled in counselor education programs (17 men and 67 women) from two predominantly White universities located in the southern and western regions of the United States who did not have previous multicultural training. After completing both a foundational theory course and a multicultural counseling course, they found that levels of implicit racial bias (as measured by the IAT) were significantly reduced only among counseling students who had completed enrollment in the graduate multicultural counseling course (Castillo et al., 2007). Though Castillo and colleagues (2007) provided narrative detail of the cultural competencies, textbook, and type of activities (e.g., videos, lectures, etc.) used within the multicultural counseling course studied, their study provided no direct links or causal inferences regarding specific implicit bias lessons or activities within the course that aimed at decreasing implicit bias.

A recent, growing body of scholarship does indicate several factors that have been found to be correlated with decreasing implicit racial biases and mitigating its effects within counseling and related fields. Such practices include:

- (a) proactive engagement in increasing ethnocultural empathy (Thomas, 2019);
- (b) employing frequent mindfulness practices including positive meditation on marginalized communities and enhanced perspective-taking (Burgess et al., 2017; Kang, et al., 2014; Ivers et al., 2021);
- (c) increasing meaningful and positive intergroup contact that allow a formation of new associations, including a deliberate choice to serve diverse clients (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2016); and
- (d) deliberate exposure to counter-stereotypical thinking (e.g. media images, books, movies) to decrease reliance and activation of existing unconscious stereotypes (Gonzalez, Steele, and Baron, 2017; Dasgupta and Greenwald, 2001).

Using these significant correlations, the author was able to create direct, explicit lessons on implicit bias and its impacts and incorporate them into the counseling curriculum in a graduate-level multicultural counseling course offered at a large urban university with a diverse student population.

Given the research on implicit bias and its effects, counselor educators now have a “call to action” to intentionally educate trainees so that they can mitigate its potentially damaging effects. Since the presence of implicit bias often goes hand-in-hand with a strong belief in personal multicultural competency, counselor trainees must recognize that despite their best intentions, if left unchecked, implicit bias has a “mind of its own” and can impact decision-making without conscious awareness despite their perceived level of multicultural competency. What counselor trainees

can do with this knowledge (rather than blaming themselves or generating guilt for something that is beyond their control) is to learn and understand the “next steps” they can take to mitigate their own implicit bias and take steps to mitigate it within their personal and professional lives.

implicit Bias Teaching Methods and Strategies

The following implicit bias teaching practices were created following a thorough review of the existing research on implicit bias and its mitigating effects, and were implemented by the author for use in their multicultural counseling courses over the 2020-2022 time period. The incorporation of implicit bias into this training course was grounded within the existing research findings on implicit bias and the use of the current MSJCC framework (Ratts et al., 2016). Specifically, learning objectives, lessons, and curricular activities for each of the four quadrants of training within the MSJCC (attitudes, knowledge, skills, and action) are outlined below, with example worksheets and discussion questions provided to counselor trainees throughout the course.

Using the four quadrants of the MSJCC framework as a guide can help align counselor educators’ implicit bias curriculum with these specific multicultural competency areas. The author begins teaching the graduate multicultural counseling course at their university by sharing this holistic view with trainees on the ways in which implicit bias will be addressed through the four MSJCC quadrants (see Figure 1). The author then provides a brief description of how each quadrant of the MSJCC Framework will be addressed in the course.

Knowledge

Knowledge about implicit bias is an essential component of multicultural competency. This includes having counselor trainees understand the definition and

nature of implicit bias, including “dual processing” or “Systems 1/Systems 2 Thinking,” outlining the theoretical explanation for implicit bias, explaining the conditions upon which it is activated, and sharing research on its impact, both in various fields (e.g. education, employment, housing, policing/incarceration) and in the field of counseling. Grounding counseling trainees in the foundation of implicit bias and how it operates is essential in order for trainees to become aware of its pervasiveness and impact. The following videos and materials are used in the beginning of the multicultural counseling course to define, explain, and discuss the nature of implicit bias.

“A Funny Lesson on Implicit Bias”

Students are first introduced to the concept of implicit bias and how it operates through the use of this humorous video (<https://youtu.be/yz0QT-ZZ0SI>) from Conan O’Brien’s talk show as hosts Andy Richter, Conan O’Brien, and guest host Tony Hale teach a lesson about implicit bias (Conan on TBS, 2019). The video illustrates how implicit bias works with respect to gender stereotypes and gender expression. This is deliberately used in the beginning of the course as gender is often a less divisive and threatening identity characteristic than racial or affectional orientation identity.

“Implicit Bias: How It Affects Us & How We Push Through”

In class, student next watch mental health director Nancy Fuchness’s Tedx event, “Implicit Bias: How It Affects Us & How We Push Through” (Fuchness, 2015 TEDx event), which describes “real life” examples of how implicit bias operates and includes the harrowing outcomes produces when implicit bias overtakes the decision-making process of health and medical experts. Fuchness (2015) shares vignettes pulled from her own personal and professional experience, and shares potential ways to mitigate implicit bias’s effects, including slowing down the thinking process and

asking others to check one's own decisions in order to recognize and mitigate potential biases.

[Kirwan Institute's Implicit Bias Training Modules](#)

Over the course of the semester, graduate students complete the evidence-based Kirwan Implicit Bias Training Modules (Kirwan Institute, 2016). Modules 1-2 are completed first, in class, over a 2-week period, allowing ample time for in-class small group and whole class discussion. Modules 3-5 are then assigned to students as homework for the course. These training modules become essential “building blocks” for grounding students in understanding how implicit bias works in the brain, and its detrimental outcomes and effects if left unchecked. Examples of essential knowledge students gain from these Modules include:

- “Systems 1 and 2 Thinking”, which illustrates how our brain relies on quick automatic (“Systems 1”) thinking to make many decisions throughout the day, often leading to biased, stereotyped or hasty decision making in times when thoughtful, mindful “Systems 2” thinking should be employed.
- Research studies demonstrating the impact of implicit bias in several domains, including housing, schooling, employment, education, and policing. This includes the very relevant research studies on the “shooter effect”, which suggests that, in simulation tests, a White person requires less decision time to shoot an unarmed Black man than to shoot an armed White man and that Whites will shoot African Americans more frequently (Correll et al., 2002; Greenwald et al., 2003; Payne, 2006).
- A review of four implicit bias “activation” conditions: stress, time constraints, multi-tasking, and need for closure, which are all known to increase human reliance on implicit bias to make decisions. After learning about these

conditions, students are asked to examine these four conditions in class, and to discuss the following questions with respect to these conditions:

- (a) Which of these conditions affect you and your work most frequently? How do you cope/respond?
- (b) Which of these conditions do you see affecting you in your role as a counselor?
- (c) What might one solution be to mitigating the above conditions, in order to ‘think slow’ and be less reliant on automatic thoughts/ unconscious bias?

Attitudes and Beliefs

After knowledge of implicit bias and its impacts and conditions, implicit bias attitudes and beliefs are then discussed and measured in the following ways:

Discussion of “Bias Against Bias”

First, students “normalize” implicit bias and recognize that bias exists in all cultural human beings. Lessons from the Kirwan Institute’s Implicit Bias Training Modules are reviewed (e.g. “Implicit bias is distinct from any conscious prejudice, and happens without our permission or our control”). A class discussion on the “bias against bias” is then used to ask why so many people are reluctant to admit that unconscious biases exist in them, despite all of the research that demonstrates that “no one is immune”. How might this “bias against bias” hinder progress of addressing systemic racism and gender and race equality?

“Circle of Trust” Activity (Self-Report Bias)

Students are then introduced to the “Circle of Trust” Implicit Bias activity (Culture Plus Consulting, 2018) in order to view firsthand how the form of implicit bias known as “affinity bias” impacts their life and the people they choose to have in their life. This author uses the USA Swimming’s “DEI Circle of Trust Activity” (USA

Swimming, 2019) for a script and instructional guide. After this activity, many students recognize that there is a noticeable lack of diversity (in age, gender, race, political affiliation, etc.) in those that they trust and turn to in their lives. This illustrates the unconscious bias we have for “those like us;” and sets the stage for later actions steps that may include the conscious decision to interact intentionally with those different from yourself as a method to mitigate implicit bias.

Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT)

Since implicit bias attitudes require specialized assessment methods independent of self-reported bias, the IAT is then introduced to students, with sample questions and instructions reviewed in class. Students are then assigned the task of completing 2-3 IATs at home of their choosing (e.g. Male-Female, Black-White, etc.), with instructions to come to class ready to discuss their results in small groups. The instructor uses their own results as an example to demonstrate vulnerability and to model for students how to discuss one’s implicit association results, normalizing potential feelings of embarrassment, shame, or surprise as a result.

Skills

After knowledge and attitudes of implicit bias are reviewed, the skills needed to mitigate implicit bias are the discussed in the following ways:

The SPACE2 Model of Mindful Inclusion (Menzies, 2018)

Once knowledge awareness and attitudes of implicit bias are thoroughly uncovered, it is time for students to begin learning skills to reduce or mitigate implicit bias. Students are reminded of the brains’ automatic “Systems 1 thinking” that our brains employ to make decisions more easily by relying on unconscious stereotypes. In order to consciously mitigate this process and control for the 4 conditions in which implicit bias is activated, students review the SPACE2 Model of Mindful Inclusion

(Menzies, 2018), a collection of six evidence-based strategies gathered from social psychology research that activate “controlled processing” and enable individuals to detect and override these automatic reflexive thinking patterns:

- *Slowing Down* — being mindful and considered in your responses to others
- *Perspective Taking* — actively imagining the thoughts and feelings of others
- *Asking Yourself* — active self-questioning to challenge your assumptions
- *Cultural Intelligence*—interpreting one’s behavior through their cultural lens other than your own
- *Exemplars* — identifying counter-stereotypical individuals
- *Expand* — the formation of diverse friendships

Students practice each skill in class, and then through a series of vignettes practice prompting each other to remember these six strategies in order to reinforce the need to create time and space between their automatic reflex and their ability to make a mindful and intentional “slow thinking” response.

“Real-Life” Vignette Practice

A series of vignettes are provided to students (such as those that Melanie Funchess describes in her TEDx event), so that students can identify the type in level of implicit bias occurring, recognize its impact and outcomes, and then discuss in small groups what might be needed to mitigate the bias in the vignette. Questions for discussion include: *Do different doctors need to be employed? Do jurors or judges need to be blind? Does a résumé review need to hide the names of applicants so that their race or gender not be revealed?*

During this phase of the implicit bias education, it is important for instructors to encourage students to “think outside the box” about what might be done and how it might be communicated to the parties involved using the SPACE2 model. After a few

vignettes are discussed in groups, students are then encouraged to bring in and write up their own “true life” vignettes, which they can share anonymously with the instructor or can share as a personal example. This element of “truth reckoning” can be powerful; armed with a supportive class community, a shared group task, and the invitation to share how implicit bias has affected them personally. Students often find that they are helped through past experiences of discrimination to which they they have held on, and can “rewrite the narrative” into a more just outcome, sharing the skills that they have now learned.

Actions

Finally, the implicit bias knowledge, attitude measures, skills and real-life vignettes where students gain reflection on skills needed to address bias all set the stage for the final MSJCC area: Actions. The two action steps below are ones that counselor trainees are encouraged at the end of the course to incorporate into their own daily life to help mitigate implicit bias when working with clients.

Creating an Implicit Bias “Action Goal List”

Students are encouraged think about how to mitigate implicit bias in their own spheres of influence, personally and professionally, in order to change their decision-making and behaviors with intentionality. This includes a discussion of how long it takes to form a “habit” with respect to behavioral change, how “baby steps” lead to larger change, and how both short- and long-term commitments to the research-based methods of reducing implicit bias should emerge. Such research-based action steps include talking about race in a direct and transformative way to those in (or out) of your inner circle of trust; connecting with people from racial/ethnic groups that are different from your own; and exposing racial disparities in critical opportunity domains, including counseling, to those with decision-making authority. Additional

steps include educating multiple audiences, including teachers, employers, judges, politicians, and students about the causes and consequences of implicit racial bias in language that is accessible, and evaluating media messages critically for evidence of racial and ethnic bias in order to lift up examples of people who have overcome barriers to opportunity (e.g. shifting to using [Good Black News](https://goodblacknews.org/) as one's home page: <https://goodblacknews.org/>). Critically examining one's racial attitudes for implicit bias (e.g. taking a few more IATs and noting discrepancies) and replacing "tolerance" behaviors with acceptance and appreciation behaviors (e.g. shifting from ignoring microaggressions to consciously using micro-affirmations) are also key steps to take. Students are encouraged to choose mitigating actions on which they think they can personally follow through, both within the semester and longer-term (e.g. during their internship the following year; during their professional practice). Students are assigned to complete an "Implicit Bias Action Goal List" of their chosen actions and to journal throughout the remaining weeks of the semester to monitor their progress and change.

Journaling

Once students commit to their chosen action steps, they then journal for each remaining week in the course on how and when these actions occur and submit their journal entries as weekly assignments. For example, a student might commit to the action step of stating micro-affirmations each day of the week. Micro-affirmations include tiny acts of opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, graceful acts of listening, consistently giving credit to others, and/or providing comfort and support when others are in distress. Micro-affirmations include the myriad details of fair, specific, timely, consistent, and clear feedback that help a person build on strengths and correct weakness (Rowe, 2008), which have been found

to mitigate the effects of implicit bias. A student may choose to incorporate micro-affirmations, particularly when working with those from racially marginalized groups, as one intentional way that they will incorporate actions to reduce racial implicit bias into their daily practice. Each week, the student would reflect on how this action step was incorporated into their day, where they were, what they did or said, and how it felt to intentionally use this action step, and finally, the impact it had on those who received the micro-affirmation. This reflective practice provides weekly reinforcement not only for their own behavioral change but for their larger commitment to implicit bias mitigation advocacy.

Discussion

The above implicit bias teaching strategies have been utilized in multicultural counseling courses at a large, urban university in the United States in which up to 20 graduate students are enrolled. Since each graduate student is provided with a figure and model of the MSJCC (Ratt et al., 2015) at the beginning of their program, the MSJCC is introduced briefly again in the course, and students are shown clear course learning objectives, which include “To gain the knowledge, attitudes, skills and action steps necessary to learn about and mitigate implicit bias in order to become more culturally responsive counselors.” Students are provided with opportunities to provide narrative commentary on the effectiveness of the course and course curriculum, including the implicit bias activities and curriculum incorporated, at the end of the course.

While post-course discussion and evaluation results indicate that the research-based implicit bias practices implemented within the multicultural counseling curriculum are meeting the intended goal of providing future counselors with the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and action steps to learn about and mitigate implicit bias,

more quantitative research is needed to determine causal effects. Assessing for the impact of implicit bias teaching methods and instructional strategies can pose a notable challenge. Ideally, an analysis of the effectiveness of these tools can and should be utilized using assessment pre-and post measures (e.g. both self-report of multicultural competency and using various measures of the IAT) both at the beginning and again at end of each semester; and research should be clear on what types/factors of implicit bias (e.g. racial, gender, age, etc.) are being studied. The author's current goal is to provide pre- and post-measures to each student in order to assess the effectiveness of each specific implicit bias learning strategy as listed in this article. While more research is needed in examining which specific pedagogical teaching strategies facilitate implicit bias levels and any changes, Boysen's (2009) review of implicit bias integration into counselor education endorsing the MSJCC as a framework to guide the implicit bias curriculum (as it is used here) appears promising.

Benefits of Implicit Bias Training

The author has found myriad benefits inherent in incorporating implicit bias work into multicultural counseling courses. Preparing counselors as potential change agents and broadening their perspective about their own biases and their impact speak directly to the learner objectives and outcomes of the MSCCJ and the CACREP standards previously mentioned. Specifically, one of the MSJCC's tenets is for counselors to "[a]cknowledge the importance of reflecting on the attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, and biases they hold about privileged and marginalized clients" (Ratts et al., 2016, p. 7); and integrating implicit bias knowledge, tools and activities within multicultural counseling curricula operationalizes this tenet. Providing skills for students to "slow down their thinking", practice mindfulness, and actively work to increase positive intergroup associations throughout the course in order to combat

implicit bias's effects allows for thoughtful intentionality to social justice that is directly tied to the MSJCC (2016), allowing the foundation of the MSJCC framework to "come to life" in the classroom. Moreover, recognizing that "no one is immune" to unconscious bias and taking collaborative and active steps to become aware of and mitigate such bias increase mindful compassion and empathy among a new generation of helping professionals, which also model for counselor trainees how to facilitate and discuss a sensitive topic in collaboration with peers.

Challenges of implicit bias Training

Challenges inherent in the incorporation of incorporating lessons and activities on implicit bias in multicultural classrooms are also evident. First, counselor educators must rise to the challenge to be vulnerable themselves within the classroom, to be willing and comfortable disclosing bias, including their own (e.g. IAT results), as well as versed in facilitating and mitigating race discussions. Second, if counselor educators fail to normalize implicit bias repeatedly as a very typical human error of social cognition in which "no one is immune" and encourage self-compassion that must accompany such awareness (MacGhee, 2021), students may become discouraged or unmotivated to move forward with such introspective work. Knowing that this work can be uncomfortable for students and may result in lower course evaluations even *if* ethical considerations are addressed and safe and inclusive learning spaces are created, meaning that counselor educators whose teaching positions place high value on student end-of-term evaluations (or when such evaluations are used as a means of job security) may be reluctant to actively incorporate implicit bias lectures, materials, and practices.

Given that the benefits of implicit bias integration are thought to outweigh the challenges, it is the hope that teaching practice briefs such as this, which emphasize

and allow for proactive planning and preparation in order to incorporate implicit bias successfully into multicultural counseling curriculum, can be utilized to help address these challenges in advance, so that consistent and uniform strides in the integration of implicit bias in counselor education can be made.

Ethical Considerations

Counselors and counselor educators adhere to the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), whose Preamble identifies one of the core professional values of counseling as “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). As evidence of this value, nearly all counselor education programs proclaim their commitment to social justice advocacy and multicultural competency directly in their mission statements and program learning outcomes. Yet several ethical considerations exist when deliberately integrating implicit bias awareness, knowledge, skills, and action activities in a multicultural counseling classroom. Discussions of race and bias need to be recognized for the vulnerabilities they bring out in class members, as well as the potential for feelings of guilt, shame, anger, frustration, discomfort, and/or invisibility (lacking voice) that may result (Dovidio, 2005; Boysen, 2010). As with any topic that has the potential to be emotionally charged and heated within the classroom, faculty must create a safe and brave space in which all members feel supported and in which rules are laid out and agreed upon clearly from all members of the class community. To be fair and ethical to all parties, both faculty and counselor trainees’ should agree explicitly (e.g. “ground rules”) that sharing their internal and unconscious biases and feelings in the classroom via activities and discussion will be met with dignity and respect regardless of content shared. Such agreed-upon ground rules can include: being fully present to participate,

being open to new and different perspectives, being brave enough to engage and lean into discomfort and take risks, speaking from one's own experience (instead of "they," "we," and "you"), being mindful of when to share and when to listen without interrupting; recognizing one's own triggers (and share if one does feel triggered), asking questions respectfully, and respecting to maintain confidentiality. Setting up such ground rules in advance to create an inclusive dialogue is especially important in order to combat the resistance that can make race discussions difficult. Both White-identifying class members and BIPOC members may at times feel threatened, targeted, or particularly vulnerable given that implicit bias awareness shines a spotlight on aversive racism and its impact.

Reminding counselor trainees to create an inclusive *dialogue* (vs. contentious *debate*) is also essential. Gerzon (2006) defines healthy dialogue as collaborative discussion that recognizes multiple viewpoints, searches for strengths and value in others' positions, and above all, in which participants listen to understand and find meaning (vs. listening to find flaw or weakness). Reviewing the "debate vs. dialogue" differences prior to implicit bias work helps create structure and boundaries in the classroom, both of which allow counselor educators to foster a safe space for this important work.

Finally, in addition to establishing ground rules and fostering a safe and inclusive classroom through healthy dialogue and respecting vulnerability, it is imperative that counselor educators continually emphasize the need for self-compassion to their counselor trainees. If self-compassion and normalization of bias are not emphasized repeatedly, students may become discouraged or unmotivated to confront their own implicit biases and move forward to take the necessary steps to mitigate them (MacGhee, 2021).

Implications for Future Research

Over 15 years ago, Boysen and Vogel (2008) noted that “the presence of implicit bias among counselor trainees and the effect of training on these biases is an unexplored area that deserves attention” and that “the effect of counselor training on implicit bias should be examined” (Boysen and Vogel, 2008, p.104). A review of counseling research indicates that not much has changed in fifteen years, despite a change in the social and structural landscape of racial awakenings within the U.S. and a call to action for racial justice among the field’s leading associations (e.g., ACA, ACMD). Though more studies have emerged linking implicit bias to counselor trainees’ clinical judgment and practice, unanswered questions remain.

Specifically, future research is needed in examining specific pedagogical *teaching strategies* that may facilitate changes in implicit bias levels within a multicultural course curriculum, and to evaluate the effectiveness of these curricula tools on mitigating the effects of implicit bias in counselor trainees, both immediately post-course and upon completion of fieldwork/internship (e.g. lasting effects).

In addition, more evidence is needed on specific mindfulness practices that are associated with decreasing implicit bias in the brain. Burgess et al. (2017) reviewed concurrent evidence from neuroimaging that revealed that mindfulness meditation modifies neural structures in the brain commonly associated with the activation of prejudice. Understanding which mindfulness or meditation practices are associated with decreasing implicit racial bias, such as those found in the Burgess et al., (2017) study, may help reduce the effects of such bias.

More information is needed to determine if significant correlations and/or causal links exist between explicit implicit bias curricula using the MSJCC framework and resultant level of implicit bias among counselor trainees. Boysen and

Vogel's (2008) study suggested that merely having graduate students take the IAT at the start of their multicultural counseling course and having them examine their results is not enough to fully evaluate the effectiveness or potential causal relationship of proactive and direct teaching of implicit bias within a multicultural counseling course. Future research is needed in this area, including a thorough examination of the teaching practices outlined here, along with an assessments of pre-post IAT measures, in order to see if results have significantly decreased students' implicit bias from the beginning to the end of a multicultural counseling course.

Conclusion

Prior reviews of implicit bias integration into counselor education suggested using the original 1992 Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) endorsed by the ACA as a framework (Boysen, 2010). Given the updates to this framework in 2016 (now the MSJCC), and in the continued absence of direct research examining the effects of specific implicit bias curricula, it will be beneficial to use the updated MSJCC as a research-based framework to guide the implicit bias curriculum in counselor education programs. The implicit bias tools, activities, and content shared within this article were created based upon this premise, using research-based evidence of knowledge and strategies found to mitigate implicit bias, as well as the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) and CACREP (2016) standards.

Counselor educators must identify and incorporate pedagogical strategies to reduce implicit racial bias among trainees (Ivers et al., 2021) if they are to adhere to the ethical and professional guidelines of the counseling profession that call upon counselors to advocate for social justice in the field. Yet often, the process of understanding what implicit bias is and how deeply ingrained it is in one's mind may decrease trainees' hope that one can combat its effects. However, as more research is

conducted on the methods of mitigating the effects of such bias (or even changing the biases themselves), counselor trainees can be motivated to recognize that this process *can* be disrupted with intention, attention, and time.

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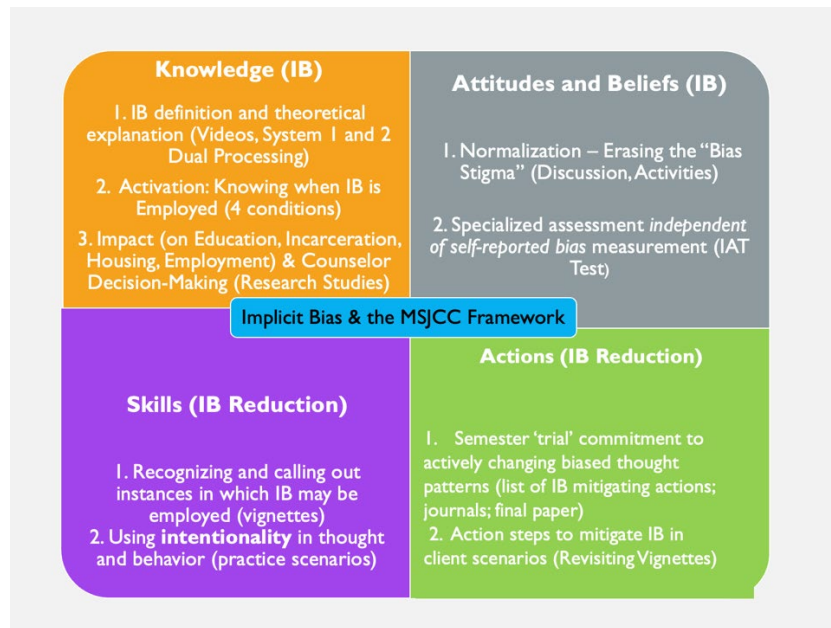


Figure 1

Incorporating Implicit Bias into the MSJCC Framework (Ratts et al., 2016) of Attitudes/Beliefs, Knowledge, Skills and Actions (AKSA)