Chapter 9

The Case of Harper, Courageous Cultural Conversations in the Counseling Room: Overcoming Complacency With Competence and Confidence

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The authors will utilize the case of Harper to delineate how to counsel clients to remain true to one’s personal identity, while still developing a culturally competent identity in empathetic relationship with others. Harper is coming to counseling because she is facing a move from her homogeneous cultural community in Western North Carolina to the diversity of Washington, DC. Harper states she is fearful and anxious about (1) having to set her values aside, (2) being offensive because she lacks awareness of other cultures, and (3) the unknown of what living around different religions, ethnicities, and cultures may entail. The authors will explore practical ways in which the MSJCC can be implemented in the clinical setting for the sake of counseling clients toward cultural competency. Counselors will examine the importance of counselor self-awareness, regarding marginalization and privilege, within the therapeutic relationship. The authors will provide examples of experiential, solutions focused, and group therapy interventions to help clients move toward cultural competency.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler and McCullough (2016) the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) are a theoretical framework to implement competency within counseling theories and practice. Through the lens of the MSJCC, the case study exemplified within this chapter is one which provides an example of therapeutic interventions for a client struggling with fear and anxiety due to a lifetime of implicit cultural complacency. The client, Harper, is coming to counseling because she is currently facing a move from her homogeneous cultural community in Western North Carolina to the diversity of Washington, DC. Harper states she wants to feel more confident about the move because it is for the purpose of her husband’s recent promotion and she wants to be supportive of him, however she is fearful and anxious about (1) having to set her values aside within a much greater diverse population; (2) being offensive because she lacks awareness of other cultures; and (3) the unknown of what living around different races, religions, ethnicities and cultures may entail.

Case Description

The case of Harper addresses one client’s insecurities as a result of implicit cultural complacency. The presenting issues Harper is facing are nothing new for many individuals who have grown up and remained within the community wherein they were born. Implicit is denoted, as it is not until Harper is faced with leaving her homogenous cultural climate is she made aware of her limited perspective of other cultures. Implicit bias being subconscious or unarticulated perceptions, positive or negative, directed toward an individual or group based on stereotypes (Berg-Weger, 2016).

Through Harper’s presenting issues of being anxious and fearful of leaving her homogenous cultural climate, for a more culturally diverse climate, we will walk through Harper’s struggle of integrating her personal identity with a culturally competent identity, fears of being offensive or offended by individuals who are different from her, and anxieties over the unknown of what living among people of different cultures may signify. Through the use of solution-focused interventions, experiential therapy, and psychoeducation group therapy techniques we will see Harper benefit from the courageous cultural conversations created within our counseling room.

Before addressing client issues, meeting clients at their personal point of understanding is essential, so let’s meet Harper. Harper is a bright, caring, and open-minded client. However, in the initial intake session she discloses,
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