

**Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice**

By: Sue, D., Sue, D., Neville, H. & Smith, L., 8th edition, (2019)

**Book Review**

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**Abstract:** This article provides a comprehensive review of the book “Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice” by Sue, D., Sue, D., Neville, H. & Smith, L. 8th edition. Chapter 6, however, is authored by Christina M. Capodilupo, Ph.D, at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her name does not appear on the book cover and appears only in the table of contents as well as on the actual chapter (p. 119). The book is very important and is considered essential resource in the field. Furthermore, the book contents can be helpful to educators, mental health professionals, medical professionals and all those who serve diverse clients.

**Keywords:** Multicultural Counseling, Culturally Diverse

**1. About the Book**

A manual of insightful information that covers several aspects of the counseling process and raises professionals’ awareness of personal internal dynamics as well as the dynamics of the counseling process. It presents information about counselors from both white and colored backgrounds in various settings. Furthermore, it provides information about cultural characteristics of various cultural groups as well as the needs of populations in specific circumstances in the counseling process (e.g. clients of old age & clients living with poverty). The book represents a significant contribution to the field of multicultural counseling. In spite of some shortcomings, it is a must read for mental health professionals. It can also be of great benefits to educators, lawyers, law enforcement personnels, and all those who interact with the general public in diverse and multicultural societies.

The book consists of 520 pages of large size with paper cover. It is organized in two main sections where each section is made of four main parts where each part is made of several chapters (12 chapters for the first section, and 14 for the second section thus totaling 26 chapters altogether).

Authors present the book as “has been the cutting-edge text in multicultural counseling and mental health, used in an overwhelming majority of graduate training programs in counseling and clinical psychology” (p. xix). It is very clear that it provides a very comprehensive and valuable reference and resource for establishing the importance of multicultural counseling competencies as well as for shedding light on specific characteristics of certain populations that affect the counseling process which is a very important advantage of the book. Although there are other books that address counseling and psychotherapy to diverse populations such as the “Handbook of Psychotherapy and Religious Diversity” by Richards and Bergin, eds. (2014), and “Counseling Across Cultures” by Paul Pedersen et al., eds. (1989 & 2015) among many others, this book is distinct in its focus on the competencies as well as on addressing the issue of multicultural counseling from more angles than other texts including focusing on the client/counselor inner dynamics, the counselor’s skills as well as on the counselor/client dynamics rather than being limited to the characteristics of various populations only.

## The Authors of the Book

The book's distinction can be attributed to both the contents as well as the authors particularly Dr. Derald Wing Sue who is well known as one of the leaders in multicultural counseling competencies. He has been also known for involvement, along with leaders like Paul Pedersen, in paving the way for the inclusion of such competencies in professional circles until multicultural competencies became required qualifications for counseling/therapy practice. Professional associations (e.g. the American Counseling Association [ACA], and the American Psychological Association [APA]) require professionals to be adequately educated, trained and aware of cultures they serve. Of his significant contributions, Sue, Arredondo & McDavis (1992) introduced the Multicultural Counseling Competencies that included 3 components (attitude, beliefs, and skills) for the three elements of counseling which are: (1) the counselor, (2) the client, and (3) the issue at hand for counseling, thus amounting to 9 competencies (see. Sue, Arredondo & McDavis (1992); Sue, D. W. et al. 1998 & Sue, D.W. 2001) among other writings.

## The Importance of Multicultural Competencies

The ACA Code of Ethics 2014 defines Multicultural / diversity competence as the “counselor’s cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge about self and others, and how this awareness and knowledge are applied effectively in practice with clients and client groups” (p.20). It also defines multicultural/diversity counseling as “counseling that recognizes diversity and embraces approaches that support the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of individuals within their own historical, cultural, economic, political and psychosocial contexts” (p. 20). The APA code of ethics including 2010 and 2016 amendments, addresses multicultural competencies in three points in section (two) titled: Competence. The three points can be summarized in the following: (a) Psychologists provide services, teaching and conduct research with populations and in areas within the boundaries of their competence (i.e. education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study or professional experience), (b) psychologists have to obtain education, information, knowledge & consultation whenever necessary to understand the factors associated with the population being served except in providing services in emergencies, and (c) Psychologists must undertake adequate education, training, and consultation adequate to the population they are planning to serve if they lack such competencies (Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct).

## 2. The Book Review

To understand the scope of the book, I find it essential to provide the following details. The first section deals with the multiple dimensions of multicultural counseling and therapy. It includes four main parts which are titled as follows: (I) The Affective and Conceptual Dimensions of Multicultural Counseling and Therapy, (II) The Impact and Social Justice Implications of Counseling and Psychotherapy, (III) The Practice Dimensions of Multicultural Counseling and Therapy, and (IV) Racial, Ethnic and Cultural (REC) Attitudes in Multicultural Counseling and Therapy.

As seen in the titles of both sections' parts, and similarly throughout the book, the authors use “therapy” and “psychotherapy” interchangeably which may be due to different authors writing different parts and chapters. Although, these two terms can be understood as one and the same by many, it would have been better had only one of these terminologies been used consistently throughout the book especially when we know that some prefer to use the term “psychotherapy” for comprehensive, long-term approach practiced by licensed clinical psychologists, clinical counselors, clinical social workers, psychiatrists, etc. while the term “therapy” is used for short-term, solution focused particularly humanistic approaches (e.g. person-centered). If used intentionally, the authors may have wanted to communicate that the information presented in the book could be used in all possible forms of counseling. These differences of opinion in both public and professional circles, however, would have warranted an explanation of the use for these two terms, or at least stating that they are being used interchangeably.

Section Two is devoted to Multicultural counseling to specific populations. Its four main parts are as follows: (V) Understanding Specific populations, (VI) Counseling and Therapy with racial/ethnic minority group populations, (VII) counseling and special circumstances involving racial/ethnic minority populations, and (VIII) counseling and therapy with other multicultural populations. Chapters of this section deal mainly with culturally competent assessment as well as specific populations such as African Americans, American Indians/Native Americans and Alaska Natives, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders/ Latinx populations / multiracial, Arab Americans and

Muslim Americans, and Jewish Americans and populations in specific circumstances such as: older adults, refugees, individuals living in poverty, and individuals with disabilities, etc.

Because of the size of the book and the vast scope of its contents, I will provide the highlights of various parts along with a brief review for its contents.

- Part I of this section is dedicated to chapters titled: (1) obstacles to developing multicultural competence and cultural “humility”: understanding resistance to multicultural training, (2) multicultural counseling and therapy (MCT), and (3) multicultural counseling competence for counselors and therapists of marginalized groups. The competencies in these chapters represent a shift from the competencies mentioned above and previously introduced by Sue, Arredondo & McDavis (1992) which dominated the literature in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The new approach presented in this section reject the notion of multiculturalism and, instead, adopts the concept of interculturalism which advocates that cultural variations consist of three levels: (a) every human is like all others (i.e. universal values and humanity sharing), (b) every human is like some others (i.e. group affiliation), and (c) every human is like no other (i.e. uniqueness of the individual). This approach was recommended and adopted earlier in the literature by Lartery (2003) as a result of the realization of inadequacy of terminology such as “cross-cultural” and “multicultural” for their inability to accurately represent the cultural similarities and differences. In this part, it appears that terminology remains a problematic issue for the profession. For instance, the expression of “cultural humility” suggests the persistence of a supremacy view of self and one’s own cultural affiliation while looking down at other cultures. Rather than “humility”, the use of terms like “realization of real self-worth and the worth of others”, “realizing the worth of the client”, or something to that extent would sound more acceptable and more appropriate.

Both models of multicultural competencies remain, however, insufficient and incapable of producing real multicultural sensitivity and awareness. According to Tomlinson-Clarke (2013), current multicultural training models are limited in helping counselors to acquire cultural competencies needed for effective interventions with culturally diverse populations in global communities. Because acquiring cultural competence is a developmental process for the counselor (Sue & Sue, 2013), multicultural training must provide continuing opportunities to use self-reflective skills to confront bias assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (Sue & Sue, 1990; Pedersen, 2003).

- Part II of this section includes the following three chapters: (4) political and social justice: implications of counseling and psychotherapy, (5) the impact of systemic oppression within the counseling process: client worldview and the counselor credibility, and (6) microaggressions in counseling and psychotherapy. This “microaggression” chapter, however, did not address what many minority population members face on a daily basis which is known as “the multiple oppression syndrome” which refers to the person who may be subjected to multiple layers of oppression because of the various minority characteristics he/she may have. An illustration of that can be seen in the following example: an old woman of color, who is a refugee, and is wearing a Muslim headscarf known as (*hijab*). Such a person can be subjected to oppression because of her age, gender, color, refugee status and religion. If she escapes oppression for one factor, she is likely to be oppressed for all others.
- Part III of this section deals with the practice dimensions of multicultural counseling and therapy and includes chapters on (7) barriers to multicultural counseling, (8) communication style and its impact on counseling, (9) multicultural evidence-based practice, and (10) traditional healing methods of non-western indigenous populations. Addressing barriers to sensitive and effective multicultural counseling and non-western traditional healing methods, each in one chapter only seems very huge generalization unless it is meant for illustration only. Reducing cultures into only “whites or and colored”, “whites and non-whites”, or “majority or dominant and minority” is clearly “reductionism” which limits the various ethnic and cultural groups in the discussion into only two. Furthermore, it assumes that all experiences and outcomes of those experiences have the same effects on the whole culture of discussion, a major deficiency throughout the book. Communication skills are only but one single area of skills that are required for sensitive and effective multicultural counseling. This makes the reader wonder if its inclusion in this book is meant to just highlight its importance.

Since the cultural differences could vary at all levels: the universal, the group, and the individual, it would be better to train the counselor/therapist to be able to discover all of these differences on their own and to

develop the best strategies to deal with them and/or utilized them for the benefit of therapy rather than to adhere to stated information that may be inaccurate and different from reality.

- Part IV address racial. Ethnic and cultural (REC) attitudes in multicultural counseling. It includes two chapters; (11) on identity attitudes of people of color, and (12) white racial identity development. Although the chapters contain very useful information, there is an apparent assumption of one single identity for the people of color as well as one single identity for whites. The book also illustrates the identity struggle for “Jenny” who has oriental heritage and lives in denial of her cultural background and heritage, but she is forced to acknowledge and consequently accept her cultural heritage through the large number of students from oriental backgrounds on her college campus. This shows that the book collectively treats all oriental cultures as one thus ignoring the riches and distinctions of each culture, while ignoring intercultural differences at both the group and individual levels. At the same time, it refuses to acknowledge the acculturation and assimilation process which Jenny went through to become part of the “white” culture despite of her facial features and complexions which reveal her ancestors’ cultural origin.

It is worth noting that the book includes highly valuable sections in each chapter that can help in the comprehension of the contents and invite self-reflection on its applications and implications. These sections include chapter’s objectives, reflection and discussion questions, implications for clinical practice, summary and glossary terms. They help put the chapter’s information into focus. The book, therefore, seems to be better fit if introduced as a practical guide and manual for training purposes inside and outside the classroom rather than a textbook.

Furthermore, the title “Counseling the Culturally Diverse” suggests that counseling could take place between a counselor and a client who are from the same culture which is an outdated perspective and approach. Dragun (1989) declared that “Culture is in everyone’s own head” thus indicating that multiple cultures could exist in the same family and that culture is no longer defined by a group of people who uphold the same values and have one same lifestyle. Furthermore, Pedersen (1991) & (2013) added that “Multiculturalism is the fourth force in the counseling process”, with the other three forces being the counselor, the client and the counseling issue. As a result, every encounter whether in counseling or not, should be treated as multicultural. If applying the model introduced in this book, it should be considered as intercultural which suggests the presence of shared universal values, shared or distinct group values and definitely unique individual values in every counseling interaction.

While the title of the book includes “theory and practice”, it is very hard to find theory reflected in the contents of the book.

### 3. Conclusion

While there are some shortcomings, the book is a very valuable reference, and it is another step towards the development of very respectful, sensitive and effective counselling process for all clients who need it for development, prevention and intervention. One of the most important changes needed is to go beyond the consideration of cultural characteristics as defining individuals particularly in this time and age of overwhelming individualistic orientation and cultural variations within the one family.

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