Transforming an MFT program: A model for enhancing diversity

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Abstract (Document Summary)
Marriage and family therapy programs need to go beyond the typical practices of recruiting and retaining students of color; graduate programs should be transformed to reflect a deep, active systemic commitment to both diversity and social justice. McDowell et al argue that it is through this type of transformation that programs become truly ready to support students of color.

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[Headnote]
Marriage and family therapy programs need to go beyond the typical practices of recruiting and retaining students of color. Marriage and family therapy educators must assume positions of leadership by transforming graduate programs to reflect a deep, active, systemic commitment to both diversity and social justice. In this article, we argue that it is through this type of transformation that programs become truly ready to support students of color and to prepare all therapists to advocate for equity in a diverse, often unfair society. This article offers a model that addresses readiness, recruitment, retention, assessment, and professional development from this perspective.

Awareness and sensitivity to issues of equity need to become a more integral part of family therapy (Laszloffy & Hardy, 2000; McGoldrick, 1998). Diversity in the field’s membership also needs to be more reflective of the society in which we live (Killian & Hardy, 1998). This means going beyond the celebration of difference to reflect a deep, active commitment to both diversity and social justice. This type of transformation requires a critique of our theoretical assumptions, practice strategies, and professional culture to help us reveal gender, class, race, and other biases that may stand in the way of becoming a truly inclusive field. Marriage and family therapy (MFT) training programs, being the entry point into the profession, need to lead the way in this effort (Green, 1998).

Family therapy, although partly an act of rebellion against the linear, individual-pathology perspective, was nevertheless born out of a White, middle-class, male tradition. Feminist theorists (Goldner, 1985; Hare--Mustin, 1978, 1987; McGoldrick et al., 1996) were the first to challenge this perspective by breaking the myth of neutrality, pointing out that therapists either act to confront power inequities in the family or help maintain the status quo through their silence. As the field has embraced multiculturalism, therapists have become more aware of diversity. However, it is only recently that members of the field have begun to seriously critique the dominant cultural bias of the field’s theories, practices, and membership (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1994; Killian & Hardy, 1998; McGoldrick, 1998). Challenging the views and practices that may serve to perpetuate social injustice means taking another step toward giving up the comfortable illusion of a socially neutral stance.

Over the last decade, leaders in the field have been calling for an emphasis on social and racial sensitivity and diversity in MFr programs, institutes, and professional organizations (Green, 1998; Hardy & Laszloffy, 1992; Killian
& Hardy, 1998; McGoldrick et al., 1999; Wilson & Stith, 1993). Although few educators would disagree with these goals, many MFT programs are still struggling with how this might be accomplished. In a study of 29 MFr programs (Wilson & Stith, 1993), 80% reported that they actively recruit minorities into their student body; however, only 29% indicated that they considered themselves to be successful in this endeavor. Annual reports made to the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) by accredited MFT programs for the period of July 1999 through January 2001 indicate that student diversity continues to be a significant challenge. The racial composition indicated in the reports of 79 accredited MFT programs reflected nearly 80% of all students were European Americans.

We are suggesting that MFT programs go beyond typical efforts for recruiting and retaining students of color to reflect a deep, active commitment to both diversity and social justice. By transformation, we mean shifts in ideology and practice over multiple areas of the program that result in second-order, systemic change. We believe that the commitment to this type of transformation needs to occur in MFT programs whether or not there is racial diversity in the student body at any given time. It is through this type of transformation that programs can become truly ready to support and prepare the next cadre of diverse, socially sensitive therapists of all races who are able to confront the social inequities present in their lives and the lives of their clients.

PROGRAM TRANSFORMATION

Even those who are deeply committed to social justice and inclusion may find themselves more concerned with meeting diversity quotas than with changing practices. One reaction to changing the racial profile of a program is to do more recruiting, opening the admissions door wider to fill the ranks with students of color. Faculty may follow successful recruitment with added efforts toward retention. This strategy may produce a change in demographics, yet fail to support a program culture that truly values diversity and social justice.

Marriage and family therapy programs that embrace pluralism and social justice create environments that sustain diversity, while offering all faculty, supervisors, and students opportunities to become socially aware and active. The goals for program transformation are to:

1. Develop and maintain a culture of pluralism in which multiple perspectives are cultivated and valued;

2. Promote an ongoing process of therapist/educator/supervisor cultural and contextual self-awareness;

3. Increase therapists’ awareness of the systems of privilege and oppression that define equity and social justice in client/social systems;

4. Enhance therapists’ skills in addressing cultural assumptions, power relationships, and beliefs to advocate for justice and equity in families and society.

The model we propose begins with attention to readiness followed by recruitment, retention, graduation, assessment, and professional development (see Figure 1). Although the model is visually drawn in a linear manner, we believe that every step of the transformation project is continually influenced through changes in all other areas. Change occurs continuously, and it is important that as many changes as possible are made simultaneously.

THE PROGRAM: FACULTY AND STUDENTS

The authors of this article are faculty and students in an accredited MFT master’s degree program embedded in a Family, Consumer, and Nutrition Science Department at a large midwestern university. At the time this article was written, Teresa was the coordinator of the MFT program’s Family Center where students do therapy as part of the practicum experience. She also taught MFT graduate courses and supervised MFT trainees. She is European American, originally from the western United States. Shi-Ruei is Chinese American and grew up in Taiwan. She is an associate professor in child and family studies. Shi-Ruei teaches courses on diversity, minority families, and child/family development. She is also active in campus multicultural groups. Kenya is African American who grew up in the Chicago area and completed an internship at the MFT family center during her senior year at our university before joining the MFT graduate program. Anchal is Asian Indian, having come to the United States to participate in our program. Anchal taught clinical psychology in India before deciding to continue her studies in MFr. Cecilia is Latina, and also grew up in the larger Chicago area. Cecilia is bilingual and worked in the Social Security office for several years before returning for her master’s degree in MFT. Kenya, Anchal, and Cecilia are all students.
Our MFT program has been facing the complex task of inspecting our teaching practices, supervision, curriculum, administrative policies, and university-wide relationships to create a learning environment that is more socially sensitive and inclusive. This article is a reflection of our efforts to date. We believe that sharing our experience thus far, as well as the model we have developed to guide our efforts, may lend a helpful perspective to other training programs.

READINESS

Readiness is both a first step and part of an ongoing process leading to the success of diversifying a MFT program. Lazsloffy and Hardy (2000, p. 36) define racial awareness as "the ability to recognize that race exists and that it shapes reality in inequitable and unjust ways." They mark the onset of racial awareness as the ability to distinguish between how one would like things to be and how things are. As understanding develops, racial awareness leads to a fuller understanding of specific ways in which proracist ideology shapes reality as well as the ways perceptions of reality differ within and between diverse racial groups. Those who then become racially sensitive are able to translate their awareness into action by challenging attitudes, behaviors, and/or conditions that create or maintain social injustice and to relate cross-racially in ways that allow others to feel safe and comfortable. This description can be used to more broadly define awareness and sensitivity to all socially contingent intersecting systems of privilege and oppression. By readiness, we are referring to a broad systemic change in the program that reflects social awareness and sensitivity.

Faculty Readiness

Faculty need to commit to challenging their own attitudes and beliefs and to developing a socially and racially sensitive lens through which to view every aspect of the program. Individual faculty can achieve this by increasing their contact with those they see as "other," reading social justice literature, joining campus and community social justice/racial bridging groups, taking related courses/workshops, seizing opportunities to talk about diversity and equity with colleagues, and participating in careful self-inspection. European-American faculty members may be faced with the discomfort of a deeper understanding of White privilege and/or find themselves experiencing changes in their own racial identity.

Teresa: Working on transforming the MFT program has been an incredible learning experience for me. This has come as a bit of a surprise, because I clearly considered myself among the ranks of those who value and incorporate social and racial awareness into education and supervision. As the MFT program faculty seriously
began looking for ways to develop a more diverse student body, beyond the typical recruitment and retention efforts, I became increasingly cognizant of how much I needed to learn. Early in this effort, I contacted the directors of several MFT programs that I understood to be successfully diverse including Robert Massey at Seton Hall University (personal communication, September, 1999). He told me that faculty need to start by changing themselves. I took this to heart and began taking courses and workshops that focused on social justice, spending time as a White minority in learning and conference environments, reviewing literature on social/racial awareness and sensitivity, connecting with like-minded colleagues, and so on. This has begun opening my eyes to many of the hegemonic practices in higher education, to the need for making social awareness central to training, and to the type of pluralistic environment required to sustain diversity.

Organizational Readiness

There are likely to be varying degrees of social awareness, sensitivity, and commitment for change in the larger academy. These may be reflected in the amount of energy and enthusiasm each brings to the table for the diversity effort. In most academic cultures, rules about individual achievement and competition (e.g., Graduate Record Examination [GRE] scores, grades, comprehensive exams) often take precedence over other relevant personal qualities. The bureaucracy of academic institutions also presents barriers to the type of flexibility that may be necessary to diversify a program (i.e., application deadlines, rules around tuition waivers). Changing organizational policies and procedures requires changes in the attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and norms embedded in the academic culture in which MFT programs are situated.

Program Readiness

Social awareness and sensitivity need to be integrated throughout the MFT program (Killian & Hardy, 1998). Readings, exercises, and course requirements relating to social justice, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, physical abilities, and class can be folded into all coursework. There needs to be open dialogue about how patriarchal, Eurocentric theories and methods may further alienate, subjugate, and oppress many students, faculty, and families. We need to carefully critique from a pluralistic perspective the traditional White, middle-class model that has permeated MFT training to create space for a truly respectful, plural learning environment that both welcomes and challenges students of all racial and cultural backgrounds.

Shi-Ruei: I teach a course entitled "Working with Ethnically Diverse Children and Families in the US." This course encourages students to think beyond the attitude of "universalism" of all families that has permeated the field of family therapy. The course provides a perspective that challenges students to examine the process in which race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ableness become the criteria by which disqualification from equal opportunities is achieved. The course is unique because it provides an ecological overview of the systematic efforts taken by the dominant society (macrosystem) to exclude the full social membership of families of color and their participation in the society. Clear analyses are given in class to view family from a historical perspective and the deployment of various forces from the macro system (i.e., the political structure, media, educational institutions, organized religion, etc.) to construct negative images of families of color. The negative images serve to rationalize their inferiorized status for the justification of exclusion and oppression. In so doing, the family of color (the microsystem) is profoundly affected by the macro system in its structure, gender relationships, division of labor, and parent-child relationships. Nevertheless, the family of color remains resilient and is adaptive to the macro system. Focus on the strengths of the family is the guiding principle of the course. Aside from examining the impact of the macrosystem on family functioning from an ecological perspective, students are encouraged to conceptualize beyond the familiar theoretical framework. Students are also challenged to think about the important implications arising from cultural and racial differences in their clinical practice. Non-Western pedagogy focusing on group work, including group tests is used to promote group cooperation. Individual competition is minimized in the class.

In addition, internships that provide therapists-in-training with experience working with diverse populations need to be secured. It may be particularly important to find fitting internship placements for students of color whose goals include working with clients with similar backgrounds and/or using bilingual/bicultural skills. Marriage and family therapy programs also need to provide students with the experience of learning from diverse instructors, supervisors, and guest lecturers. We have found that as our program emphasizes social justice and racial diversity in the curriculum, supervision, student-faculty relationships and research, the student culture also becomes better prepared for diverse membership.

RECRUITMENT

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Including diverse students in MFT programs has many advantages. As suggested by Laszlof and Hardy (2000), the most immediate way to challenge racial stereotypes, prejudices, and hatred is through direct exposure, especially personal interactions with members of different cultural groups. No experience can substitute for the learning that takes place via cross-racial/ethnic interactions. Further, by including students from many different backgrounds, MFT programs benefit from different perspectives of its theories and practices.

The traditional channels of recruiting students often rely on professionals and program alumni attracting relatives and friends to the program (Pruitt & Isaac, 1985). Other traditional approaches to student recruitment include the distribution of advertising materials (e.g., program brochures). Often, students of color do not have access to these channels. Even if they do, the recruitment materials usually do not address concerns that are important to students of color. Also, the retention rates of students of color are often poor in predominately White institutions. Students of color may perceive the environment of these institutions as unsupportive. It is not surprising that these traditional means of recruiting do not very effectively entice students of color.

Identifying Potential Students

A crucial step toward attracting students of color is identifying a potential student body. Several steps can be taken to accomplish this: (1) Identify the target population and its potential network. (2) Form strong partnerships with various campus programs (e.g., Centers of Black Studies, Latino Studies, Native American Studies, Asian-American Studies). These centers usually have the most contact with prospective students of color through providing academic and social support. (3) Establish and maintain ongoing, positive relationships with faculty of color to enhance the exposure of the program through their professional and community networks to students of color. (4) Build positive working relationships with institutions that graduate large numbers of students of color. This includes historically Black institutions, Native-American tribal colleges, and institutions with significant numbers of Latino and Asian-American students. (5) Forge unequivocal connections with minority professional organizations. (6) Network with professionals of color in the community. This type of connection not only attracts prospective applicants to the program, but can also provide valuable professional experiences for all students.

Overall, to successfully recruit students of color, efforts must involve active participation of all aspects of the department, college, and university, including nonminority faculty and administrators. The efforts on the part of those who earnestly contribute their expertise and time in recruiting students of color should be systematically linked to the professional and university reward structure (Oliver & Brown, 1989).

Building Relationships

Once the recruitment network is identified and established, it is imperative to build relationships with potential students. Faculty can familiarize potential students with the MFT program by inviting them to campus lectures, conferences, and one-on-one discussions with faculty and students. Prospective students can be provided with complete materials that not only explain the academic nature of the MFT program but also share a more personal perspective about the faculty, including their commitment to diversity. The program can increase visibility by frequenting minority professional, social, religious, and cultural events. Preadmission workshops and open houses where prospective students can see the facilities, talk with supervisors and instructors, and spend time with current students can increase connection and comfort. Marriage and family therapy faculty and students can make visits to predominantly minority institutions, campus groups for students of color, and undergraduate classes to foster more personal contact with a potential student body.

Building personal relationships can make a crucial difference in recruiting students of color. Many students of color entering a MFT graduate program (to prepare to join a field that is predominately White) may feel they are taking one more step into the often-unfriendly territory of the dominant culture. MFT faculty may need to go beyond making initial connections or mentoring to act as sponsors to successfully admit prospective students of color. Marriage and family therapy faculty sponsorship can reach students who would remain otherwise unfamiliar with family therapy, be discouraged from applying, or face significant barriers to attending. This sponsorship may include advocating for changes in admission procedures, exceptions to bureaucratic rules, and assistantship positions. Faculty sponsors can provide advice on clarifying admission procedures, writing letters of recommendations, and developing academic skills. In addition, faculty sponsors can provide some assistance in reviewing application materials and giving individual guidance. Offering undergraduates work experience in MFT therapy clinics can be very valuable in assisting them in determining their level of fit with the field, becoming familiar with MFT programs, offering related experience to enhance graduate applications, and increasing connection with faculty (Prouty, Johnson, & Protinsky, 2000).
Kenya: During my undergraduate experience I encountered at least three instructors who had been trained in MFT programs. These instructors were instrumental in providing me with information about the field. I also had opportunities to volunteer at the family center. Through volunteering, I was given a chance to meet and talk to faculty and students in the program who helped stoke my curiosity. The faculty member who was the coordinator of the family center at that time encouraged me to apply. Supervisors in the program were willing to talk to me about any questions that I had about the program and the field. One of the supervisor’s overt and genuine support of a more diversified program was also encouraging.

Current students in the program can serve as an important resource in drawing potential students of color. Peer-initiated communication at the recruitment stage was found to be crucial for many students of color in making the final decision to enroll in a particular program (Olson, 1988). Another benefit of actively engaging current students is that input provided by current students allows the program to develop a specialized access structure for students of color. In doing so, the program not only receives direct input from its students of color, but also enlists the active participation of the students of color in a mutually beneficial way.

International students are a valuable resource in offering alternative cultural perspectives. Prospective international students need consistent contact with faculty who can help oversee their application process, inform them of university rules and expectations, connect them with mentors, and be available to answer questions they have about leaping into graduate studies in a foreign country.

Anchal: I was in instant and spontaneous communication with members of the MFT program during the decision-making and application process. They consistently replied to questions, apprehensions and concerns in very warm, supportive, personalized ways. They were also flexible in finding a way for me to complete my personal interview. I was asked to videotape my responses to certain questions rather than flying to the states from India. The faculty helped me secure a graduate assistantship for financial assistance. When I arrived, faculty introduced me to other Indians at the university who could be useful in terms of clarifying certain apprehensions and information regarding housing and other requirements.

In conclusion, the recruitment activities should be diverse. In fact, the more diverse the activities, the more likely other significant groups (campus and noncampus) will join in the overall efforts to attract more students of color, enhancing the success of the outcome (Oliver & Brown, 1988).

Admissions Process

Admission practices have been identified as a neglected area of the recruitment process that could increase the success of students of color in academic programs (Olson, 1988). As Pruitt and Isaac (1985) argue, too often in the area of admission, implicit discrimination is practiced under the guise of objective admission standards. Scores on the GREs and undergraduate grade point averages are typically used as predictors of students’ performance in completing graduate work. However, few systematic efforts have been made to determine the validity of these scores in predicting students’ performance in MFT programs. Caution has to be taken if these “objective” screening criteria are the only criteria used for the purpose of admission. The problems associated with the use of standardized scores in the admission process are well documented (Olson, 1988; Pruitt & Isaac, 1985). A recent policy information report by the Educational Testing Service (Coley, 2001) highlights the fact that students of color usually suffer more when standardized measures are used as ranking criteria. If GRE scores are to be used, students should be compared with their own racial norms. Coley (2001) also points out that within each racial and ethnic group, there are significant differences between genders that must be considered. As the National Research Council Committee on Testing concluded, “When there are many applicants capable of succeeding, admissions decisions should be based on broader social and educational values” (as cited in Pruitt & Isaac, 1985, p. 530). GRE scores might be waived for students with adequate grade point averages and whose academic work is familiar to faculty. Other measures have also been used to supplement standardized criteria to better assess all applicants. Many programs rely on references and written statements as well as interviews with prospective students to determine if the applicant possesses attributes that are considered important for success in the MFT program. However, overreliance on the subjective criteria may create further hurdles for culturally/racially diverse students. Many students of color have different patterns of speech and mannerism. Others may speak English as a second language. These differences often negatively influence how they are evaluated. Consequently, students with backgrounds that are different from the dominant culture may be viewed less favorably and perhaps denied acceptance not because of a lack of ability to perform but because of a lack of dominant cultural experience.

To avoid rejecting potentially qualified candidates, MFT programs should have an agreed-upon mechanism for interpreting the qualifications and credentials of diverse applicants. Developing a flexible, sensitive admission policy
to identify, attract, and admit promising MFT candidates often presents a challenge. Faculty members who share the cultural background of the prospective student can be asked to participate during interviews or view videotapes of interviews to offer additional input. Arranging for prospective students to meet with current students can also offer additional perspectives.

RETENTION

Historically, retaining students of color has been difficult for many predominately White institutions at the undergraduate level (McNary, 1996). It becomes even more problematic at the graduate level (Johnson, 1996). One of the major problems associated with retention strategies in many programs is the assumption that students of color are monolithic. In reality, students of color differ in race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, family involvement, and quality and level of preparation received from their undergraduate programs. Consequently, retention strategies that embrace the cultural deficit model by providing academic support services alone are not effective in meeting the needs of these students. Assuming a cultural deficit model implies that students of color need to be socialized into the White, middle-class academic culture. The deficit stance further assumes that change needs to happen in only one direction, namely that students of color must be changed or adapt themselves. This way of thinking maintains the status quo, does a disservice to students of color, and overlooks the opportunity to take advantage of diversity to create positive change in the field.

Policies (developed at the program, department, college, and university levels), faculty, administrators, staff, curriculum, and the overall campus environment play important roles in the successful retention of students of color. We have identified that combined efforts from the following areas are crucial in establishing effective retention activities: Academic support; faculty support; the university/academic environment; social and cultural environment; and financial support.

Academic support

Not all students of color need academic support services, but some do. As pointed out by McNary (1996), most institutions recognize this and establish various academic support services and remedial programs. The success of these services depends on the funding of the programs, their staff-student ratio, the attitude of the staff, as well as the extent to which these programs are integrated into the curriculum.

Academic support services should not be limited to students who are less prepared for graduate work. Programs such as those that provide additional research opportunities for talented students of color are also needed (Freeman, 1999). This type of effort greatly increases the likelihood that many students of color will succeed by gaining the research skills that are essential for survival in advanced graduate programs.

Many students of color need more specific advising and guidance in academic matters and career choices. Assisting students in articulating and developing immediate and long-term career goals and selecting courses is important. Providing information about possible internship/practicum sites, recommending potential job opportunities, supporting attending professional meetings, and suggesting job search skills are especially crucial in the professional development for students of color. This is true not only because many students of color are first generation college students, but also because there are few available role models in the field. Killan and Hardy (1998) point out that only 3% of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) members identified themselves as "ethnic minorities" in 1994. The lack of role models of color is not a minor issue. It means that students of color may find themselves isolated in situations that lack both formal and informal support systems. Consequently, many feel that graduate school is intolerable and ultimately drop out. Further, the lack of professionals of color also suggests that MFT does not truly value diverse racial involvement. Thus, considerable attention must be given to recruiting racially diverse faculty and to increasing diversity in the university environment as a whole.

Faculty Support

Experience has shown that students' interaction with faculty is essential to student of color retention. As suggested by Lee (1999), this interaction not only includes formal, structured experiences in academic settings, but also includes informal contact. Faculty needs to develop trust and credibility with students and to maintain this integrity throughout their relationship. Taking time for informal, friendly, and caring contact is imperative and rewarding for both students and faculty. Given the importance of faculty-student relationships, the potential benefits of effective faculty mentoring cannot be overly stressed.
Although sponsorship during the recruitment stage involves more relationship building and admission advocacy, the primary goal of mentorship is to enhance the educational experiences of students and to facilitate their successful adjustment to both the campus environment and eventually to the field of MFT. Faculty mentors need to be available to nurture, provide support, and when necessary, advocate for students in this process. Lee (1999) reports that for the undergraduate African-American students, the race of the faculty mentor was not as important as the quality of the interaction between the student and the mentor. This is especially important when there is a pervasive absence of faculty of color in many MFT programs. Lee (1999) suggests further that the findings of her study should not be taken to mean efforts to recruit and retain faculty of color should cease. On the contrary, active efforts to recruit and retain racially diverse faculty in all MFT programs are absolutely necessary. However, what is important here is that the lack of faculty of color should not be used as an excuse for not mentoring students of color. White faculty members need to be sensitized to the needs and issues faced by students of color and feel comfortable in initiating contact and advocating for them.

Cecilia: The most supportive experience I had as an undergraduate was belonging to Latinos Unidos. My undergraduate school had very few Latino students and this organization allowed me to be around people that I felt really understood who I was and who shared some of my experiences. I would like to belong to a group like that during my graduate studies, but between my studies, practicum, married life, and working, I just do not have the time. My undergraduate advisor, who happened to be a European-American woman, provided a great deal of support. She always had her door open to me because I think she understood that being a first generation Latina student was difficult. However, I also found support in the fact that she expected no less of me than of any other White student. Her expectations made me feel that I could do it, that being Latina did not mean that I was less, or that being Latina was a reason to do less. In graduate school, I do not want my professors to assume I need special considerations because I am Latina. If I am struggling or need advice, I want the opportunity to ask for it because I am a student not because I am Latina. The support I want in graduate school is just to have the professors available for questions about the MFT program, finding an appropriate internship site, advice about classes, and even to be available for a few "gripe sessions." Since I would like to be a therapist that can work with Latino families, I feel that a "successful" completion of the MFT program would include experience with Latino families/couples.

Kenya: So far in the MFT program, I have noticed that the faculty and curriculum are very racially conscious. This type of consciousness is of course linked to more racially sensitive clinical work and calls for students in the program, even me, to be more racially aware. For example, one of the required readings focused on White privilege. Some of the privileges described were ones that I had never even thought about or considered to be privileges. As an undergraduate, I felt as though the idea or intention to be racially sensitive was apparent, but I think the employment of this idea is even more important. For example, I've been in classes where I (the only Black student or one of two or three) was asked to more or less give the Black perspective. In situations like this I almost don't want to say anything because I feel as though I am being asked to speak for everyone who is classified as African American. That just isn't possible because although we all come from the same cultural background, there are a lot of factors that make our individual experiences different and therefore our thought processes unique.

Supervision

The importance of racially and socially sensitive supervision is imperative to supporting supervisees of color and encouraging all supervisees to be alert to the social contingencies affecting the lives of their clients. Both dominant- and nondominant culture therapists are faced with issues in cross-cultural as well as same cultural therapy. They need support in ferreting out the nuances of socially defined power differentials in the therapy room. Supervisors need to be aware and sensitive themselves and have the skills necessary to create a safe and comfortable environment for supervisees to explore difficult issues. Supervisors need to be able to discuss their own positioning and to lead by inquiry. They must be able to supportively challenge supervisees to look at their own attitudes and beliefs as well as those of their clients. Supervision is where all of the theory and discussion around oppression and equity comes to life. Often, supervisees struggle to recognize the impact of social forces in their own lives and the lives of their clients, and to find avenues to advocate for social change.

The University/Academic Environment

To successfully retain students of color, it is essential to build and maintain an academic, social, and cultural climate that values diversity within the academic community. This includes an institutionalized commitment to proper assessment, human resources, sufficient funding, and executive leadership (McNairy, 1996). As pointed out by McNairy (1996), having more racially diverse students does not result in an automatic reduction of prejudice and stereotypes, nor does it automatically increase tolerance and awareness of other cultures.
An example of institutionalized commitment to multiculturalism is the Multicultural Curriculum Transformation Institute at Northern Illinois University. To achieve a curriculum and campus climate more receptive to students of color, the Provost's office initiated and funded the Institute. The Institute is made available to all tenure-track faculty who are willing to revise the curriculum to infuse it with multicultural pedagogy and scholarship. The Institute takes place every summer and involves a 10-day intensive workshop to assist individual faculty members in developing new pedagogy and to transform their course contents. Faculty members then implement a project and present it to the university to receive a stipend. This endeavor is linked to the university merit system. Since its inception in 1993, the Institute has supported more than 100 tenure-track faculty. Although it is not designed specifically for the MFT faculty, the Institute is a step aimed at developing a more multicultural community for all students.

The Social and Cultural Environment

Academic and social integration of students into the university community has a decisive impact on the retention of students of color (Lee, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Feelings of isolation and alienation are a key factor contributing to the high attrition rate among students (Tinto, 1993). Students of color need to not only feel encouraged to participate in multicultural events, but should feel valued and welcomed at all campus activities. Various functions designed specifically for students of color need to be available, such as cultural, professional, and student organizations, welcome night, and new student orientation. However, the more important element is the overall campus atmosphere. All cultures, ethnic groups, and races should be reflected in all aspects of the campus life. This includes the food served in the dining halls, integration of scholarship of people of color in the curriculum, and active involvement of students of color in student government. It also includes offering a variety of social activities targeted at student of color interests, as well as the availability of fellowships, scholarships, and assistantships for all students of color.

The more time that students spend interacting with peers, participating in school activities and programs, and interacting with faculty members, the greater the probability of retention (Griffin, 1992). Because of gross underrepresentation of racially diverse faculty and students in many MFT programs, students need to feel their presence is truly valued by the institution. They need to feel the campus provides them with adequate opportunity for faculty and peer interaction and is supporting their cultural identity.

Efforts also need to be made in advocating on behalf of faculty and students of color. The office of minority affairs, affirmative action programs, and minority caucuses offer approaches for addressing concerns faced by many students and faculty of color. Students and faculty who are from traditionally less powerful positions need to feel empowered. Their voices have to be heard. Supportive networks should be created and adequately funded by the institution.

Financial Support

A major concern, especially for students of color, is the availability of funds for graduate work (Johnson, 1999). Increasing financial assistance was identified as one of the key factors in recruiting and retaining African-American students in MFT programs (Wilson & Stith, 1993). Financial support is essential for all students from lower and middle-class backgrounds. Financial concerns were ranked as the greatest obstacle for students of color attending graduate programs (Johnson, 1996). Often, students of color and international students face much greater financial difficulty than dominant culture students because of historical/institutional factors and family background. It requires vision, leadership, strategic planning, and adequate funding in the department and university to provide sufficient financial assistance for students to meet their educational obligations.

ASSESSMENT

Ongoing Assessment and Program Evaluation

Perhaps one of the indicators that a MFT program is being successful in developing a culture of pluralism is open dialogue between students and faculty about the program itself. Deacon and Piercy (2000, p. 39) suggest that MFT programs use participatory evaluation methods to "elicit useful feedback to improve programs and, at the same time, empower trainees to become partners in the evaluation process." These authors describe the use of student focus groups as well as a number of creative ways to gather feedback. These include sculpting the program, rating components using line sculpts, projective techniques, values voting, visualization techniques, and employing cards that spark conversation. The questions in the evaluation can include areas that highlight social awareness, the needs of diverse students, the culture of pluralism, and social/racial sensitivity in supervision. Students of color
might also be invited to form an advisory board that specifically considers how the MFT program might enhance its readiness, recruitment, retention, and professional development efforts.

Most students take the opportunity to critique their programs seriously. It is meaningful to be asked and listened to. It is important for faculty to be clear about how and when input will be used. Faculty also need to be prepared for a more empowered student body whose members are likely to bring up issues no one asked about. Faculty and students need to work together to effectively manage talking about tough issues. Kenya: The fact that I am being asked about the program is a form of support.

PROFESSIONAL MENTORING

Although it may take time, MFr program faculty needs to work on increasing their connection with diverse professionals in the field who are available and willing to act as mentors. Alumni are a natural mentoring resource for students of color, and as programs become more diverse, the cadre of professionals who have been through the academic program, found jobs, and joined professional associations will grow. It is crucial for faculty to maintain active relationships with alumni of color who can then act as mentors to students and recent graduates. These alumni can be asked to return to participate in professional panels, give guest lectures, assist in research or publication, and consult on cases. MFT programs might also help establish and promote professionals of color by providing space for AAMFT associate member meetings, inviting alumni to yearly get-togethers with current students, and advocating for professional groups for students/alumni of color. Faculty also needs to be available to postgraduates as they face dilemmas associated with applying their MFF knowledge to diverse populations and actively intervene to support social justice.

Cecilia: After I leave the program, I would find it helpful to be able to keep in touch with my graduate professors. I would like to be able to call them and ask them questions about how to go about starting a private practice or about the current techniques in MFr. I would also find it helpful if I were able to keep in touch with my peers and continue to be resources for each other.

Anchal: I need to be able to apply what I learn here in the MFF program to my practice when I return to India. I would like the opportunity while in the graduate program to work with at least a few Asian Indian families and to explore the applicability of family therapy to an Indian setting. I will need information regarding job opportunities. Finding a job becomes a more difficult task for International students because their social networks take a while to establish.

CONCLUSION

Diversifying our MFr program remains a work in progress. To guide our efforts, we have drawn from the literature and our own experience to develop a model that starts with readying our program and ourselves to become truly supportive of diversity. We see ourselves as needing to develop trusting relationships with students and other faculty that will support all of us in our efforts to learn. We no longer see our task as simply diversifying our student body, and recognize that it is essential for all of us to maintain pluralistic learning environments that attend to issues of social justice. Thus far, we have seen a significant increase in the number of students of color applying and successfully engaging in the MFr program. We have also seen an increase in the depth of social and racial sensitivity among all students and faculty. We hope to inspire open inquiry for the honest, ongoing assessment of our program and to continually hold ourselves accountable for contributing to positive social change.

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