In this qualitative study, the authors examined master's-level counselor trainees' reactions to difficult dialogues in the classroom regarding racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism over a 3-year period. Using the Consensual Qualitative Research method as introduced by C. E. Hill, B. J. Thompson, and E. N. Williams (1997), the data analysis team analyzed narrative and reaction papers submitted during a didactic course on multiculturalism. Behavioral reactions were identified that form the basis for this study: denial, deflection, rationalization, intellectualization, principium, false envy, minimization, and benevolence.

Increasing the number of multiculturally competent helping professionals in mental health and higher educational settings is an important goal for programs preparing counselors (Arredondo, 1999; Hill, 2003). According to Sue et al. (1982) and Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992), multiculturally competent helping professionals possess culturally sensitive attitudes and beliefs, knowledge regarding issues of discrimination and cultural oppression, awareness of the histories of various cultural groups as well as their cultural values and worldviews, and culturally relevant skills to work successfully with culturally diverse clients.

Individuals have many choices regarding how they acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and awareness to become multiculturally competent helping professionals (e.g., complete cultural competence coursework, participate in conference presentations and trainings, practice in the counseling field; Hill, 2003). Regardless of the method, multicultural competence does not occur without engaging in difficult conversations concerning aspects of diversity such as race, sexual orientation, and disability (Watt, 2007). A difficult dialogue can be defined as an exchange of ideas or opinions between individuals that
centers on an awakening of potentially conflicting views of individual beliefs or values on social justice issues, for example, racism, sexism, or heterosexism/homophobia (Watt, 2007). Counselor educators who facilitate these difficult dialogues in educational settings may find that these conversations become heated and that students disengage from the dialogue or display resistant attitudes (King, 2004).

Chan and Treacy (1996) described resistance in multicultural courses as a process that reflects a complex dynamic between students, teacher, and course content. To train counselor education graduate students to be multiculturally competent, educators must include content in the curriculum that raises trainee awareness regarding the American social and political context (Locke & Kiselica, 1999). The professional standards that guide the counseling profession require that trainees also become conscious of their personal values and biases (American Counseling Association, 2005; Sue et al., 1992). A multicultural instructional experience can be a journey toward greater self-awareness for some students (Watt, Robinson, & Lupton-Smith, 2002); however, the experience can also lead to a painful examination of American history that includes conquest, legal disenfranchisement of people on the basis of their race and ethnicity, and structural inequities maintained in current public policies (Locke & Kiselica, 1999).

Facilitators may be challenged by managing students’ emotionally unpredictable reactions that arise when classroom discussions include the painful realities of social injustice (King, 2004). These difficult dialogues are a necessary part of preparing helping professionals to work in diverse settings (Hyde & Ruth, 2002). According to Freire (1970), critical consciousness occurs when a person has the skills to assess the social, political, and economic circumstances related to oppression in a society and takes action to change those circumstances. Because these dialogues are necessary for raising critical consciousness, counselors, faculty members, and student affairs practitioners need to facilitate difficult dialogues between constituents in educational settings so that environments are made more welcoming (Watt, 2007).

Literature Review of Multicultural Competence

Training Research

Research on Approaches to Multicultural Competence Training

Most courses pertaining to multiculturalism in the field of counseling use a variety of teaching methods to increase self-awareness (Sevig & Etzkorn, 2001). For instance, students are required to survey related research, participate in immersion assignments, and use journaling to reflect on course content and class discussions (Vaughan, 2005). Although using a combination of teaching methods is important, researchers have found through qualitative studies that the use of reflective writing in multiculturalism courses seems to be an essential element in increasing student learning (Vaughan, 2005). Reflective writing is defined as assignments in which students are asked to openly share their thoughts on topics discussed in class by creating journals or composing reaction papers. Generally, although completion of re-
reflective writing assignments is required, students are not graded on the content of their responses. Reflective writing in the form of journal writing is recognized as a helpful tool in developing self-awareness (Mio & Barker-Hackett, 2003). The writing process may help individuals to better understand their personal feelings and thoughts on a topic.

Heppner and O’Brien (1994) conducted a qualitative study that used a form of reflective writing. They assessed how students experienced the affect of multicultural training by analyzing student responses to seven open-ended questions administered at the end of each class period. Their findings indicated that as self-awareness increased, trainees became more concerned regarding their multicultural competence. Many multicultural training courses use some form of journal writing as a tool to encourage personal reflection toward the end of raising awareness (Garmon, 1998; Mio & Barker-Hackett, 2003). Journal writing is thought to be successful because it provides an opportunity for students to share their ideas without fear of being judged by other classmates or penalized by grading (Mio & Barker-Hackett, 2003). In a qualitative study, Garmon investigated the use of keeping a dialogue journal in training and concluded that student learning was enhanced by journaling. Specifically, journaling provided an avenue for a students’ misconceptions or prejudiced beliefs to be challenged by the instructor in a safe environment (Mio & Barker-Hackett, 2003).

Research on Resistance and Reactions to Multicultural Competence Training

Researchers examining the process of students becoming multicultural-ally competent have often attempted to analyze their reactions to the training experience (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Burkard, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Alfonso, 1999; Constantine, 2002). The resistance displayed by students seems to have captured the interest of investigators (i.e., King, 2004; Mildred & Zúñiga, 2004). Researchers conducting qualitative research regarding multicultural training (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Utsey, Gernat, & Hammar, 2005) have described the emotional intensity of student reactions and students’ unwillingness to engage in deeper exploration of issues such as racism and White privilege and have concluded that resistance can be used in productive ways by the instructors to measure student readiness to engage in dialogue and to facilitate student learning.

Outcomes of Multicultural Competence Training

The majority of empirical research on multicultural competence training outcomes has been conducted by examining the levels of competence achieved by trainees as a result of their training experiences through the use of pre- and posttraining measures (Constantine, 2002; D’Andrea & Daniels, 1991). The limited quantitative research findings have indicated that White counselor trainees who have received multicultural training are more likely to have attitudes that signify
higher levels of racial identity development (Watt et al., 2002) and to be more sensitive to clients of diverse backgrounds (D’Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991). Trainees who have received multicultural training are also more likely to report higher levels of racial consciousness and interracial comfort (Parker, Moore, & Neimeyer, 1998). Constantine empirically investigated attitudes and competence and discovered that school counselor trainees who harbor racist attitudes will likely underserve clients of color, imposing inappropriate stereotypes that restrict the counseling process from being as effective. Researchers who have examined the cross-cultural relationships between clients and White counselors have found that trainees with attitudes in the lower statuses of racial identity are less likely to form productive working alliances with clients of color (Burkard, Juarez-Huffaker, & Ajmere, 2003; Burkard et al., 1999). In general, researchers in each of these empirical investigations have concluded that multicultural training that raises a trainee’s awareness and increases a trainee’s sensitivity to cultural issues is likely to result in a multicultural sensitive practitioner who provides better service to clients and students.

**Current Study: Privileged Identity Exploration**

A limited amount of research has been conducted that specifically explores students’ reactions to the difficult dialogues they encounter during their training (Hyde & Ruth, 2002; King, 2004; Mildred & Zúñiga, 2004). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify resistant reactions to difficult dialogues in the classroom by conducting a qualitative analysis of papers written by master’s-level helping professionals in training enrolled in a multicultural training course. We examined students’ responses to difficult dialogues in the classroom regarding racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism. We used a phenomenological research design and naturalistic methods of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, we used the Consensual Qualitative Research method (CQR; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997) as a data analysis method to identify students’ resistant reactions by analyzing their personal narrative and reaction papers written before, during, and at the end of a course in multiculturalism. We formulated a research question to guide our qualitative study:

**Research Question:** In what ways do students express resistance in reaction to difficult dialogues in the classroom regarding racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism?

The reactions students shared during the course included their internal process and deeply personal responses. The CQR method “is ideal for conducting in-depth studies of the inner experiences of individuals” (Hill et al., 2005, p. 204) because the data analysis process involves methods that require a team of researchers to examine the data and come to consensus regarding the findings. Therefore, using the CQR method is a way to temper biases that occur when examining data that include attitudes related to racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism.
Method

Procedure and Participants

Multiculturalism course. The 15-week didactic course on multiculturalism used in this research was offered through a counselor education program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) at a large U.S. midwestern university. This introductory multiculturalism course was required for students seeking master's degrees in school counseling, rehabilitation counseling, or student development and was offered to students during the 1st year of their programs.

Three foundational ideas were a part of the course and were communicated to students on the first day of class. First, the course would cover awareness, knowledge, and skills as described by Sue et al. (1992) with more focus on awareness because of the course's introductory status. Second, the course would not teach specific knowledge about minority populations; rather, the course would focus on raising awareness concerning personal perceptions and experiences with individuals whose culture and race differ from that of the students, with the emphasis being on "You" and not on "The Other." Third, the purpose of the course was to teach the values of the profession and not to change individual values or beliefs; however, because of the content and structure of the course, a challenge to an individual's belief system was inherently present.

The course was taught from a sociopolitical perspective. Specifically, the content of the course included class lectures, readings, and other assignments that examined the topics of racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism.

At the completion of the course, students were asked to consent to participate in this study and to submit their narrative and reaction papers. Consequently, the study participants were not aware that their papers would be used for research when they were preparing them to meet the course requirements. Requesting consent to participate in this study at the end of the course allowed students to be engaged in the learning process without concern for monitoring their reactions because of their status as study participants and to be aware of the personal and sensitive reflections shared in their papers submitted for this research.

Selection of participants. The entire data set included 72 study participants, of which 65 were female students and 7 were male students, who completed the multiculturalism course used in this research and submitted narrative and reaction papers. Regarding race, 3 study participants identified as Asian, 3 as African American, 1 as Latino, and 65 as Caucasian. Each study participant signed an institutional review board informed consent form. Out of 72 sets of papers, we (all seven authors; hereinafter research team members) individually reviewed sets of papers submitted by 10 or 11 study participants for common themes. Each research team member selected 4 sets of papers that he or she believed best represented the voices of those reviewed and that he or she viewed as expressing themes
of resistance. After selection of these 28 sets of papers, all research team members reviewed the selected papers and met to discuss the pool of study participants.

The final sample of study participants was chosen using the consensus process. Research team members reached consensus on three issues: clarity of resistant responses, study participants' gender and race, and number of study participants across the entire data set. Research team members explored the themes of resistant reactions across the 28 sets of selected papers. To reach consensus during the meeting, they read aloud from study participant papers and discussed the clarity of expression of the resistant responses. Research team members discussed how the responses resonated with many of the expressions that they had heard during their years of participating in or facilitating multicultural trainings. They also decided that the expressions of resistance in the selected papers of the male, Asian, African American, and Latino study participants were distinctly different from those in the selected papers of the White female study participants. Research team members agreed that the written expressions of these White female students best represented the voices of those who were both White and female in the larger sample; therefore, they believed that beginning the exploration of this phenomenon of resistance by looking at the largest group in the sample—White female students—seemed appropriate. Finally, research team members agreed to focus on 3 consecutive years and chose an equal number of study participants from each year. They agreed that examining the experiences of study participants within the same course, across different years, would help to more accurately determine whether a phenomena related to resistance existed. Thus, through the consensus process, research team members decided to choose 3 White female students from each year (i.e., 2002, 2003, and 2004), for a total of 9 participants for this study.

**Final sample.** Nine White female students who self-identified as heterosexual, whose ages ranged from 22-43 years (M = 29.7, SD = 7.97), and who were in their 1st year of graduate studies participated in this study. Study participants were seeking masters degrees in school counseling (n = 5), rehabilitation counseling (n = 2), and student affairs (n = 2). The school counseling and student affairs programs were accredited by CACREP. On average, the study participants had one or no previous multicultural training experience before taking the multiculturalism course used in this research. Study participants completed the multiculturalism course during 2002 (n = 3), 2003 (n = 3), and 2004 (n = 3).

**Data collection.** Each study participant submitted four papers written for the multiculturalism course used in this research to be analyzed for themes: one from the beginning of the course (narrative paper), two from the middle (reaction papers), and one from the end (reaction paper). For the narrative paper assignment, students wrote essays regarding their cultural backgrounds in response to various questions: How do you identify yourself racially? How do you identify yourself ethnically? How do you identify yourself in terms of sexual...
orientation identity, disability identity, etc.? What other ethnic/racial groups resided in or near your neighborhood? and What type of messages were you given from your parents about race? (Pinderhughes, 1989). For the reaction paper assignments, students were given the opportunity to share responses to course content and process. Students were encouraged to share honest opinions in these papers without consequence to their grades.

Research Team Members

The first author (hereinafter the primary researcher) was an African American female counselor education faculty member who had taught courses on multiculturalism and facilitated multicultural training for 18 years. The remaining research team members were doctoral students pursuing degrees in counseling or student affairs: two Latina female students, one African American female student, one Filipino and White female student, one White male student, and one White female student. Research team members self-identified as heterosexual and nondisabled, and their ages ranged from 27 to 50 years. Each possessed a specific interest in the area of multiculturalism, and five had previous experience ranging from 2 to 15 years in facilitating multicultural training. All research team members reported participation in multicultural training professional development experiences. Five doctoral students had previously assisted the primary researcher in teaching the multiculturalism course used in this research for at least 1 semester; one had also taken the course under the instruction of the primary researcher. All doctoral students within the College of Education with an interest in research, teaching, and practice related to multiculturalism were invited to apply to be a part of the research team. Interested doctoral students submitted applications that included their curriculum vitae and letters of interest highlighting their expertise in the area of multiculturalism. Research team members were selected on the basis of expertise and experience with the topic.

Auditors. Two research team members served as internal rotating auditors. To attain the impartiality required of internal auditors, one research team member did not attend the meeting at which core ideas were determined, and another research team member was absent from the meeting at which domains were developed. Hill et al. (2005) suggested that auditors from within the team, who have a common understanding of the data, edit and challenge the core ideas of the consensus findings. This process leads to core ideas that are “clear, accurate, and contextually based” (Hill et al., 2005, p. 200). The two internal auditors responded to the findings of the other research team members by providing written feedback and by exchanging verbal feedback during the next meeting. Three external auditors were also used in this research: one African American female licensed psychologist, one White female education methods instructor, and one African American female counselor educator. The ages of the external auditors ranged from 45 to 52 years. These individuals were selected as external auditors on the basis of their interest in qualitative research and expertise in teaching topics related to multiculturalism. The external
auditors considered the domains, core ideas, category descriptions, frequency categories, and quotations from study participant papers to provide feedback to research team members throughout the cross-analysis process. Hill et al. (2005) suggested that auditors are used to ensure that "all important material has been faithfully represented in the core ideas" (p. 201). External auditors were used in this research to help ensure that the findings were not influenced by "groupthink," as suggested by Hill et al. (2005, p. 201).

Researchers’ biases. Before data collection and selection of study participants, research team members discussed their expectations and biases related to the topic of resistance and student reactions to multicultural courses and trainings. Each recalled examples of resistant behaviors displayed during courses or trainings on the topic. The two research team members who had not assisted the primary researcher in teaching the multiculturalism course used in this research recalled times during their professional practice with students and colleagues in which difficult conversations regarding diversity turned into intense arguments. The only research team member who had taken the multiculturalism course shared personal observations of resistance and student reactions experienced both as a class member and as a teaching assistant. On the basis of their experiences, research team members expected to find denial, anger, frustration, apathy, and entitled attitudes in the study participant’s papers. They also presumed that resistance would be displayed primarily in reaction to racial issues and not as much in reaction to discussions of sexual orientation or disability. Research team members also reviewed literature on resistance and student reactions (i.e., Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1991; Midgette & Meggert, 1991; Mio & Awakuni, 2000). On the basis of personal experiences and the literature review, research team members concluded that difficult dialogues concerning multiculturalism are often derailed by resistant behaviors; therefore, they decided to examine the study participant’s papers for themes guided by the research question (i.e., “In what ways do students express resistance in reaction to difficult dialogues in the classroom regarding racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism?”).

During the initial data analysis, research team members discovered a portion of what they expected, such as denial and entitled attitudes. They also recognized that study participants seemed to be genuine in attempting to come to terms with what it meant to exist in a multicultural society. Therefore, during the cross-analysis, research team members became increasingly uncomfortable with their bias that included the negative connotations associated with the term resistance and began to use the term defense modes to refer to the behaviors described in the study’s participant papers. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Freud’s defense mechanisms can be described as “a major means of managing instinct and affect” (Vaillant, 1992, p. 4). Many individuals use defense mechanisms as a way to lessen negative feelings toward a situation by distorting the reality (Vaillant, 1992). Defense mechanisms have been associated with pathology and with adaptive strategies related to normal human development (Vaillant, 1992).
Research team members believed that using the term defense modes more accurately represented the behaviors of the study participants who were maneuvering through the developmental process necessary in coming to understand multiculturalism. Additionally, research team members realized that their perceptions of defense modes were likely influenced by their training in the field of counselor education; therefore, their understanding of the defense mechanisms and the lens they used to capture meaning in the study participants’ words was likely shaped by concepts previously discussed in the literature (e.g., Corey, 2009).

**Data Analysis**

This study used the CQR method, which is a data analysis procedure that requires a team of researchers to examine the data and come to consensus regarding the findings. This method was ideal because the data analysis process required team consensus discussions that helped to temper biases that naturally occur when examining participant responses that include ideas related to racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism.

Research team members attended five meetings, each lasting 2-4 hours, over a period of 1 academic year. As suggested by Hill et al. (2005), the consensus process was used to code the data into domains, core ideas, category descriptions, and frequency categories. **Domains** are topics used to group or cluster data. **Core ideas** are actual quotations from study participants that capture the essence of the meaning of the data within the domains. **Category descriptions** are summary statements that describe the essence of a portion of the data in fewer words, but with more clarity. **Frequency categories** are derived by the number of participants who have at least one response that clusters within a certain domain (Hill et al., 2005).

**Coding into domains.** Research team members individually reviewed 36 papers (4 each from the 9 study participants in the final sample) and began a list of domains gathered from this review. They met to discuss the initial coding and reach a consensus regarding the best assignment to give for each of the domains. In this study, therefore, the domains emerged as a result of research team members’ observations of the narrative and reaction papers. Eight domains were identified: Denial, Deflection, Rationalization, Intellectualization, Principium, False Envy, Minimization, and Benevolence. The Deflection domain has similarities with Frew’s (1986) and Corey’s (2009) descriptions of the Gestalt idea of deflection and with Freud’s (1937) and Corey’s explanation of the psychoanalytic idea of displacement. Freud identified the defense of denial, displacement, intellectualization, and rationalization, each of which is similar to the domains and category descriptions of Denial, Deflection, Intellectualization, and Rationalization that emerged from this data analysis. Descriptions of Denial, Deflection, Intellectualization, Rationalization, and Minimization have been previously discussed by researchers as conceptual ideas in literature exploring the cognitive behavior aspects of resistance in multicultural classrooms (e.g., King, 2004; Mio & Awakuni, 2000; Thompson & Neville, 1999) and
in an empirical investigation of the use of defense mechanisms in multicultural counseling (Utsey & Gernat, 2002).

Abstracting core ideas. As Hill et al. (2005) suggested, research team members first reached consensus regarding the domains, after which they individually revisited each study participant's paper and selected direct quotations to match the eight domains. The selected quotations were compiled to facilitate review and consensus discussion. During the data analysis meeting, research team members read aloud portions of the selected quotations for each domain and discussed until they reached consensus as to whether the quotations captured the essence of that domain. For example, one quotation that was selected for the Deflection domain was read aloud: "I think one of the reasons that race never crossed my mind was because my parents never made an issue of it." Once research team members reached consensus that this quotation accurately reflected the Deflection domain, this quotation was placed in that domain as an example and words such as my parents were abstracted as core ideas.

Auditing domains and core ideas. After research team members reached consensus regarding the domains, one rotating internal auditor reviewed the data and the domains. Likewise, after research team members reached consensus regarding the core ideas, the other rotating internal auditor reviewed the data and the core ideas. Each internal auditor provided written feedback and attended a subsequent meeting to discuss the feedback with the other research team members. Thus, final determination of domains and core ideas were reached through consensus involving all research team members.

Performing cross-analysis. After reaching consensus regarding domains and core ideas, research team members developed the category descriptions to capture the common themes within domains and across cases. For instance, the category description for the Deflection domain was "taking out impulses on a momentarily less threatening target" (e.g., see comments by Corey, 2009, regarding deflection and displacement). This description included information derived from the study participants' quotations that pointed to the lack of awareness being the fault of another source (e.g., parent, school system) regarding why an individual was not familiar with a particular idea (e.g., the effect of race on an individual's life). Thus, the category descriptions for each domain were derived through data analysis as a step in capturing themes from the study participants' narrative and reaction papers.

Once the category descriptions were developed, one research team member categorized the data by frequency of occurrences using the selected quotations that were the basis for the abstracted core ideas. This part of the cross-analysis involved placing the data into one of three frequency categories: general, representing when responses were made by all or all but one of the study participants and encompassing reactions to racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism; typical, representing when responses were made by more than half but not all study participants and applying to reactions related to racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism; and variant, representing
when responses were made by at least 2 or more study participants, but covering reactions related to heterosexism or racism only (as cited in Hill et al., 2005).

**Auditing cross-analysis.** The three external auditors reviewed the data (i.e., identified domains, abstracted core ideas, developed category descriptions, and placement in frequency categories). They provided verbal feedback to one research team member who reported that feedback to the remaining members. Research team members discussed the external auditors' feedback and reached consensus. The purpose of this process was to determine whether the selected quotations had been assigned to appropriate domains.

**Reviewing findings.** Each research team member reviewed the results obtained in each step of the CQR data analysis process. The purpose of this process was to verify consensus.

**Ensuring trustworthiness and accuracy.** As part of the data analysis process, research team members reported the domains, core ideas, and category descriptions to the study participants. Of the 9 study participants, 4 offered responses regarding the findings. These study participants reported that the domains, core ideas, and category descriptions were consistent with their experiences as expressed in their narrative and reaction papers. Study participants may have experienced difficulty in responding because the findings captured expressions of resistance of which they may not have been aware.

**Results**

Research team members identified eight domains through analysis of study participant narrative and reaction papers (see Table 1). The findings are grouped by frequency category and present representative quotations for each domain. (Editors' note. Potentially offensive words or phrases within the selected study participant quotations have been replaced with "[derogatory phrase]" or "[derogatory name]" to address the sensitive nature of the language used. On the one hand, including such language might offend some readers. On the other hand, not including the actual words or phrases might prove silencing and insulting to others. Whereas not including the study participants' direct quotations could place potential limitations on reporting the findings of the study, excluding the potentially offensive language was important. Readers may contact the primary researcher to obtain the verbatim quotations.)

**General Frequency Category**

**Denial domain.** This domain describes the use of denial as a defense mode when attempting to come to terms with the realities of social injustice. Generally, all study participants expressed thoughts that argued against the anxiety provoked during discussions regarding racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism by stating that those injustices did not exist. For instance, one individual wrote that she doubted that she would face sexuality discussions in her career:
TABLE 1
Summary of Domain, Category Description, and Frequencies From the Cross-Analysi of Participant Reactions to Difficult Dialogues During a Multiculturalism Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Category Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Arguing against an anxiety-provoking stimuli by stating it doesn't exist</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflection</td>
<td>Taking out impulses on a momentarily less threatening target</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationalization</td>
<td>Supplying a logical or rational cause as opposed to a real reason</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectualization</td>
<td>Avoiding unacceptable emotions by focusing on the intellectual aspects</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principium</td>
<td>Avoiding exploration on the basis of a religious or personal principle</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False Envy</td>
<td>Displaying an affection for a person or a feature of a person in an effort to deny the complexity of the social and political context</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimization</td>
<td>Reducing the magnitude of a social and political issue down to simple facts</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Displaying an overly sensitive attitude toward a social and political issue on the basis of a feeling of charity</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. General = responses in all or all but one of the cases and encompassing reactions to racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism; Typical = responses in more than half but not all of the cases and describing reactions to racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism; Variant = responses in at least two or more cases, but covering reactions related to heterosexism or racism only.*

As a person going into the student affairs profession, I feel that, since my career path is in career services, this will not be an issue in most cases. Sexual preference is not a topic that will come up on a regular basis in career counseling.

In coming to terms with the realities of racism, all study participants expressed feelings of anger and denial. They seemed to be able to accept that injustice existed in American society, but they had difficulty fully embracing it as a reality:

Some people feel guilty because we came as Whites and conquered this land. This is the disadvantage to being White. We are often accused of being the only ones who have committed atrocities. It is as if being White makes me somehow guilty for all the wrongs Whites have committed. I say any race without sin can feel free to cast this stone. All races have committed atrocities against others.

Another individual wanted to shift attention away from the complexities of race by focusing on similarities: "I look on people as individuals who need to be understood on an individual basis no matter what race or ethnic identity."

**Deflection domain.** This domain describes a defense mode wherein substitution is used as a means to avoid self-reflection. As study
participants came to terms with the realities of racism or heterosexism, all but one deflected the focus in their reaction papers toward less threatening targets, such as a parent or the school system. This individual pointed to her father's thoughts regarding racism:

As I grew, I knew that I was different than my father. I'm not sure how it happened, but when he would make prejudicial comments, I knew in my heart he was wrong. By the time I was in high school, I was much more vocal about my feelings. Unfortunately, this only spurred more comments. In response to my arguing, he would often say, "There isn't anything wrong with Black people, [derogatory phrase]." Typically, at this point in the argument, I was so angry at his ignorance that I couldn't even speak. Sometimes I think he would make comments just to push my buttons—his vocalizations didn't stop with African Americans, but stretched toward anyone "different" from him, including other ethnicities and sexual orientations. The one thing I knew was that I was both ashamed and confused by his comments: ashamed that I could be related to someone so hateful and ignorant, and confused because I couldn't fathom how someone could believe such things.

In her narrative and reaction papers, she did not provide further explanation of the complexity of how her parental relationship may have influenced her belief system. Another study participant expressed frustration with the expressions of racial minorities on the topic of heterosexism/homophobia:

What bothers me even more is the fact that the only people who vocalized their feelings about homosexuality were of minority status themselves... I just wonder if they have taken a good look at themselves and have really thought about what they are doing, or why they believe what they do.

This individual's comments in her reaction paper deflected the focus toward the racial minority students instead of identifying her own thoughts concerning heterosexism and homophobia.

*Rationalization domain.* This domain describes a defense mode in which current views of issues related to racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism are defended by presenting reasons that do not require exploration of the roots of injustice. All study participants presented logical or rational reasons, as opposed to real reasons, regarding why atrocities happen in the realm of racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism.

One person described oppression as a universal occurrence:

Wow, this [oppression] has all happened to every single one of us at one time or another in our lives, no matter what race, gender, or ethnicity we are. Furthermore, we have all done this to other people regardless of their race, gender, or ethnicity, many times without thinking about it. These examples are especially true in the workforce, but it is not usually thought of as oppression, just simply the general hierarchy of power and control that exist in the workplace.

Another individual defended her position against homosexuality by reasoning that it was similar to helping a drug addict:

The question for me as I start to work in the helping profession is: Can I help someone who has a homosexual identity? Some may say no because I cannot
accept their way of life. If this is the case, then the drug addict can only be helped by someone who agrees with that way of life.

This study participant rationalized that poverty for immigrants is a choice:

I just thought of it as maybe some Latinos don’t speak very good English, and/or don’t have green cards or the citizenship to be in this country so they choose to work at places that don’t care. I still think that in some cases this is true, but I can also see it in the form of oppression.

**Benevolence domain.** This domain describes a defense mode involving the display of overly sensitive attitudes toward a social and political issue because of feelings of charity. All but one study participant displayed an attitude of charity in their narrative and reaction papers rather than explore more extensively their feelings related to racism and ableism. For instance, this study participant focused on the act of not purchasing a doll so that a Black girl could buy it:

My grandma always called Black people “[derogatory name].” I also remember looking at the new Cabbage Patch Dolls when they came out and trying to decide which one I wanted. I thought one of the Black dolls was really cute but I thought that I should leave it at the store so that a Black girl could buy it because it was the last one.

In her narrative and reaction papers, she did not comment more directly on the lessons that she had been taught concerning Black people. Another individual’s response focused on using her power to fight injustice: “I have been accused by White, male staff that I am discriminatory against White kids because I give kids of color more chances. I fired the staff and continue to even the playing field.” This individual’s comments in her narrative and reaction papers seemed to center on her power rather than the powerlessness of the target population.

**Typical Frequency Category**

**Intellectualization domain.** This domain describes a defense mode wherein intellectual aspects are used as a means of avoiding emotions. More than half of study participants focused on intellectual aspects of racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and/or ableism. For instance, this woman’s focus was on learning the intellectual stimulating aspects of culture rather than exploring more extensively her personal feelings regarding (in this instance) racism: “I would have liked to have had more classroom experience about different cultures, and how my value system may be different or similar to theirs.” Another study participant viewed the emotional expressions of others from a distance and used an intellectual lens: “What I saw happening was that people were arguing based on emotional involvement [that] stemmed from their personal belief system, and at the same [time] wanting others to fit into the same box.”

**False Envy domain.** The defense mode this domain identifies is demonstrating affection for a person or a feature of a person rather
than commenting on the complexity of the social and political context. More than half of study participants displayed affection for a person of a minority race or with a disability. For instance, one study participant wrote about her feelings: “We were all very impressed with his [referring to minority male who was new to the community] strong work ethic and sense of family, believing that it fit in well with our own.” Another individual wrote of her reaction to a class discussion and exercise that focused on homophobia:

The picture of people walking on the sidewalk and there is a place on the sidewalk that says "a [derogatory name] was beat here," or it said something like that anyway, was the picture that got me the most. . . . Another reason that it bothered me is because I am friends with some people who are homosexual and they are some of the nicest people I know.

One study participant, in a reaction paper, shared a story from her childhood that spoke to her admiration for a community member (referred to by a pseudonym) rather than exploring more extensively the complexities of the racial dynamics in the relationship:

When the church softball team invited the Black man to be a part of the team because they pitied him. He ended up being the best player on the team. Steve could hit that softball farther than any of the White guys on the team and everyone looked forward to watching him wheel around the bases because he was so quick. I always found it odd how his color was suddenly overlooked, but only after he had proven himself to everyone. Steve became the essential asset to the team. I secretly thought it was funny when he could not make a game and the team would get clobbered. I often wondered what he thought of all of those people. At times I wished I could be like him so that he would not be alone. Other times I wished that Steve had kids my age so that I could be a friend to them.

This individual shared how much she admired people with disabilities:

They made a statement that I just could not get out of my mind. They said, “God gave disabilities to people who could cope with them.” I think that this says a lot about people with disabilities. Every time I talk to someone with a disability I gain a much bigger appreciation and more respect for them. I think what I am trying to say is that maybe sometimes I wish that I had a disability.

The statement she mentioned (i.e., “God gave disabilities to people who could cope with them.”) seemed to speak to her admiration for the ability of others to cope. In her narrative and reaction papers, this study participant seemed to focus on her admiration rather than on the complexities of ableism within U.S. culture.

Variant Frequency Category

*Principium domain.* This domain describes a defense mode wherein religious or personal principles are used to avoid exploring beliefs. Reactions in this domain were centrally focused on heterosexism and homophobia. In their narrative and reaction papers, 7 study participants were noted as defending their moral or religious principles in
their reaction statements regarding heterosexism and homophobia. This individual used her religion as a reason to avoid deeper explorations of issues surrounding sexuality:

As much as I want to be culturally aware and sensitive, and as much as I do not want to perpetuate discrimination through my privilege of being married, I do not believe I should compromise my Christian beliefs on this issue.

Another study participant stated her belief that God endorsed heterosexuality exclusively:

I think that homosexuals have every right that heterosexuals have to love and to be loved in return. However, I feel that God did not intend for men and men nor women and women to be together. I believe that marriage is a sacrament intended to unite man and woman through God.

Minimization domain. This domain describes a defense mode wherein the magnitude of social and political issues is reduced to simple facts. Reactions in this domain concerned only racism. Seven study participants in their reaction papers focused on simple facts and reduced the importance of social or political issues in society as they related to race. Two individuals minimized the complexities of racism:

I know that I believe that race doesn’t matter; it is what is inside that counts not what is outside. I thought I was no different; my favorite show was the The Cosby Show and that family was no different than mine except maybe the dad was a lot funnier than my dad.

Discussion

The findings of this research study may help counselor educators understand reactions of students as they engage in difficult dialogues. As Constantine (2002) indicated, clients benefit from having multicultural helping professionals in practice. Therefore, discovering ways to more effectively facilitate the training process is imperative. The findings of this research may assist educators with identifying specific reactions students display when engaged in difficult dialogues concerning diversity. Having this information may help facilitators to understand and react appropriately when working with students regarding emotionally volatile material.

The defense modes identified as Denial, Deflection, Rationalization, Intellectualization, and Minimization are behaviors familiar to educators, and those ideas have been referred to in the literature (e.g., King, 2004; Mio & Awakuni, 2000; Thompson & Neville, 1999). Counselor educators have confronted these defenses by sharing personal stories, relating factual information, or pointing out the behavior (Mio & Awakuni, 2000). On the other hand, the defense modes of Principium, False Envy, and Benevolence are reactions not given voice in the literature. These defense modes have one thing in common: They seem to be reactions that are generated from viewing the world from a position of privilege. Living in a position of privilege might desensitize individuals to thoughts and feelings, because how they
previously experienced the world may have insulated them from the dissonance of social injustice related to their dominant culture identity. Ultimately, their reactions might be to defend their previous ways of experiencing the world. For example, the majority of responses related to Principium were associated with defending perceptions of Christian views of homosexuality. Being Christian is a privileged affiliation in this society, and the responses indicated reactions to seeing social injustice related to homosexuality. As McIntosh (1989) pointed out in her well-known essay titled “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” critical consciousness regarding sociopolitical issues often comes when one confronts his or her own privilege.

Critical consciousness concerning diversity develops when awareness of one's own privileged status in relation to racism, sexism, ableism, classism, and so on, is explored on a personal and political level (Watt, 2007). That awareness arises by having emotionally charged dialogue with others during educational activities (e.g., academic classrooms or professional training sessions) regarding social justice issues (Watt, 2007). Analyzing these students' papers led to identifying these defense modes, which lends more information to research on reactions of those experiencing multicultural training from a position of privilege.

**Limitations**

Two limitations exist in this study. First, all research team members for this study were interested in research related to multiculturalism. Many had participated and/or facilitated trainings. Therefore, their views of other experiences likely influenced their perceptions of this data. However, research team members did wrestle with their personal biases and negative perceptions of resistant behaviors of students, as suggested by Hill et al. (2005). Second, the CQR methodology is most widely used to analyze transcribed data from interviews. This study focused on students' written reaction papers. Thus, the possibility exists that something was lost because this analysis did not capture the entire exchange. Conversely, focus on the students' reactions may have added complexity to the study. In other words, analyzing the students' papers allowed the complexities of the students' reactions in writing to be captured after the students had the opportunity to reflect and organize their thoughts.

**Implications for Practice**

On the basis of the findings of this study, counselor educators may be better prepared to respond in effective ways if they can anticipate these resistance reactions. Counselor educators need to consider the value of reflective writing. Through reflective writing, facilitators of difficult dialogues will be able to identify and explore in more depth the thoughts and feelings of participants. Honest, respectful dialogue between instructor and student can result in important opportunities for students to move beyond ethnocentrism (Baxter Magolda, 1997). Although learning about research on multicultural issues is critical,
students will most likely benefit from the dialogue that fosters multicultural learning and development of antiracist identities (Baxter Magolda, 1997; Strange & Alston, 1998). Furthermore, counselor educators can use these research findings to educate participants concerning their responses to these difficult dialogues. If participants are aware that these defenses might be displayed by themselves or others, they may be better able to understand their feelings and less anxious regarding these difficult discussions. In general, the findings of this research may help counselor educators to more effectively facilitate diverse classroom dialogue.

Directions for Future Research

The findings from this study suggest at least three directions for future research. First, researchers need to explore in more depth the various reactions of students engaged in difficult dialogues, using quantitative and qualitative methods. This study describes the reactions of 9 White, heterosexual female trainees. This is a qualitative study, and the findings are not meant to be generalized to larger groups. Future research needs to examine the phenomenon of these identified defensive reactions, using quantitative methods to discern whether they apply more broadly. Second, researchers need to analyze the reactions to difficult dialogues of a wider sampling of students. Future research could examine the reactions of trainees by gender, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Such an examination would allow for a more robust understanding of the range and the different types of reactions trainees express when engaged in difficult dialogues. Third, researchers must continue the use of a consensual process when analyzing data that examines participant reactions to multiculturalism content. Having the balancing perspectives of an entire team of researchers reviewing the data for themes is especially useful because of the inherent social nature of the problems such as racism, heterosexism/homophobia, and ableism. The consensual process can help in capturing ideas that are difficult to clearly view because of researchers' personal biases.

Conclusion

Counselor educators are searching for ways to prepare students today to be productive workers in settings populated with individuals from diverse backgrounds. This study identified behaviors that will hopefully assist counselor educators in having more effective dialogues regarding diversity.

References


