

Using Personal Growth Groups in Multicultural Counseling Courses to Foster Students' Ethnic Identity Development

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Abstract:

This study was designed to examine the relationship between personal growth group (PGG) experiences in multicultural counseling courses and counseling students' ethnic identity development. Differences in ethnic identity development were compared between counseling students who participated in a PGG experience as part of a multicultural counseling course and those who did not. Group session impacts were also examined. Results indicated that counseling students who participated in PGGs as part of a multicultural counseling course experienced significantly greater ethnic identity development than did counseling students not participating in such groups. Recommendations for further research are provided.

Keywords: ethnic identity development | personal growth group

Article:

Multicultural counseling competence is an essential component of counselor education programs (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2005; Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001). Evidence of this can be found in the calls from professional associations, accreditation bodies, and individuals from counseling and psychology to develop ethical guidelines and standards of multicultural counseling training (ACA, 2005; American Psychological Association, 2003; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Multicultural counseling competencies provide a framework of beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills deemed necessary for training effective counselors (Sue et al., 1992). In each of these three areas, there is emphasis on counselors becoming aware of their own assumptions, biases, and values, as well as understanding worldviews of culturally different clients and developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques.

A key responsibility for counselor educators is to promote multicultural awareness among counselors-in-training (Torres-Rivera, Phan, Maddux, Wilbur, & Garrett, 2001). One of the most commonly used methods of increasing counseling students' personal awareness is through teaching racial/ethnic identity development models (Carter & Qureshi, 1995). Counselor educators have used racial/ethnic identity development models in a variety of ways. Examples

include journaling, cross-cultural immersion experiences, role playing, and critical incident analysis (Collins & Pieterse, 2007). An important part of instruction is focusing attention on counseling students' own racial/ethnic identity development because understanding how one's own racial/ethnic identity affects multicultural counseling relationships plays a significant role in attaining multicultural counseling competence (Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995).

Racial and Ethnic Identity

Although race and ethnicity may represent two separate constructs, they have often been treated as indistinguishable in the literature (Sodowsky, Kwan, & Pannu, 1995). Racial identity has been defined as one's sense of group identity based on perceptions of a shared racial background with a specific racial group (Helms, 1990). Thus, racial identity is based in socially constructed ideas of race and is concerned with how people develop attitudes about their own and other racial groups (Helms, 1995). Similarly, ethnic identity has been defined as an abstract set of ideals, values, behaviors, and attitudes regarding ethnic group membership, which allows individuals to distinguish themselves as different from members of other ethnic groups (Phinney, 1990).

Ethnic identity development provides individuals with a sense of belonging to a community whose members share a similar ethnic heritage (Phinney, 1992). By including macrosocietal stereotypes at the individual level, ethnic identity becomes a developmental process that can change depending on certain critical incidents and self-discovery (Phinney, 1992). Particularly important for counselors is the concept that socialized attitudes that are part of one's ethnic identity may affect cross-cultural counseling relationships and dynamics (Helms, 1990). For example, level of ethnic identity development has been correlated positively with multicultural counseling competence (Vinson & Neimeyer, 2003), a goal that has clearly become essential in preparing the next generations of professional counselors.

Phinney's Ethnic Identity Model

Through her study of various racial identity models, Phinney (1990) found similar processes described in each model, leading her to develop a general model of ethnic identity development not specific to any one racial or ethnic group. Because Phinney's (1992) model of ethnic identity development is not ethnic group specific, it provides a useful framework for studying groups in which the racial and ethnic makeup of the groups is unknown or mixed. This model has been used by researchers to study both between-groups and within-group differences (e.g., Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997). In her model, Phinney (1996) described three stages of ethnic identity development through which individuals may progress, regardless of race or ethnicity.

In Stage 1 (unexamined ethnic identity), individuals have not yet been challenged to examine their own ethnicity and accompanying attitudes and values (Phinney, 1992). Because individuals internalize the values and attitudes they experience in their environments, attitudes about themselves, their own group, and other groups develop as unexamined products of socialization (Phinney, 1996). In Stage 2 (ethnic identity search), individuals become interested in learning more about their own ethnic group and, as they encounter people from more diverse backgrounds, are exposed to prejudices, discrimination, and opposing worldviews. Phinney (1996) believed that this growing awareness of ethnicity results in individuals exploring and

immersing themselves more into their own cultural heritage, developing very positive attitudes toward their own group. Ethnicity then becomes more personal than abstract, with greater congruence between emotions and behaviors. Exploration of self and others in Stage 2 leads to ethnic identity achievement, a more secure, confident sense of ethnic identity that characterizes individuals in Stage 3 (ethnic identity achievement; Phinney, 1996). In this third stage, individuals have a positive yet realistic view of their own ethnic group, have abandoned strong negative feelings toward other ethnic groups, and have become confident in their own ethnicity (Roberts et al., 1999).

Group Process in Multicultural Counselor Education

To stimulate the kind of meaningful reflection that will help counseling students develop stronger understanding of ethnic identities (Carter & Qureshi, 1995), counselor educators have developed experiential activities (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002), facilitated discussion of critical incidents and the role of social forces in cultural differences (Arminio, 2001), and created small groups in which counseling students can share their stories with peers (Reynolds, 1995). Because group work is designed to foster a sense of belonging and create a climate that supports individual growth in inventive and inspired ways (Corey & Corey, 2006), personal growth groups (PGGs) often are used in multicultural counseling courses to stimulate heightened self-awareness and ongoing ethnic identity development (Reynolds, 1995). These groups typically meet on a regular basis throughout the semester and provide students with opportunities to raise awareness about multicultural issues, challenge their personal beliefs about diversity, and help develop cultural empathy (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002).

Although group leaders regularly observe the power and impact of groups on individual members, it can be challenging to capture the subjective experience of members. Research on groups has examined such areas as group leadership, assessment of group progress, and effective components of group processes and dynamics (DeLucia-Waack, Gerrity, Kalodner, & Riva, 2004). Some of the most studied constructs related to group work are Yalom's therapeutic factors (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), which are grounded in the belief that a number of features or dynamics inherent in group processes can lead to significant change in group members (Bloch & Crouch, 1985). These group processes are a function of the behaviors of the group leader, group members, and/or the group as a whole (Bloch & Crouch, 1985).

Some researchers have studied individual therapeutic factors, whereas others have investigated the therapeutic impact of the group on its members (e.g., Elliott, 1985; Mahrer & Nadler, 1986). Therapeutic impact has been defined as a group member's sense of how he or she has been helped (Elliott & James, 1989). This therapeutic impact can be measured at different levels (e.g., an event within a session, an entire session, or the entire group process), from different viewpoints (e.g., group leader, group member, or observer), and with various methodologies (e.g., prepared questionnaire or open-ended questionnaire; Elliott & James, 1989).

Purpose of the study

To date, no research has been published on the efficacy of using PGGs in multicultural counseling courses as a tool for stimulating counseling students' ethnic identity development.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between PGG experiences in multicultural counseling courses and counseling students' levels of ethnic identity development. The primary research question was whether counselor education students who participated in PGGs as part of a multicultural counseling course would show significant increases in ethnic identity development over one semester, as compared with counselor education students who were not required to participate in a PGG as part of a multicultural counseling course. Additional questions examined the effects of perceived group impacts and demographic variables on ethnic identity development over one semester.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were 199 master's-level counseling students enrolled in multicultural counseling courses in 13 counselor education programs across the United States. All programs are accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Two groups of participants were compared for the main analyses: students in multicultural counseling courses with PGGs ($n = 85$) and students in multicultural counseling courses without PGGs ($n = 114$). The 16 non-PGG participants who did not complete the posttest were excluded from all analyses, resulting in a total of 98 non-PGG participants.

Of the 183 participants who completed the study, 148 (81%) were female, 31 (17%) were male, and 4 (2%) did not report their gender. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 62 years ($M = 29.15$, $SD = 8.90$). The number of counselor education credit hours completed ranged from 0 to 67 ($M = 22.62$, $SD = 16.40$). Because of the sample's limited ethnic composition, the variable ethnicity was collapsed into two categories labeled White ($n = 144$) and other ($n = 37$); 2 participants did not report their ethnicity.

In the current study, a PGG was defined as a subgroup of students enrolled in a multicultural counseling course who met for 1 hour in a closed-group format six times during the semester they were enrolled in the course. For all PGGs, the purpose was to give students an opportunity to discuss their experiences during the course and for group dynamics to be a catalyst for the students' growth in multicultural counseling issues (i.e., knowledge, awareness, and skills). All PGGs had advanced (either doctoral or educational specialist) students as group leaders, and group leaders for all PGGs remained consistent across the six sessions. The role of group leaders was to facilitate dialogue about participants' experiences during the course.

Instruments

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992). The MEIM is a 15-item instrument designed to measure ethnic identity development processes common to all ethnicities. Twelve items measure ethnic identity across two subscales: (a) Ethnic Identity Search (a developmental and cognitive component) and (b) Affirmation, Belonging, and Commitment (an affective component). A factor analysis of the MEIM confirmed these two subscales (Roberts et al., 1999). The first 12 items are the basis for determining identity development scores and are rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with a neutral

midpoint added in the most recent revision (J. S. Phinney, personal communication, October 13, 2004). Overall ethnic identity scores are calculated by reversing negatively phrased items and summing across the 12 items. Higher scores indicate stronger ethnic identity achievement. Three additional items on the MEIM ask respondents to identify their own ethnicity and the ethnicity of their parents. These items are used for purposes of describing the sample and are not included in the total score.

Phinney (1992) and Worrell (2000) found internal consistency estimates for MEIM total scores to be .81 and .89, respectively, for two diverse samples of adolescents. Phinney (1992) also reported an internal consistency estimate of .90 for a diverse sample of college students. Reliability of MEIM total scores has been acceptable, with coefficient alphas ranging from .81 (Goodstein & Ponterotto, 1997) to .89 (Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Stracuzzi, & Saya, 2003). In the current study, only total scores were used; thus, subscale scores were not calculated and are not reported. Pretest and posttest Cronbach's alphas in the current study were calculated to be .87 ($M = 40.50$, $SD = 8.36$) and .83 ($M = 41.47$, $SD = 6.77$), respectively.

Group Counseling Helpful Impacts Scale (GCHIS; Kivlighan, Multon, & Brossart, 1996). The GCHIS was developed to assess group members' perceptions of important (impactful) events that occurred in group sessions. This instrument is a 32-item scale designed to examine a wide range of group session influences identified in the literature as having positive influences on group outcomes. A principal component factor analysis of the GCHIS identified four factors accounting for 59.2% of total item variance: Emotional Awareness-Insight, Relationship-Climate, Other Versus Self Focus, and Problem Definition-Change.

Kivlighan et al. (1996) described these four factors as subscales (i.e., Emotional Awareness-Insight, Relationship, Other Versus Self Focus, and Problem Definition-Change) in the development of the GCHIS. The Emotional Awareness-Insight subscale includes both cognitive and affective elements to capture helpful session impacts in which group members experience notable personal insight through understanding their own feelings (Kivlighan et al., 1996). The Relationship subscale emphasizes a group member's relationships within the group that have a strong impact on the individual and the group (Kivlighan et al., 1996). The Other Versus Self Focus subscale assesses group members' opportunities to receive help directly through their own work or by observing or helping another group member (Kivlighan et al., 1996). Finally, the Problem Definition-Change subscale includes both cognitive and behavioral components to assess group members' ability to clearly identify problems, assess progress toward target goals, and make consistent behavior changes (Kivlighan et al., 1996).

Interrater reliability at the item level ranged from .61 to .99 (Holmes & Kivlighan, 2000). Kivlighan et al. (1996) reported the following coefficient alphas for the four subscales: .88 (Emotional Awareness-Insight), .86 (Relationship), .61 (Other Versus Self Focus), and .78 (Problem Definition-Change). Validity was established by assessing the relationship between the four subscales and group members' ratings of group leadership dimensions (Kivlighan et al., 1996).

The GCHIS uses a 5-point rating scale (0 = not at all, 4 = very much) to assess group members' perceptions of the impact of these four subscales (e.g., 'Felt supported or encouraged'). Possible

scale scores range from 0 to 128. Both total scores and subscale scores were used in this study and for each of the six administrations of the GCHIS. Cronbach's alphas ranged from .73 to .82, and the four subscale mean scores ranged from 65.05 to 73.84, with standard deviations between 12.56 and 17.06.

Procedure

An e-mail was sent to two counseling electronic mailing lists (CESNET and the Multicultural Interest Network of the Southern Association for Counselor Education and Supervision) inviting counselor educators teaching a multicultural counseling course to participate in the study and asking whether PGGs were included in their multicultural courses. Instructors from 13 CACREP-accredited counselor education programs located in the southeastern, northeastern, midwestern, and southwestern United States volunteered to ask their students to participate. Of those 13 instructors, 4 indicated using PGGs in their courses.

Instructors who volunteered to recruit student participants were sent packets by postal mail that contained (a) copies of the MEIM, the GCHIS, and a three-item demographic questionnaire (gender, age, and number of counselor education credit hours completed); (b) informed consent forms for counselors-in-training; (c) preaddressed, postage-paid envelopes for returning completed instruments and informed consent forms; and (d) instructions to the course instructors for administering instruments used in this study. Participants were administered the instruments by their group leaders (PGG) or course instructors (non-PGG). PGG and non-PGG participants completed the MEIM at the beginning and end of the semester. PGG participants also completed the GCHIS immediately following each group session. After each administration of the GCHIS, PGG participants placed completed instruments in provided envelopes, which were then sealed and forwarded by group leaders to us.

Data Analysis

For the entire sample ($N = 183$), a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted on pretest and posttest scores of the MEIM to determine whether there was a significant difference between PGG participants' and non-PGG participants' levels of ethnic identity development. With ANCOVAs, pretest scores are used as covariates in pretest-posttest research designs (Vogt, 2005). MEIM pretest scores were entered in the analysis as a covariate in order to control for differences in those pretest scores (Howell, 2006). A linear regression was then conducted to examine the effects of student participant demographics (ethnicity, gender, age, and number of counselor education credit hours completed) on MEIM posttest scores.

Additional analyses were conducted on PGG participant data only ($n = 85$). According to Howell (2006), a paired-sample t test is used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the mean values of the same measurement made under two different conditions. In the current study, a paired-sample t test was used on pretest and posttest MEIM scores of PGG participants to examine for significant differences. A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to analyze effects of the six PGG sessions and the four GCHIS subscales between pretest and posttest MEIM scores. A linear regression was conducted to determine the specific effects of each of the four GCHIS subscales on MEIM posttest scores.

Results

Findings for the Entire Sample

Before conducting the ANCOVA, we tested the homogeneity-of-slopes assumption to evaluate the interaction between the covariate (pretest MEIM scores) and the intervention (participation in a PGG) in predicting the dependent variable (posttest MEIM scores). ANCOVAs assume a linear relationship between the covariate and the dependent variable and the absence of interaction between the covariate and the intervention (Howell, 2006). Results of the test for homogeneity of slopes indicated that the interaction was not significant, $F(1, 181) = 2.03, p = .15$. Differences on the dependent variable between groups (i.e., PGG and non-PGG), therefore, did not seem to vary as a function of the covariate. In other words, the act of taking the pretest had no bearing on the effect of the PGGs or the posttest results.

An ANCOVA was then performed in which posttest mean scores were adjusted to control for the variability in pretest scores. After adjusting the means of posttest scores for PGG (adjusted $M = 3.71, SD = 1.56$) and non-PGG participants (adjusted $M = 3.31, SD = 0.58$), we found the main effect of PGG participation to be significant, $F(1, 181) = 5.09, p < .03, \eta^2 = .17$. Thus, the increase in MEIM scores from pretest to posttest for PGG participants was greater than that for non-PGG participants. According to Cohen (1988), effect size can be interpreted as small (.20), medium (.50), or large (.80). The effect size of .17, then, is considered small in terms of the variance accounted for in MEIM posttest scores by PGG participation. In other words, 17% of the variance in MEIM posttest scores was accounted for by PGG participation. Interpreting effect size, however, is a difficult task. Thompson (2002) stated that researchers must take the robustness of the constructs into consideration when interpreting effect size. Ethnic identity development is a complex phenomenon; therefore, an effect size labeled small according to Cohen's scale may, in fact, be significant for the sample in the current study.

Linear regression analysis of the effects of student participant demographics (ethnicity, gender, age, and number of counselor education credit hours completed) on MEIM posttest scores revealed that the overall model significantly predicted MEIM posttest scores, $F(4, 180) = 4.80, p < .001$. R^2 for the model was .10, and adjusted R^2 was .08 (see Table 1). Taken together, the four demographic variables accounted for only 10% of shared variability with the dependent variable (MEIM posttest scores).

Findings for PGG Participants Only

Results of a two-tailed, paired-sample t test supported the primary hypothesis, $t(84) = -0.97, p < .05$. A statistically significant increase in mean differences between pretest and posttest scores was found, suggesting significant positive ethnic identity development for PGG participants.

Results of the repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant effect for group session, $F(5) = 3.59, p < .004, \eta^2 = .22$, and the four subscales of the GCHIS, $F(3) = 4.81, p < .003, \eta^2 = .26$. The Session \times Subscale interaction did not show a significant effect, $F(15) = 1.13, p < .33, \eta^2 = .02$. The lack of interaction between group sessions and GCHIS

subscales suggests that the four GCHIS subscale scores did not vary significantly from session to session.

TABLE 1
Results of Regression Analysis of Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure Scores Across Demographic Variables (N = 183)

| Variable | B | SE B | β | p |
|---|-------|------|---------|------|
| Ethnicity | 0.32 | .23 | .10 | .17 |
| Gender | -0.12 | .24 | -.04 | .614 |
| Age | 3.31 | .01 | .24 | .001 |
| No. of counselor education credit hours completed | 1.37 | .006 | .18 | .02 |

A linear regression conducted on the four GCHIS subscale scores across the six group sessions revealed that the model did not significantly predict MEIM posttest scores, $F(4, 80) = 1.33$, $p < .27$. R^2 for the model was .06, and adjusted R^2 was .02. In terms of individual relationships between these independent variables and MEIM posttest scores, none of these subscales was found to be a significant predictor of MEIM posttest scores (see Table 2).

Discussion

Results of this study indicate that participating in a PGG experience as part of a multicultural counseling course may enhance the ethnic identity development of counseling students. Goals in many multicultural counseling courses include raising awareness of counseling students' personal worldviews and biases and increasing their understanding of worldview differences among groups of people. Because small-group dialogue offers students many opportunities for significant personal change (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), students in PGGs may feel more open and willing to explore these and other differences. In addition, the usual norms that "we don't talk about our biases and ethnicities" can be replaced with group norms that emphasize discussion of these issues as the purpose of the PGG.

PGGs also may promote a greater sense of security because of the cultivation of such therapeutic group factors as universality and cohesion. Research suggests that when group members feel secure, they are more likely to experience positive growth within the group context (Tschuschke & Dies, 1994). In addition, students in PGGs have opportunities to observe, encounter, and contribute to other students' personal and ethnic identity development. Group members who observe others struggling with difficult issues and "growing" in their ethnic identity development can be inspired to make positive changes themselves. Because this study did not treat PGGs as standardized interventions, it is not possible to know exactly what took place in each group and how processes happened. Still, findings from this study provide empirical support for the potential value of PGGs as part of a multicultural counseling course.

TABLE 2
Results of Regression Analysis of Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure Scores Across the Subscale Scores of the Group Counseling Helpful Impacts Scale (n = 85)

| Variable | B | SE B | β | p |
|-----------------------------|-------|------|---------|-----|
| Emotional Awareness–Insight | –0.33 | .32 | –.21 | .30 |
| Relationship | 0.17 | .20 | .14 | .41 |
| Other Versus Self Focus | 0.45 | .24 | .26 | .07 |
| Problem Definition–Change | –3.32 | .22 | –.02 | .88 |

The current study found that age of students and number of counselor education credit hours completed were significant predictors of ethnic identity development. This suggests that older students and those who are further along in their counselor training may have a stronger sense of their own identities; greater life experiences to draw upon; and perhaps a better understanding of the importance of cultural knowledge, skills, and awareness in their journey to becoming professional counselors. The practical significance, however, of student age and number of counselor education credit hours should be examined with larger and more diverse samples in future studies.

In this study, students' ethnicity and gender were not found to contribute significantly to variance in posttest MEIM scores. This may simply be due to imbalances on those two variables in a sample in which 81% of participants were women and 79% were White. The small percentages of men and students of diverse ethnicity in this study made it difficult to find any differences that may exist. In future studies, oversampling could be used to increase gender and ethnic heterogeneity of participants. One method of doing this might be to solicit study participants directly from counselor education programs at historically Black colleges and universities and at public universities in which the community is composed of large populations of ethnically diverse groups.

Although the combination of the four GCHIS subscales significantly predicted PGG participants' MEIM posttest scores, examination of individual relationships between the subscales and posttest scores revealed no significant predictors of MEIM posttest scores. This result seems to support Yalom and Leszcz's (2005) claim that Yalom's therapeutic factors in combination are more important than any individual therapeutic factor (e.g., instillation of hope) for promoting significant change in groups. Another possible explanation relates to the potential energy level of PGG participants after a group session, because discussing multicultural issues can be emotionally and cognitively draining. Weary PGG participants may not have concentrated well while scoring the GCHIS after each session, resulting in similar ratings of impact after each group session. On the basis of our experiences with groups and multicultural counseling courses, we expected to find more "peaks and valleys" in the impact data (from GCHIS subscale scores). This suggests that self-report data may not provide an accurate or complete picture of dynamic group processes and impacts. Finding ways to collect and incorporate more observational data

(e.g., Hill Interaction Matrix; Hill, 1965) may help future researchers explore this aspect of PGGs more fruitfully.

Limitations of the current study are related to confounding factors, measurement, and sampling issues. One confounding factor in PGG participant scores is the influence of group leaders. For example, group leaders' own levels of ethnic identity development, as well as other factors such as age, leadership style, personality characteristics, and counseling or supervision theoretical orientations, could be important factors affecting group members' development.

Another limitation concerns the variable nature of the PGG experiences at four different counselor education programs. The reality of investigating PGGs in different counselor education programs, taught by different faculty, and facilitated by different group leaders, is that the agendas, formats, and processes of these group experiences cannot be prescribed or systematically structured across groups. The scope and design of this study focused on perceived group member impacts, as measured by the GCHIS, and did not examine the details of group process, member interactions, leader behaviors, or other aspects of groups such as stage of group development. Because of the complexity of group dynamics and experiences, research on groups typically focuses on a limited number of variables. Clearly, there is more research needed regarding the use of PGGs in multicultural counseling and other counselor education courses.

Finally, participants in the current study were recruited by posting a call for multicultural counseling course instructors willing to be included in the study on two counseling/counselor education electronic mailing lists. Because it is not known how many potential instructors viewed those invitations to participate, response rates cannot be calculated for this study. In addition, the lack of random sampling limits the generalizability of these findings.

Recommendations for-Research and Practice

Results of the current study suggest that PGG experiences, as part of multicultural counseling courses, can make an important contribution to counselor ethnic identity development. Building on this study, future investigators in this area should examine more closely the dynamics and processes that occur (i.e., what happens) within these kinds of PGGs. For example, other reliable measures of the therapeutic factors (e.g., Therapeutic Factors Scale [Yalom, 1985], Therapeutic Factors Inventory [MacNair-Semands & Lese, 2000]) can be used to help pinpoint specific factors that occur in PGGs that can contribute to students' ethnic identity development. The use of multiple inventories to measure a construct can also aid in developing a structural model to better explain the ethnic identity development of graduate counseling students. Training observers to record and rate interactions in PGGs might offer valuable information beyond that which can be collected through self-report. For example, sociometry (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000), which involves direct observation of groups, could be used to help researchers examine interaction patterns and dynamics among members and between members and leaders.

Another recommendation involves investigating the effects on PGGs of different group leaders. Factors such as group leaders' amount of training and experience in leading groups, theoretical orientations, group leadership/facilitation skills, and demographic characteristics should be examined to determine how any of these leader variables have an impact on students' ethnic

identity development in a PGG experience. Future researchers in this area also should consider using alternative methods of recruiting participants to establish representative samples, thus allowing for generalizability of findings. Other, more direct approaches to inviting participation from counselor educators (e.g., personalized invitations to faculty) could result in more diversity of instructors and their programs and enable researchers to calculate response rates, something that was not possible in the current study.

The intentional use of PGGs to promote ethnic identity development in a multicultural counseling course offers opportunities and challenges for culturally biased interactions among group members. Because groups often are viewed as microcosms of everyday life, effective group leaders can help counseling students explore their beliefs, feelings, and interactions in the here and now and then generalize what they have learned to the outside world (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). As advances in technology seemingly isolate people from one another, PGGs can provide a humanizing element to counselor education by offering feelings of universality, cohesion, and interpersonal learning (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Findings that level of ethnic identity development has been correlated positively with multicultural counselor competence (Vinson & Neimeyer, 2003) suggest that identifying effective approaches to promote counselor ethnic identity development is particularly critical in counselor education. Including PGGs as one component of a multicultural counseling course may be one way for counselor educators to stimulate, promote, and support their students' ethnic identity development.

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