

Competencies for Counseling the Multiracial Population

Multi-Racial/Ethnic Counseling Concerns (MRECC) Interest Network of the American Counseling Association Taskforce

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In memory of Dr. Bea Wehrly for her tireless work and advocacy. The publication of her book, Counseling Interracial Individuals and Families, by the American Counseling Association in 1996 was a major part of this journey.

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Competencies for Counseling the Multiracial Population: Couples, Families, and Individuals; and Transracial Adoptees and Families

The Multiracial/Ethnic Counseling Concerns (MRECC) Interest Network of the American Counseling Association has developed the following competencies in order to promote the development of sound professional counseling practices to competently and effectively attend to the diverse needs of the multiple heritage population.

Section I: Overview

This document is intended to provide counseling competencies for working with and advocating for members of the multiracial population including interracial couples, multiracial families, and multiracial individuals, and transracial adoptees and families. The document is intended for use by counselors and other helping professionals; individuals who educate, train, and/or supervise current and future counseling and other helping professionals; as well as individuals who may conduct research and/or other professional activities with members of the multiracial population. To this end, the goal is for these competencies to serve as a resource and provide a framework for how counseling and other helping professionals can competently and effectively work with and advocate for members of the multiracial population.

Acronyms

Several acronyms will be presented and used in this document. The first, *MRECC* (Multiracial/Multiethnic Counseling Concerns) is the name of the group that has been working to raise awareness about interracial couples, multiracial families, and multiracial individuals, and transracial adoptees and families in the counseling and other helping professions since the mid-1990s. Further information about this group follows. The term *multiracial population* is used to refer to the communities commonly acknowledged by and included under this broad umbrella,

F. Assessment

G. Research and Program Evaluation

H. Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice

References and resources used to construct the competencies and deemed as beneficial to those who may utilize this document are provided at the end of the document, followed by a complete glossary of terms utilized in the document and in various oral and written discussions about the mixed race and transracial adoption experience.

Section II: Interracial Couples, Multiracial Families, and Multiracial Individuals

Since the repeal of anti-miscegenation laws in the United States brought about by the Supreme Court's landmark *Loving v. Virginia* decision in 1967 there has been a dramatic increase in interracial marriages and partnerships. Subsequently, there has also been a dramatic increase in the rate of births of children from these marriages and partnerships. Data from the 2010 U.S. Census revealed that 8.4% of all marriages and 15% of all new marriages in the U.S. were interracial (Wang, 2012). In addition, nine million individuals or 2.9% of the total U.S. population were identified as being of two or more socially constructed racial categories, with over 4.2 million of these individuals being under the age of 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Despite these dramatic increases, multiracial couples and individuals continue to confront environmental systems that are biased and to deal with stressors associated with negative and hostile encounters rooted in racism and other forms of oppression.

Micro, meso, and macro environmental factors figure prominently in the daily experiences of members of the multiracial population and over the course of the lifespan. The impact of these factors are best observed in Root's (2002) Ecological Framework for Understanding Multiracial Identity, a model designed to provide a structure for understanding the racial identity

development of multiracial individuals (Root, 2003). The model is borne out of the sociological constructs of interaction and includes the variables gender; regional history of race relations; inherited influences, encompassing languages spoken at home, parent's identity, nativity, extended family, names, home values, sexual orientation, and phenotype; traits, encompassing temperament, social skills, talents, and coping skills; social interaction with community, encompassing home, school/work, community, friends, outside the community; and identity, which encompasses and includes designated or chosen racial and ethnic identity (Root, 2003). These factors and variables alone and in combination have considerable impact and influence on multiracial identity development, and are important to understanding multiracial individuals in

example, there is a significant body of literature that addresses couples and families in which one of the partners/parents is White, but a dearth in the literature examining families in which both partners/parents are of color. Finally, as with some other populations, the limits of research due to bias, lack of access to information, and lack of normative information must be acknowledged.

A. Competencies for Working with Interracial Couples and Multiracial Families

Human Growth and Development

Culturally Competent Counselors will:

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- Understand that each partner may have different experiences with Racial Minority Identity, White Racial Identity, Multiracial Identity Development, and/or Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Identity Development.
- Understand that identity is a fluid process and how this process impacts the relationship
- Recognize how prejudicial attitudes, discrimination, and pressure to stay with one's particular race or ethnic group may affect developmental decisions made by interracial/interethnic families and couples regardless of their efforts to be resilient.

Social and Cultural Diversity

Culturally Competent Counselors will:

Counselor Awareness:

- Understand their personal cultures and how these cultures might impact the assumptions they have about their clients' culture and intercultural status as a couple/family.
- Acknowledge and recognize when the counselor's culture may impact the way the couple perceives the counselor as safe or unsafe in establishing a therapeutic relationship.
- Identify the phase of cultural identity development of each member of the couple or family and make this an explicit part of the counseling process when needed.
- Acknowledge that couples and families are existing within a dominant U.S. cultural worldview value set that may negatively impact differences in values within the couple.
- Understand that racism and heterosexism still exist and that interracial/interethnic couples may experience prejudice and discrimination from outside their relationship along with their own internalized messages.
- Understand the ways in which oppression, prejudice and discrimination impact a couple's relationship.
- Familiarize themselves with the cultures of each member of the couple and family through research and by asking the clients about their cultures and each of their unique processes with acculturating into the dominant U.S. cultural worldview perspective.
- Acknowledge that racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and religious oppression are worldviews as well as value systems that may undermine healthy functioning of a0.2 (e)02 (a) 0.2 () 0.2

- Appreciate that culture goes beyond race and ethnicity and includes factors such as gender, religion/spirituality, diverse sexual orientations and gender identity/expressions, social class, (dis)ability and other areas that impact their cultural assumptions.
- Understand the importance of the potential differences of experiences based upon the various racial or ethnic combinations of couples with a special focus on two persons of

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- Understand that the multiracial population continues to be a hidden population that is often excluded from many discussions of racial and ethnic issues due to multiple heritage individuals' lack of identity with any one racial or ethnic group.
- Understand the importance of using appropriate language when referring to multiracial

- Provide advocacy efforts at the micro, meso, and macro levels to develop consciousness-raising and public awareness of the multiracial population's concerns, history, sociopolitical influences, resilience, and strengths. !
- Understand that the ACA Ethics Code and related standards (e.g.

predicted negative consequences for Black children's racial identity, adjustment, and preparation for coping with racism and oppression; referred to transracial adoption as "cultural genocide;" and called for a halt on these adoptions (NABSW, 1972).

Similarly, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 was enacted to end the forcible relinquishment and adoption of Native American children. These events had important repercussions. A preference for same-race adoptions was promoted and the beginning of a new research literature base commenced in which transracial adoptions and their outcomes were the focus of empirical investigations. Researchers focused primarily on the adoptions of Black and biracial children with African ancestry and their psychological adjustment and racial identities. In response to the overrepresentation of children of color in foster care and without permanent placements, the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 and the Interethnic Placement Act of 1996 were passed to prohibit agencies that received federal funding from denhcm BT 50p1 a 0. 0.2 (t) 0. 0 50 0 4 0

adoption. Disparities (e.g., cultural, political, economic, social) that exist among adoptees,

- Address occupational stereotypes experienced by TAs, stemming from cultural and racial stereotypes and enacted through racial microaggressions (e.g., adoptees of African descent as inherently athletic, and adoptees of Asian descent as skilled at math and science).
- Understand the discord that can result from a mismatch between adoptive parents' and adoptees' academic and career aptitudes.
- Recognize that tasks related to racial/ethnic identity development (i.e., immersion in one's birth culture, or reunion with birth family members) may delay and alter career development and decision making activities.
- Stay abreast of the current literature on career counseling and research according to best practices with clientele of color, to consider ways it may uniquely apply to members of the TrAKN community.

Assessment

Culturally Competent Counselors will:

- Understand and adhere to the legal and ethical guidelines regarding best-practice standards for assessments (e.g., ACA Code of Ethics, Standards for Multicultural Assessment), and know current literature on the spectrum of adaptive and healthy TrAKN functioning, to meet the unique needs of TrAKN members.
- Seek supervision/consultation with TrAKN communities and resources to supplement knowledge base, minimize bias, and avoid inappropriate or harmful assessments.
- When assessing clients, recognize that initially presented issues in counseling may mask adoption-related issues in need of clinical attention and assessment (e.g., relationship challenges as masking issues with oppression or internalized oppression).
- Avoid assessments that over-pathologize TrAKN members. Seek to eliminate bias toward TrAKN members in assessments through careful consideration of the theories utilized, item content, adoption insensitive language and meaning, normative samples, referral questions, and dynamics in assessment interactions.
- Understand that primary considerations in assessment (e.g., measure development/item development, normative samples, psychometric properties) must account for the diverse experiences of TrAKN members in the creation, norming, administration, scoring, interpretation, and report-writing aspects of assessment.
- Advocate for the creation of appropriate norming groups for assessment measures that are used with TrAKN members, particularly TAs, to prevent biased interpretations of assessments in various domains including adjustment indicators such as aptitude, cognitive ability, personality, career, substance abuse, and interpersonal relationships.
- Use assessment measures including intake paperwork, interview protocols, and screening measures that contain inclusive, adoption-sensitive language and that allows for the diverse family constellations and identities of TraAKN members (e.g., same sex parents, foster and adopted family members, first/birth parents, diverse racial identifications within families).
- Recognize that comprehensive assessments for TrAKN members includes attention to their adoptive and relinquishment histories as well as the impact of early trauma, multiple

adoption/foster placements, relinquishment, oppression (racial, cultural, and adoptive),
adoption placement, pre-adoptive history, post-adoption adjustment, adoption disruptions

research on internationally adoptees may not generalize to those adopted domestically).

- Utilize research and program evaluation participation incentives to provide valuable resources to TrAKN individuals and communities.
- In adoption-related research, assess and account for participants' contextual variables to increase accurate interpretation of TrAKN members' experiences (e.g., heritability, pre-post adoption histories, adoptive parenting styles, TAs' environments, adjustment, mental health concerns, or other psychological constructs).

Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice

Culturally Competent Counselors will:

- Develop and apply ethical decision-making models that account for the needs and concerns of the TrAKN, and recognize the ethical issues inherent in adoption practice and the clinical ramifications of unethical practice (e.g., coercion to relinquish children for adoption, child trafficking, poorly regulated adoption systems).
- Advocate for improved clinical competence among professionals, including school and mental health counselors, counselors-in-training, supervisees, teachers, and the medical community about issues and treatment needs unique to the TrAKN population.
- Recognize their ongoing ethical and clinical responsibility to all members of the TrAKN when working with families that experience disruption, dissolution, or displacement, and commit to providing ethical and responsible follow-up to provide continuity of care for all members (including minors) of the TrAKN.
- Acknowledge the unique confidentiality issues related to open adoption, open birth certificate access, and sensitive pre-placement information of TrAKN members (e.g., revealing relinquishment information or mental health histories of adoptees and birth parents).
- Obtain training and supervised experience in family counseling and family systems to ethically and competently work with the TrAKN.
- Be able and willing to advocate for TrAKN clients' dignity and welfare when challenged by supervisors/colleagues/other professionals who may act upon personal beliefs or biases regarding adoption or race/ethnicity.
- Seek specialized training/education through professional workshops and conferences, professional literature, community engagement, and current news and events for TrAKN individuals and communities.
- Advocate for and support TrAKN individuals and communities by providing affirmation, acceptance, and

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! Loving Day – www.lovingday.org

MAVIN Foundation – www.mavinfoundation.org

Mixed Heritage Center – www.mixedheritagecenter.org

Mixed Race Studies – www.mixedracestudies.org

National Council for Adoption – www.adoptioncouncil.org

PACT: An Adoption Alliance – www.pactadopt.org

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Glossary

Adoptee: A person who has been legally integrated into a family by parents to whom they were not physically born. The term *adopted child* often indicates an adoptee who is still a child (Russell, 1996).

Adoption: Legally, adoption is the legal transfer (of a child) from birth parents to the care of adoptive parent(s) who then assumes all the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of being the child's parent (Sifferman, 1993).

Adoptive family life-cycle: Refers to the tasks and patterns common among families who adopt (e.g., making the decision to adopt; kidokiiong foro adopi;0.2 (on t) 0.2 (he1 Tf [(a) 0.2 (dop) -0.2 (i)t) 0.2 (;o`

responsibilities of any parent (Sifferman, 1993).

Anti-miscegenation: Against race mixing and/or interracial marriage (Kelley & Root, 2003; Root, 1992).

Attachment: Child's connection to a parent or other caregiver that endures over time, establishes an interpersonal connection, and aids in the development of a sense of self.

Attachment parenting: This describes an overall parenting style that seeks to promote secure attachment strategies within the parent and child relationship.

Biologicalism: This refers to the preference within society for families formed biologically over families formed through adoption or foster care. Families formed through biology are viewed as more permanent and authentic than those formed through other means.

Bicultural: Refers to a person who is a product of two distinct cultural groups and moves between two sets of cultural norms and expectations (Gibbs, 1989; Root, 1990).

Biracial: Refers to an individual whose parents are of two distinct socially constructed racial groups. However, the term also accurately refers to an individual who has parents of the same socially constructed racial group, when one or both parents are biracial or where there is a known multigenerational family history of racial mixing that is significant to how the individual chooses to identify (Kelley & Root, 2003; Root, 1992).

Closed adoption: An adoption that involves total confidentiality and sealed records, providing no contact or identifying information between the individuals involved in the adoption (Gritter, 1997). Adoption in the past century in America was dominated by this practice (Gritter, 1997; Melina & Roszia, 1993, Pertman, 2000).

Culture: Is comprised of a set of shared beliefs, values, practices, attitudes, and traditions that are associated within a group of people often linked by geographical and physical shared traits.

2003, p.viii).

Interracial: Involving two or more socially constructed racial groups. The term typically pertains to couples where each partner is of a different racial background; however the term is also used to describe offspring of these unions and families (Kelley & Root, 2003).

Microaggressions: “Brief, commonplace, daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, *whether intentional or unintentional*, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative ... slights and insults ...” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Racial microaggressions are race-based, and are often referred to as more subtle, modern forms of racism. Microaggressions can also target other groups beyond race (e.g., ethnic, religious, and gendered groups).

Miscegenation: The act of sexual mixing within or out of marriage and between persons of distinctly different racial backgrounds (Spikard, 1989).

Mixed Heritage: A term used to describe persons who are of two or more different racial backgrounds that considers the biological and cultural variables that underlie designations of race and ethnicity (Stephan, 1992).

Mixed Race:

Reculturation:

parental rights may be in the process of being terminated.

- *International Adoption*: is the adoption of a child from another country (often referred to as a “sending country”) by an adult(s) of another country (often referred to as a “receiving country”). These adoptions involve the immigration of the adopted child. This is also referred to as transnational adoption or intercountry adoption.
- *Kinship adoption*: Sometimes called relative adoption or kinship care. Refers adoption by a relative, such as grandparent, aunt, uncle, tribe or clan, stepparents, or other extended family member, godparent, or someone who is has a kinship bong with the child. In kinship adoption, the adoption is formal and legal whereas in kinship care, the caregiving may be informal or foster care.

persons are from two different cultures of origin. Many of these types of adoptions are also transracial (see below).

- *Transracial Adoption*: refers to an adoption in which the adoptive parents and the adopted person are from two different racial and/or ethnic groups.