

**Examination of Multicultural Counseling Competencies in School Counselors**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigated 227 school counselor's multicultural counseling competencies (MCC). MCC were measured with a self-report inventory, and with ratings of responses to short vignettes, designed to assess "demonstrated" competency. Results indicated that school counselor self-ratings did not predict demonstrated ratings of MCC. People of color self-reported higher MCC. A significant effect for age and teaching experience was found with two of the four vignettes, with younger counselors and those with less teaching experience having more highly rated responses. Years of counseling experience was also significantly related to responses on one vignette, with less experienced counselors receiving higher ratings.

*Keywords:* multicultural counseling, competencies, school counseling

## **Examination of Multicultural Competencies in School Counselors**

Multicultural counseling competencies (MCC) have been conceptualized as the awareness, knowledge, and skills that counselors require to work effectively with diverse individuals and have been discussed extensively in the literature (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue, 2001; Ridley & Kleiner, 2003; Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Moreno, 2007). MCC include, but are not limited to, awareness of one's own stereotypes and biases; knowledge of one's own and others' worldview and the implications of terminology utilized to refer to diverse groups, both historically and currently; and the behaviors that translate this awareness and knowledge into effective interactions with diverse individuals. Uehara (2005) suggested that school counselors have the ability to impact interactions among diverse groups in a positive way by heightening awareness and knowledge. School counselors can play a pivotal role in shaping the climate of their institution with regard to diversity and inclusion, but we still know very little about school counselors' self-reported MCC and the relationship to their MCC in dealing with students (Smith, Constantine, Dunn, Dinehart, & Montoya, 2006).

### **Research Examining Predictors of Self-Reported and Demonstrated MCC**

A connection between educational experiences and self-reported MCC has been demonstrated fairly consistently in the literature, with differences relating to type and frequency of training. Constantine, Arorash, Barakett, Blackmon, Donnelly, and Edles (2001) found that the number of multicultural counseling courses taken by school counselors was predictive of their self-reported multicultural counseling knowledge. Sodowsky, Kuo-Jackson, Richardson, and Corey (1998) found that the number of one-time multicultural workshops taken by participants did not make a significant

contribution toward self-reported MCC, but that the number of on-going experiences such as having ethnically and racially diverse clients on participants' caseloads, having taken multicultural counseling courses, and engaging in research projects concerning people of color did make a difference. Utilizing a sample of participants drawn from counseling and psychology professional association listservs and graduate programs ( $N = 338$ ), Chao (2006) found that the number of multicultural courses and workshops each related to higher self-reported MCC scores. Chao, Wei, Good, and Flores (2011) found a significant interaction between race/ethnicity and multicultural training on multicultural awareness, but not multicultural knowledge, also based on self-report measures.

While the connection between training and self-reported MCC is of interest, there is a need to link multicultural training to other indicators of competence beyond self-report (Smith, Constantine, Dunn, Dinehart, & Montoya, 2006). Worthington et al. (2007) conducted a content analysis and found a limited number of studies exist exploring demonstrated, as opposed to self-reported, multicultural competencies. Elsegood and Papadopoulos (2011) used a content analysis of journals kept by mental health service providers in England taking an on-line cultural competency course and found evidence of changes in their clinical work as a result of exposure to course material. However, while not in response to an MCC measure, these findings were still based on participants' self-reports.

Brabeck et al. (2000) and Sirin, Brabeck, Satiani, and Rogers-Serin (2003) developed the Racial Ethical Sensitivity Test (REST), consisting of five videotaped scenarios followed by an interactive interview, to measure ethical sensitivity to racial and gender intolerance in schools. Sirin et al. used the REST in subsequent research

and found that participants who had taken *both* a multicultural and ethical issues course scored significantly higher on the REST than those who had taken neither; self-reported MCC related to performance on the REST was not examined.

Worthington, Mobley, Franks, and Tan (2000) asked participants ( $N = 38$ ), who were counselors or counselors-in-training, to formulate counseling interventions at specific points in a videotaped scenario of a first-year Mexican American student experiencing adjustment issues at a predominately White university. The responses were rated utilizing the Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory-Revised (CCCI-R; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Hernandez, 1991). Worthington et al. found that only self-reported knowledge was predictive of more highly rated responses to the videotape scenario. Scores on the other MCI subscales: multicultural counseling skills, multicultural awareness, and multicultural counseling relationship were not significantly related to demonstrated MCC (i.e., the counseling interventions). There is little evidence in the literature that research on demonstrated MCC has been conducted with school counselors.

While we found no evidence of demographic factors, such as age and race, having been examined with respect to demonstrated MCC, there have been studies relating these variables to self-reported MCC. In a sample of clinical staff at university counseling centers across the nation ( $N = 224$ ), Sadowsky et al. (1998) found that participants of color scored higher than Whites on a measure of self-reported MCC. These authors proposed that people of color may have greater familiarity with multicultural issues because they have “multicultural lives” (p. 261) in which negotiating interactions with diverse groups is a daily necessity; unlike Whites, who may enjoy the

privilege of operating in homogenous racial and cultural spaces. Chao (2006) and Dickson and Jepson (2007) found similar results with counseling professionals and graduate students. In both studies, Black and Latino participants scored significantly higher than Whites on a measure of self-reported MCC. Sadowsky et al. did not find any significant differences in amount of multicultural training received with respect to age.

### **Research Questions**

In order to explore school counselor's multicultural competencies the following research questions were identified:

1. Do self-reported MCC predict demonstrated MCC in responding to hypothetical school counseling situations that raise multicultural issues?
2. Does prior training in multicultural issues (completing a multicultural graduate course, completing a multicultural in-service training offered by their school, completing multicultural training outside of their school campus, and supervision regarding multicultural issues) predict self-reported MCC and demonstrated MCC in responding to hypothetical school counseling situations that raise multicultural issues?
3. Are school counselors' age and race associated with self-reported MCC and demonstrated MCC in responding to hypothetical school counseling situations that raise multicultural issues?
4. Do school counselors' professional experience in a school setting (years of teaching and counseling) impact self-reported MCC and demonstrated MCC in responding to hypothetical school counseling situations that raise multicultural issues?

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 227 school counselors in private and public schools in the state of Texas; 204 females and 23 males ( $M = 46$  years,  $SD = 10.11$ ); 70.2% were White or European Americans, 15.8 % Hispanic or Latinos, 9.2% Black or African Americans, 2.6% individuals identifying with one or more racial/pan-ethnic categories, .9% Asian Americans, .9% individuals choosing “other”, and .4% Native Americans. To be certified in the state of Texas, school counselors are required to have at least two years' experience as a classroom teacher. On average participants reported having been employed as teachers for approximately 11 years ( $SD = 7.80$ ). A total of 14.6% of the participants reported working as a school counselor only at the elementary school level, 8.9% reported working as a school counselor only at the middle school level, and 30.8% reported experience only at the high school level. The remaining 45.8% of participants reported school counseling experience at multiple levels. Participants' school counseling experience ranged from zero to 39 years ( $M = 10.28$ ,  $SD = 7.87$ ). The average reported student caseload was 429 ( $SD = 207$ ).

### Procedures

Participants were recruited via e-mail lists of school counselors provided by the Texas Counseling Association (TCA), which contained a total of 3,260 members that identified themselves as school counselors. Approximately 10% of these emails were invalid, which resulted in a total potential pool of participants of slightly less than 3,000. In order to enhance the participation rate of the study, participants were also recruited through professional staff meetings held by a central Texas school district. A total of 264

participants began the survey, while 227 completed it. Due to these methods and the low response rate, the sample obtained must be considered one of convenience and among other validity threats. It is possible that this method of sampling could impact the generalizability of the findings.

Participants were directed to a webpage to complete the surveys, questionnaires, and vignettes online. In addition to the study measures reported below, additional measures were collected that were reported by McCarthy, Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, and Guzmán (2010); this study does not share any measures other than demographic with that study.

With respect to multicultural training experiences, 67.5% of school counselors reported completing multicultural training outside of a school campus, nearly half reported that multicultural training is mandatory in their district, 87.6% reported taking a multicultural course in their graduate program, and 64.9% had completed multicultural in-service training offered by their school. These variables will be hereafter referred to as outside training, mandatory training, graduate course, and in-service training.

## **Instruments**

**School Counselor Demographic Survey.** Constructed by the study authors, this survey asked school counselors to report information described in this study.

**Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale.** The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (M-C SDS; Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972) is a self-report scale utilized to assess whether participants attempted to create an unrealistically favorable impression of their skills and competencies. Higher overall scores demonstrate a greater need to present oneself as socially desirable. For this study, a short form of the M-C SDS, which

has yielded a reliability coefficient of .63, was utilized (Reynolds, 1982). With the current sample, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .62.

**Multicultural Counseling Competence and Training Survey – Revised (MCCTS-R).** The MCCTS-R (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999) is a 32-item self-report inventory assessing professional counselors' perceived multicultural competence using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = not competent, not able to perform at this time; 4 = extremely competent, able to perform at a high level). While there are many measures of MCC, we selected the MCCTS-R because of its use in research with school counselors. The MCCTS-R explores three dimensions of perceived multicultural counseling competence: multicultural terminology, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural awareness. Higher scores on multicultural terminology, knowledge, and awareness subscales indicate higher perceived multicultural competence. According to Holcomb-McCoy and Day-Vines (2004), the MCCTS-R yielded high reliability coefficients for each scale in a sample of 510 school counselors nationwide. In the present sample, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .97. Content and construct validity for the MCCTS-R have been demonstrated through factor analysis yielding the three-factor solution now reflected in the three subscales above (Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines).

**Multicultural Critical Incidents Vignettes (MCIV).** Our goal in developing the MCIV was to assess participants' *demonstrated* MCC. School counselors' responses to four vignettes were rated utilizing a scoring system reflective of the awareness, knowledge and skills conceptualized first by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavid (1992) and later revised by Sue (2001). We first developed four scenarios based on actual experiences of school counselors:

**Vignette 1, Frequent Fights.** There have been frequent fights initiated lately in your school by Black students. One day in the hall, a White student comes up to you and says, "I'm not racist or anything, but when's the last time two White kids got into a fight around here?" How would you respond?

**Vignette 2, Ethnic Heritage Month.** During Hispanic Heritage Month, a White student approaches you and inquires, "Blacks have Black History Month in February, and this month is Hispanic Heritage Month. How come White people don't get a special month?" How would you respond?

**Vignette 3, HIV Myths.** A student comes up to you and says she doesn't want to use the bathroom at school anymore. When you ask her why, she replies that her friends told her that gay people get AIDS and maybe that's one of the germs that are in the bathroom. How would you respond?

**Vignette 4, Counselor/Student Racial or Ethnic Similarity.** A student from a different ethnic or racial group different from your own comes in to see you for counseling. The student begins to describe the problem, but then spontaneously says, "Wait a minute, you're not [identifies ethnic or racial group], how are you going to understand what I am going through?" How would you respond?

Next, we piloted the vignettes with four individuals, who were graduate students in counseling psychology, school counselors, or counseling professionals. Responses to the piloted vignettes were examined in light of the MCC refined by Sue (2001) as a framework for determining the competencies demonstrated by the responses. We then constructed a scoring guide that outlined the MCC elements that were essential to being assigned a particular score. The responses were scored on a continuum of 0-2, and can

be categorized in the following manner: a universalist perspective (0), demonstration of emerging multicultural awareness and knowledge (1), and more refined multicultural skills. (2). Each of the study authors scored the responses and reached an initial inter-rater reliability of 83.05%. After continued discussion among the raters and additional consultation of Sue, Arredondo, and McDavid (1992) and Sue (2001), multicultural competencies the raters reached 99.8% consensus. The ratings for each vignette are as follows: Frequent Fights: zero (81.6%), one (17%), two (1.4%); Ethnic Heritage Month: zero (40.4%), one (21.2%), two (38.4%); HIV Myths: zero (16.2%), one (66.2%), two (17.5%); and Counselor/Student Racial or Ethnic Similarity: zero (38.4%), one (53%), two (8.6%). The fact that over 80% of respondents were rated a zero on Frequent Fights calls into question the validity of this particular vignette, in that it not discriminate well among responses.

Because our efforts to assess demonstrated competence are exploratory, we have included representative examples of responses rated 0, 1, and 2 according to our coding scheme. The following are examples of participant responses to the Ethnic Heritage Month vignette, preceded by the percentage of responses receiving each particular rating:

**Rating of zero (40.4%).** Americans have the Fourth of July, but if you want to start up a White History Month and call it whatever you choose, like Anglo Heritage Month, then I think that would be a great project for you to start in our school. Who knows maybe you could get a special month started in all of our American schools during the school year since most are out during the month of July.

**Rating of one (21.2%).** Historically Hispanics and Blacks have been a minority in this country, so those months are to celebrate those cultures and promote the positive impact of those individuals in our country.

**Rating of two (38.4%).** I understand you may feel as though the Black and Hispanic populations get special treatment; however, that is not the case. Let's examine history, and for many years, talented and famous Blacks were not mentioned in books or given credit and the same with Hispanic writers, inventors, scientists, etc. We are just now acknowledging their efforts. George Washington has a special day, Abraham Lincoln has a special day, and many other famous people are all White, and we have traditionally celebrated their fame and accomplishments.

## Results

Research question one explored whether self-reported MCC (MCCTS-R subscales) predicted demonstrated MCC (MCIV) using multiple regression analysis with social desirability entered at step one. This variable was only statistically significant for Frequent Fights, explaining 5% of the variance. None of the MCCTS-R subscales significantly predicted performance on any of the vignettes. Therefore self-reported competency was not found to predict demonstrated competency as measured by the MCIV.

Research question two assessed whether four multicultural training variables (outside training, mandatory training, graduate course, and in-service training) predicted school counselors' self-reported MCC (MCCTS-R) and demonstrated MCC (MCIV). Multiple regression analysis was conducted for self-reported MCC and the full model for Terminology was statistically significant ( $F(4, 183) = 2.99, p = .02, R^2 = 5.8$ ). The only

statistically significant predictive variable was training outside of a school campus ( $\beta = .20, p < .01$ ). The full model for Knowledge was statistically significant ( $F(4,193) = 6.27, p < .01, R^2 = 11.5$ ); three predictive variables were statistically significant including graduate ( $\beta = .16, p = .02$ ), outside training ( $\beta = .17, p = .02$ ), and in-service training ( $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ). The full model for Awareness was statistically significant ( $F(4, 192) = 2.85, p = .03, R^2 = 5.6$ ); the only statistically significant predictive variable was in-service training ( $\beta = .15, p = .04$ ). All of the above relationships were in the expected direction (i.e., more training was related to higher self-reported competency). The multiple regression analyses indicated that the training variables did not account for a significant portion of the variance in demonstrated MCC ratings on the MCIV.

School counselor demographic factors, namely age and self-reported race, were the main grouping variable for research question three. First, to explore the impact of school counselors' age on the MCCTS-R and MCIV, we decided to separate the sample into three age groups: Group 1 ( $\leq 40$ ),  $n = 77$ ; Group 2 (41-50),  $n = 61$ ; and Group 3 ( $\geq 51$ ),  $n = 87$ . The rationale for this grouping was to broadly align with the trend of increased emphasis on multicultural issues over time in graduate training. Since the assumption of this grouping is that older school counselors would be less likely to have taken a multicultural course, before conducting the main analysis for this research question, a Chi Square was conducted to determine whether there was actually a significant relationship between age and completion of a multicultural graduate course. This relationship was significant,  $\chi^2(2, N = 222) = 17.5, p < .05$  indicating that younger counselors were more likely to have completed a multicultural course in their graduate program; interestingly for school counselors ages 51 and above, results indicated that

nearly three times as many school counselors had not completed a multicultural course as compared to the other groups.

Next, a one-way between groups Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) indicated no statistically significant differences in MCCTS-R scores. One-way Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs) indicated no significant effect for Frequent Fights and HIV Myths on the MCIV, although a significant effect for age was found with Ethnic Heritage Month,  $F(2, 140) = 3.35, p = .04$  and Counselor/Student Racial or Ethnic Similarity,  $F(2, 145) = 8.01, p = .001$ . Post-hoc comparisons indicated that the mean score for Group 1 ( $M = 1.16, SD = .84$ ;  $M = .91, SD = .63$ ) was significantly higher than that of Group 3 ( $M = .73, SD = .90$ ;  $M = .45, SD = .58$ ) for both vignettes, respectively. There was also a significant mean difference between the 41 to 50 years group ( $M = .77, SD = .56$ ) and the over 51 years group ( $M = .45, SD = .58$ ) for Counselor/Student Racial or Ethnic Similarity.

Research question three explored differences in school counselor race on the MCCTS-R and the MCIV. The specific ethnic subgroups comprising the 29.8% of participants self-identified as people of color (Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, Native American, Asian American, and other multiracial ethnic identities) were small. In order to make an attempt at examining the impact of race on MCC, the decision was made to compare this group as a whole to individuals identifying as White (70.2%). This grouping recognizes that the racial experiences of people of color differ from those of White individuals in the United States, but is limited by not allowing for the varying experiences among school counselors of color.

A one-way between groups Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) indicated statistically significant differences between the two groups as people of color reported higher perceived MCC across all MCCTS-R subscales,  $F(3, 193) = 6.9, p = .001$ . The mean score for the Knowledge, Awareness, and Terminology subscales was higher for people of color ( $M = 2.80, SD = .69$ ;  $M = 3.41, SD = .48$ ; and  $M = 3.48, SD = .60$ ; respectively) than for White participants ( $M = 2.39, SD = .77$ ;  $M = 3.20, SD = .45$ ; and  $M = 3.28, SD = .52$ ; respectively). One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) indicated a statistically significant effect of race on the MCIV for only one vignette: HIV Myths, with White participants scoring significantly higher,  $F(1, 151) = 4.3, p = .05$ . The mean score for White participants ( $M = 1.07, SD = .53$ ) was statistically different from participants of color ( $M = .85, SD = .70$ ).

Experience was the main grouping variable for research question four. School counselors in the state of Texas are generally required to have two years of teaching experience. In order to explore the relationship of prior teaching experience to MCCTS-R and MCIV scores, teaching experience was grouped according to intervals of ten years: Group 1 (0-10 years),  $n = 108$ ; Group 2 (11-20 years),  $n = 66$ ; Group 3 (21-30 years),  $n = 18$ ; and Group 4 (31-41 years),  $n = 4$ . A one-way between groups Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) indicated no statistically significant differences between teaching experience categories and MCCTS-R subscales. One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) indicated significant effects between experience groups for MCIV scores on Ethnic Heritage Month,  $F(3, 140) = 4.17, p = .01$ , and Counselor/Student Racial or Ethnic Similarity,  $F(3, 145) = 4.16, p = .01$ . Post-hoc

comparisons indicated that the mean score for teachers in Group 1 was higher ( $M = 1.11$ ,  $SD = .85$ ) than teachers in Group 3 ( $M = .33$ ,  $SD = .65$ ).

Finally, to explore relationships between years of experience counseling in a school setting and perceived MCC, three groups were established to capture years of experience as a school counselor (Group 1 = 0-10 years, Group 2 = 11-20 years, Group 3 = 21-30). A one-way between groups Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) indicated no statistically significant differences between number of years as a school counselor and MCCTS-R subscales. For the MCIV, One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) indicated statistically significant effects for Ethnic Heritage Month,  $F(2, 91) = 3.62$ ,  $p = .03$ . Post-hoc comparisons indicated that the mean score for Group 1 was higher ( $M = 1.08$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) than for Group 3 ( $M = .50$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ).

### **Discussion**

The finding that self-reported multicultural competency and demonstrated skill were not found to be related in this study suggests that how school counselors think of their own MCC may not be a strong predictor of how they will actually demonstrate those competencies in situations where they are needed. These results should be considered exploratory. While the ratings for the vignettes were developed according to current standards for multicultural competence and a relatively high degree of inter-rater reliability was found, more support for the validity of the vignette ratings is needed. It has been discussed repeatedly in the literature that most multicultural counseling courses and workshops tend to focus on awareness and knowledge, with little emphasis or time spent on building skills (Rodriguez & Walls, 2000).

Our findings for research question two, which found significant relationships between MCC training and self-reported competencies, are consistent with the literature (Smith et al., 2006). In contrast, prior MCC training and demonstrated competency on the vignettes were not related. This pattern of findings suggests that further exploration is needed of whether school counselors who have had these courses experience themselves as more competent, but may not really be able to put that awareness into practice. While the use of vignettes was exploratory in this study, its value lies in the attempt to utilize a dependent variable that relates to actual conversations that a counselor may have with students, rather than another self-reported variable about the counselor, such as his or her racial identity. These results raise an important question about what research on self-reported competency can really tell us about how well counselors will manage diversity situations on the job.

For research question three, age was not found to be related to self-reported multicultural competency. This result was surprising, given that younger participants were more likely to have taken a course and should therefore, have rated themselves higher. While preliminary, this particular result seemed to contradict our finding in research question two, and the MCC literature in general (Smith et al., 2006), that taking a multicultural course leads to higher self-reported MCC. However, age was related to demonstrated MCC responses for the Ethnic Heritage Month and Counselor/Student Racial or Ethnic Similarity vignettes. The fact that younger counselors received higher scores when responding to both vignettes suggests the possibility that growing up in a post-Civil Rights era allowed additional opportunities to practice MCC in their ongoing everyday experiences.

As part of research question three, we also examined whether race impacted self-reported MCC, and found that school counselors of color reported higher perceived multicultural competencies across all subscales of the MCCTS-R. This finding is aligned with the proposal of Sadowsky et al. (1998) that people of color may have greater familiarity with multicultural issues given that they may encounter situations characterized by diversity issues more frequently. More recently, Chao et al. (2011) found that at lower levels of training, counseling psychology students of color demonstrated significantly greater MCC awareness than their white counterparts; this difference was no longer found at higher levels of training.

Surprisingly, when responding to the vignettes the only significant result that emerged with respect to race was that White participants scored higher when responding to the HIV Myths scenario. The lack of difference in demonstrated MCC may suggest that while school counselors of color may feel they have more knowledge and awareness in this area, both White and non-White school counselors may be educated in training programs with limited opportunities to translate multicultural knowledge into practice. The intersection between age and race were not explored. While tentative, the finding that White school counselors were rated higher on the HIV scenario could be related to findings that homophobia and fears about the connection between HIV and gay individuals are more common in communities of color (Brooks, Etzel, Hinojos, Henry, & Perez, 2005). While these findings have been mixed (Walch, Orlosky, Sinkkanen, & Stevens, 2010), it is possible that counselors of color may have had less exposure to positive messages dispelling these prejudices than their White counterparts.

Similar to the findings for age in research question three, research question four revealed higher levels of demonstrated MCC, but not self-reported MCC, for school counselor with *less* teaching and counseling experience. These findings suggest that it may be the ongoing practice, possibly in a person's formative years, that comes with lived experience in a society that values diversity and is working toward racial equality that makes a difference in demonstrated MCC. These results suggest some support for the findings of Sodowsky et al. (1998) with respect to on-going experiences making more of a difference in MCC, than one-time training experiences. While it is impossible to replicate such a sustained experience, and graduate students arrive to their training with fairly formed attitudes, these findings still suggest that an increased focus on skills in multicultural counseling courses and further research on demonstrated versus self-reported MCC is warranted.

### **Limitations**

A number of limitations need to be noted in understanding these findings. First, the sample was not randomly selected and was only conducted in the state of Texas, which limits its generalizability and could have impacted the validity of the findings. Secondly, the multicultural vignettes need further research to better establish reliability and validity. Third, the results are based on self-report and vignette responses, rather than actual behaviors in the work setting, and future studies need to be conducted using other methods of data collection.

### **Recommendations for Future Research and Practice**

A number of future research directions are suggested by this study. First, the connection between school counselors' multicultural training and self-ratings of

competence with actual indicators of demonstrated MCC should be further explored. While preliminary, this study did not find such a link, and translating diversity training to actual competencies will likely be critical to the future work of school counselors. Establishing reliable and valid indicators of MCC is clearly necessary for such research to take place, and refinement of vignettes such as those used in this study may have promise in this regard. While vignettes are not as valid an indicator of competency as actual work samples, they offer researchers the ability to assess what school counselors might actually say or do in situations more directly than self-reports. Also, based on the mixed findings of this study, the link between school counselor experience, age, and racial or ethnic identity and MCC is another important avenue for future research.

With respect to implications for practice, one indication of the study is that teaching and counseling experience in general may not translate into increased multicultural competence. It appears important to focus on this area specifically. Second, the findings would seem to indicate that investing time in skill-building (e.g., interactive workshops and role-plays) versus simply attending lecture-style or “passive” trainings may be important. School counselors would likely benefit from challenging themselves to reach out of their comfort zones to participate in trainings that have a significant practice and interaction component, especially those where participants are ethnically and racially diverse. However, recalling that a variety of types of training were not found to be related to demonstrated MCC, while age (younger) and experience (less) did have a significant relationship, speaks to the possibility that a more sustained exposure to interacting with diverse groups is needed rather than isolated trainings.

Counselors looking to increase their MCC may not simply want to register for additional trainings, but instead look at the diversity of the groups with which they spend the most time. Many counselors may work in ethnically and racially diverse schools, but if they were to honestly examine the diversity of their families, friends, churches, and communities, they may find them fairly homogeneous.

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