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The influence of identity development on multicultural counselling competencies of counsellor trainees

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Abstract
This study investigated the influence of the phases of identity development as identified by the Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development (OTAID) framework on multicultural counselling competencies among the counsellor trainees in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. This proposed research utilized correlational research design. 93 counsellor trainees were recruited for data collection by using purposive sampling. Three instruments were implemented in this study, which are Self-Identity Inventory (SII), Multicultural Awareness/ Knowledge/ Skills Survey (MAKSS), and Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale- Short (MCSDS-S). The collected data were analyzed using Pearson Coefficient Correlation and Multiple Regression. The findings revealed that there is no relationship between identity development and multicultural counselling competencies. Likewise, no significant influence was found between identity development and multicultural counselling competencies. While Multicultural Skills did not predict by any phase of identity development, for no significant influence of identity development was found on Multicultural Skills.

Keywords: Identity development, multicultural counselling competencies, counsellor trainees.

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Introduction

Malaysia is unique of its multicultural context (Jamaludin & Aloysius, 2019), especially in terms of ethnics and religions. In line with the rapidly growing diverse culture society, multicultural counselling has become a recognized area of counselling practice in Malaysia (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013). As stated by (Ping, 2017), it is crucial for Malaysia counsellor to have awareness, sensitivity, and knowledges of the cultural norms and differences as well as the expectation to deal with diverse background clients in providing counselling services to the society with different practices of cultures, language, religious and other socio-economics activities. This statement highlighted the significant of multicultural competent counsellor in this nation. However, the multicultural counselling training that offered in counselling program in Malaysia seems to be not due to the demands in this field. Ng and Stevens (2011; as cited in (See & Ng, 2010) criticized that multicultural counselling practices and training are not given proper attention in counselling programs. Therefore, there is a need to study on the elements that contributed to the development of multicultural counselling competencies of Malaysia's mental health practitioners in order to provide evidential information in designing multicultural counselling trainings as well as supervision.

Previous literatures have identified several elements that are critical for counsellor's multicultural counselling competence, which is crucial in taking consideration in developing multicultural counselling trainings. Individual characteristics such as personality, demographic variables, as well as the educational and professional experiences have found to be in relation to the subscales of self-reported multicultural counselling competencies (Pope-Davis, Reynolds, Dings, & Nielson, 1995; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994). The focus of researches has shifted from individual identity to racial and ethnic identity development, as (Ruelas, 2003) suggests that findings in regard to individual characteristics may not be convincing because

ethnic membership are different from culturally diverse life experiences. In addition to this, several models have also been proposed to explain the identity development that account for counsellors' multicultural counselling competencies, such as White Racial Identity Development (Helms, 1997), Optimal Theory of Applied Identity Development (OTAID) (L. J. Myers et al., 1991), and Black American Racial Identity (Cross Jr, 1991). Many researches had suggested a relationship between racial identity development and multicultural counselling competencies (Ladany, Inman, Constantine, & Hofheinz, 1997; Ottavi, Pope-Davis, & Dings, 1994; Vinson & Neimeyer, 2000). While literatures by (Chaichanasakul, 2008; Munley, Lidderdale, Thiagarajan, & Null, 2004) had suggested a relationship between identity development based upon Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development (OTAID) model (L. J. Myers, et al., 1991) and multicultural counselling competencies.

OTAID model, using the Self-Identity Development Model of Oppressed People (SIDMOP) as the reference and foundation, was proposed to provide unifying system for understanding and conceptualization of the process of self-identity development (Myers, 1981; as cited in (L. J. Myers, et al., 1991), while provide understanding on the functions of oppression in affecting self-identity (Highlen, 1988; L. J. Myers, et al., 1991). (L. J. Myers, et al., 1991) defined identity development as a process that involved integration and expansion of the sense of self. The process of identity development is conceptualized as expanding spiral rather than linear model or categorical one, and is conceptualized into a predictable sequence, in which individual moves to next phase by expanding his or her self-knowledge and broadening worldview. There are six phases of identity development in OTAID model, which are Individuation, Dissonance, Immersion, Internalization, Integration, and Transformation. Phase 1 (Individuation) – "The world is the way it is" (L. J. Myers, et al., 1991). The individual lack of awareness of the view of self rather than the one they perceived. They may be aware of the self-identity that is initially introduced, but lack of awareness of how the society devalued the identity. Phase 2 (Dissonance) – "I'm beginning to wonder who I am" (B. L. Myers, 1999). An individual begins to aware and explore his or her identity that devalued by others. (B. L. Myers, 1999) proposed that this encounter of devalued sense of self may accompany with the feelings of anger, guilty, insecurity, confusion, sadness or isolation.

The person in this stage is more likely to respond the internalized oppression with anger, depression or shame. Phase 3 (Immersion) – "I focus my energy on people like me" (B. L. Myers, 1999). Individuals begin to reject dominant culture and embrace others from the devalued group like them, experience togetherness around members of their group and may withdraw, reject or ignore from the dominant group as well as the norms and values. They may feel excitement, joy, pride and sense of belongings around the people who are similar with them. However, they may also experience negative feelings towards the dominant group, such as anger, rage and distrust. Phase 4 (Internalization) - "I feel good about who I know I am" (B. L. Myers, 1999). Individual started to have a broadened perspective of self-knowledges and are more tolerant and accepting of members from other groups, and less influenced by the others. Phase 5 (Integration) – "With my understanding I am changing my assumption about this world" (B. L. Myers, 1999). Individual is characterized with deepened and expanded sense of community as the result of connection with more people from other groups. He or she begins to recognize the true nature of oppression, in which anyone in this society can oppress or be oppressed, depending on their assumption on self and relationship with others. Phase 6 (Transformation) – ""It is I" (B. L. Myers, 1999). What distinguish this phase from the others is the more holistically redefinition of self. Individuals in this phase have broadened worldview that include interrelatedness and interdependence of all the things, and thus spiritually define the reality rather than external circumstance. They have a thorough understanding of their culture and their history, and hence value them. Consequently, they accept and appreciate all forms of life for their contribution to the greater good of the whole.

In the present research, it was hypothesized that identity development based upon OTAID theory as measured by Self-Identity Inventory (Sevig, Highlen, & Adams, 2000) would have relationship with counselling competencies among counsellor trainees, as measured by Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey (D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991). It was also hypothesized that identity development would have influence on counsellor trainees' multicultural counselling competencies.

Method

Procedures

Correlational study is implemented in the current study, which is quantitative in nature. 93 counsellor trainees from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak were recruited using stratified sampling. Questionnaires were distributed to the potential respondents in the campus, while Google Form link was sent to Year 4

counsellor trainees who were on their internship, followed by reminder messages after two weeks. Prior to data analysis, the duplicate responses were identified by inspecting the identical responses of the survey data, at the same time identifying the submission date, time and origin as suggested by (Schmidt, 1997). Next, the descriptive and inferential analysis of the data were conducted. The descriptive data consists of mean and standard deviation, while the inferential data are inclusive of Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Stepwise Multiple Regression.

Measures

Demographic Survey. The demographic survey is designed to obtain the basic information of the respondents. The features that are included in the demographic survey are gender, ethnic, year of study, and status of disability. Besides, the information related to respondents' multicultural related activities, inclusive of multicultural related coursework, hours spent in supervision on multicultural related issues, and contact hours with diverse clients.

Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey (MAKSS). MAKSS was utilized to measure self-perceived multicultural counselling competencies from 3 dimensions, which are Multicultural Awareness, Multicultural Knowledge, and Multicultural Skills. While MCSDS-S was used as measure for social desirability. The MAKSS is a 60-items self-assessment designed by Andrea, Daniels, and Heck (1991). The option in this instrument is ranked in Likert scale from 1 to 4, in which 1 represents Very Limited/ Strongly Disagree, 2 represents Limited/Disagree, 3 indicates Good or Agree, and 4 corresponds to Very Good or Strongly Agree. This instrument is aimed to measure multicultural competence through three subscales. Multicultural Counselling Awareness is measured by the item 1 to 20. Item 21 to 40 provide a measure to Multicultural Counselling Knowledge, while item 41 to 60 is used to measure Multicultural Counselling Skills. The total score of each subscale is calculated by summing the score for items that represent the subscale (i.e., 1-20 = Multicultural Counselling Awareness, 21-40 = Multicultural Counselling Knowledge, and 41-60 = Multicultural Counselling Skills) and divide the sum by 20 to generate the mean for each subscale score. 5 items are reversed in this instrument, which are item 11 to 15. Thus, the scores for these items will be coded reversely to be consistent with other item scores.

Self-Identity Inventory (SII). SII (Sevig, et al., 2000) is a 71-items questionnaire that theoretically based on the Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development. SII was used to measure the phases of identity development, which are Individuation, Dissonance, Immersion, Internalization, Integration, and Transformation. It is utilized to measure the six scales of self-identity based on OTAID. SII items are rated in six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree", 2= "disagree", 3 = "disagree a little bit", 4 = "agree a little bit", 5 = agree, and to 6 = "strongly agree". There is no reversed item in this inventory.

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Short (MCSDS-S). MCSDS-S, developed by (Reynolds, 1982), is the short version of Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS). This instrument is designed to identify the socially desirable responding by the respondents. MCSDS-S includes 13 true-false items, with the score range from 1 to 13. The negative items in this instrument are item 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 & 8. Since MCSDS is practically limited by its length, the short version of MCSDS is utilized in this study. The higher score in MCSDS-S indicates a greater likelihood the bias responses by the respondents.

Results and Discussion

A total of 93 counsellor trainees had participated in the present study. The respondents were all recruited from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. The following table denoted the descriptive information of the respondents in the present study. The correlations between the subscales of MAKSS and SII were reported in Table 2. The results indicated that the 5th phase of OTAID model, Integration emerged as sole factor that positively associated with Multicultural Awareness and Multicultural Knowledge.

Among the six phases of identity development, the phase of Integration was a sole predictor of counselor trainee's perceived Multicultural Awareness and Multicultural Knowledge. Integration is positively correlated with Multicultural Awareness, with $r(93)=0.25$, $p=0.02$. Integration is also positively correlated with Multicultural Knowledge, with $r(93)=0.25$, $p=0.02$. Moreover, Integration predicted 6% of Multicultural Awareness, with $F(1.92)=6.04$, $R^2 =0.06$, $p<0.05$. Integration also predicted 6% of Multicultural Knowledge, with $F(1.92)=6.19$, $R^2=0.06$, $p<0.05$. The results of Stepwise Multiple Regression were reported in Table 3. As shown in the table, the 5th phase of appeared as the sole predictor for both Multicultural Awareness and Multicultural Knowledge. While Multicultural Skills did not predict by any phases from identity development within OTAID model.

Table 1: Descriptive Information of Respondents

Descriptive Information	Frequency	Percent
Gender of the respondents		
Male	17	18.3
Female	76	81.7
Total	**93**	**100.0**
Year of study		
Year 2	26	28.0
Year 3	50	53.8
Year 4	17	18.3
Total	**93**	**100.0**
Ethnicity		
Malay	53	57.0
Chinese	10	10.8
Indian	2	2.2
Iban	8	8.6
Bidayuh	4	4.3
Kadazandusun	2	2.2
Other	14	15.1
Total	**93**	**100.0**
Disability		
Yes	1	1.1
No	92	98.9
	93	**100.0**
Multicultural courses		
Yes	30	32.3
No	63	67.7
Total	**93**	**100.0**
Estimated hours spent on multicultural counselling		
Less than 10 hours	75	80.6
10 hours and above	18	19.4
Total	**93**	**100.0**
Estimated hours spent in supervision on multicultural related issues		
Less than 5 hours	75	80.6
5 hours and above	18	19.4
Total	**93**	**100.0**

Table 2: Pearson Product Correlations Coefficient of Identity Development and Multicultural Counselling Competencies

	MCC		Multicultural Awareness		Multicultural Knowledge		Multicultural Skills	
	r	Sig	r	Sig	r	Sig	r	Sig
Identity Development	0.18	0.09	-	-	-	-	-	-
Individuation	-	-	-0.01	0.90	0.07	0.49	0.16	0.13
Dissonance	-	-	-0.08	0.50	0.20	0.06	0.04	0.71
Immersion	-	-	0.13	0.21	0.14	0.20	0.13	0.20
Internalization	-	-	0.13	0.22	0.14	0.18	0.73	0.49
Integration	-	-	0.25	0.02	0.25	0.02	0.04	0.73
Transformation	-	-	0.18	0.09	0.13	0.22	0.05	0.62

Table 3: Influence of Identity Development on Multicultural Counselling Competencies

	MCC		Multicultural Awareness		Multicultural Knowledge		Multicultural Skills	
	r^2	Sig	r^2	Sig	r^2	Sig	r^2	Sig
Identity Development	0.03	0.09	-	-	-	-	-	-
Individuation	-	-	-0.83	0.90	0.00	0.49	0.03	0.13
Dissonance	-	-	-0.42	0.50	0.66	0.06	0.01	0.71
Immersion	-	-	0.50	0.21	0.05	0.20	0.02	0.20
Internalization	-	-	0.05	0.22	0.03	0.18	0.01	0.49
Integration	-	-	0.06	0.02	0.06	0.02	0.01	0.73
Transformation	-	-	0.94	0.09	0.00	0.22	0.03	0.62

Among the 6 scales of SII, the phase of Integration in OTAID model appeared to be the sole factor that contribute to Multicultural Awareness and Multicultural Knowledge with a positive relationship. While Multicultural Skills was not affected by any phase of identity development based upon OTAID model. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by (Chaichanasakul, 2008), in which Integration is accounted for Multicultural Awareness. On the contrary, Integration did not account for multicultural awareness in the study conducted (Munley, et al., 2004), rather, Individuation appeared to be the only predictor for multicultural awareness with a negative relationship. The contradiction in findings might because of the cultural differences, in which the respondents in the present study interpret the items differently rather than previous study as aforementioned. Apart from that, the other 5 subscales from SII, Individuation, Dissonance, Immersion, Internalization and Transformation did not predict the multicultural awareness in the present study.

Although positive relationship was found between Dissonance and multicultural awareness in the study conducted by (Munley, et al., 2004), Individuation appeared to be one unique predictor for multicultural awareness in that study. According to the study conducted by (Munley, et al., 2004), Individuation emerged as one unique predictor for multicultural awareness with negative relationship, given that people in Immersion is thought to lack of awareness of self and may exhibit stereotypes that shaped by family values towards others. Cultural differences might have contributed to this contradiction in findings. It should be noted that none of the stages in identity development based on OTAID framework is accounted for the counsellor trainees' multicultural skills in this study. These findings are contradicted to the research conducted by (Chaichanasakul, 2008), in which the stage 5 of the identity development, Integration presented as the most significant predictor for multicultural skills among the 6 subscales of SII. In the previous study, it was explained that individuals in stage 5 demonstrate characteristics that value both differences and similarities, at the same time have higher unconditional positive regards towards themselves and others from different groups. Such findings in present study may because the respondents interpret the meaning of the questionnaire differently than what intended by the researcher. Besides, these findings may also due to the cultural differences, as all previous studies were conducted in Western context.

Findings in the present study within the OTAID framework seems to be similar to the research that employed racial identity development in studying its influence on multicultural counselling competencies. For instance, in the study conducted to examine the influence of White Racial Identity Development (WRID) on multicultural counselling competencies, the more advanced identity development statues tended to be associated with higher scoring in multicultural counselling competencies. In fact, study conducted by (Middleton, Ergüner-Tekinalp, Williams, Stadler, & Dow, 2011) revealed that one of the advanced status in WRID, Pseudo-Independence, has predicted the multicultural counselling competencies, while the early developing statues (Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration) did not account for multicultural competencies. Likewise, in the present study, the more advanced identity development stage, e.g. Integration is associated with greater multicultural awareness and knowledge. These findings revealed that multicultural counselling competencies is not predicted by the demographic background of the counselling practitioners unilaterally, rather, their attitudes towards the people from diverse background.

Interpretation of the results from this study should be viewed in light of several limitations. One of the limitations of present study is the use of self-measures and social desirability in the current study. High social desirability responses as measured by MCSDS-S were found in the present study, in which the respondents may have reported anticipated attitudes or behaviors rather than the actual one. Relatively small sample size (N=93) also limited the generalizability of the findings in the current study. Besides, this study is limited in terms of the measured variables. In this study, the dependent variables, multicultural counselling competencies are measured using MAKSS, an instrument that based on the original Multicultural Counselling Competencies (MCC) standard that proposed by (Arredondo et al., 1996) rather than the latest standard of multicultural counselling competencies, which is the Multicultural and Social Justice Counselling Competencies (MSJCC), (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). The response rate of the study was also affected by the length of questionnaire, which inclusive of 144 items and should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Replication of the present research is encouraged to investigate the relationship of multicultural counselling competencies and identity development within the Optimal theory by including large amount of sample size with various diversity background. Increasing diversity of the sample should be considered in the future researches to increase the generalizability of the findings. Besides, longitudinal studies that examine the multicultural counselling competencies among counsellor trainees across the time would be tremendously informative to the current literatures. In pertaining to this, future researches can consider the longitudinal studies that examine the identity development, development of multicultural counselling competencies, and counselling process. While current study examined the influence of identity development within OTAID framework on multicultural counselling competencies, additional researches are also needed to continuously explore the other predictors of multicultural counselling competencies. The findings from such researches would be evident for the counsellor trainers to take into consideration of those predictors when designing training to expand the multicultural competencies of the counsellor trainees. The endorsement of multicultural counselling competencies standard that based on MSJCC (Ratts, et al., 2016) as variable is also encouraged in the future study. Exploring the predictors of MSJCC would be evident in identifying the suitable effective methods in facilitating multicultural counselling competencies, either in training or supervision.

Despite of these limitations, this study appeared to be the first empirical study in local that investigate the identity development as a factor that influence multicultural counselling competencies of the counsellor trainees. The findings from the current study can be used as the foundation of the future research to further explore the significant factors that contribute to development of multicultural counselling competencies, which provide informative evident for counselling practice and training. The present study also proven that none of the early-development (Individuation, Dissonance, Immersion, Internalization) phases from OTAID framework were found to contribute to multicultural counselling competencies. Only Integration as an advanced phase in identity development was found to be statistically significant to predict multicultural awareness and knowledge. It was explained that individuals in the phase of Integration possess deeper sense of community due to connection to more people. Thus, these findings could be taken into consideration by counsellor trainers and supervisor in the effort to develop multicultural counselling competencies of counsellor trainees. Despite of didactic teaching strategies, course task and practicum that encourage contact with different group of people should be offered to the counsellor trainees to allow that them to have actual experiences that beyond mainstream societal encounters. Experiential training and activities, for instance, that provide immersion experience with people from diverse background are recommended for this purpose. As for the counsellor trainees, the findings from this study can be used as

reference for them to assess and expand their multicultural counselling competencies. They may assess the phases of identity development and hence increase their multicultural counselling competencies by enhancing their understanding towards self and challenge themselves to immerse with people from different group. Understanding how identity development of the counsellor trainees influence the therapeutic relationships with culturally diverse client would also be beneficial in increasing their multicultural counselling competencies.

Conclusion

Overall, the results from this study imply that Integration appeared to be the most significant predictor for multicultural knowledge and awareness due to the individual characteristics that embrace higher unconditional positive regards and acceptance in comparison to earlier phases of identity development within the OTAID framework. However, identity development was not accounted for multicultural skills. This study is limited in terms of the self-reported measure, sample, variables, and length of questionnaire. Apart from that, several implications are suggested in the present study for training and supervision, self-assessment for counsellor trainees, and future research. The researcher recommended that future research include larger and more diverse sample, explore factors that contribute to multicultural counselling competencies, longitudinal studies, and endorse MSJCC as variables in examining multicultural counselling competencies. The researcher suggested that training and supervision that involve immersion with people from diverse background to be considered in promoting multicultural counselling competencies of counsellor trainees. Further studies are encouraged to explore the significant factors that contribute to multicultural counselling competencies.

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