

SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT Student Research Brief

What is the impact of the counselor's gender, race, and sexual orientation on client satisfaction?

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Introduction

Counselors must be aware that client satisfaction can be affected, if their race, gender, and sexual orientation doesn't match the client's. Will clients be more apt to follow treatment plans and continue counseling with an agency even if their demographics don't match the counselor's? Research has been done that show difference of gender being the biggest factor that can affect the client's overall satisfaction of the counseling. SOURCE?

Summary of Primary Findings

Flaherty and Adams (YEAR) stated that most of the more recent research seems to suggest that gender matching is beneficial only for women and may be relatively detrimental for men. Research has also suggested that clients treated by female therapists experienced more symptom improvement and reported more satisfaction with treatment than did those treated by male therapists SOURCE?. Studies SOURCE? using minority clients report contradictory findings. In Vail's study of African American clients, the majority of clients dropped out of treatment if they were assigned a therapist of the same sex. Asian male clients were shown to stay in treatment longer if assigned to a male therapist rather than if they were assigned to a female therapist. Project Liberty was designed as a research idea that would help agency's better evaluate their services SOURCE. Project Liberty service recipients completed a anonymous questionnaire that measured client satisfaction with 11 aspects of service quality; two were counselor's cultural sensitivity and counselor's ability to speak the same language as the client. The counselor's respect for the client and his or her cultural sensitivity were rated particularly high in the responses of importance. Bonner (1997) argued that African American clients would be more likely terminate counseling sessions if their counselor was Caucasian. In his research he found that the counselor's race in relation to the client's had little to do with their overall satisfaction of their counseling experience.

DATA AT A GLANCE

RESEARCH HAS ALSO SUGGESTED THAT

CLIENTS TREATED BY FEMALE THERAPISTS

EXPERIENCE MORE SYMPTOM IMPROVEMENT

AND REPORTED MORE SATISFACTION WITH

TREATMENT THAN DID THOSE TREATED BY

MALES. SOURCE?

Implications for Social Work Practice

The implications for future practice is that clients preference may start to change counseling as we know it today. Instead of agencies deciding the right counselor for the client to see, perhaps the client may be empowered to make that decision. If this kind of system were put in place then the likelihood of reverse discrimination against counselors could take place.

Recommendations for Practice with Systems of All Sizes **this section should have been numbered (there should have been 10 recommendations)**

Counseling centers should conduct surveys to identify if clients in their agency prefer if counselors' race, gender, and sexual orientation match their own. Counseling centers must demonstrate a willingness to become culturally competent. Agencies should look to professionalize their staff by becoming multicultural in the people they hire. Agencies need to hire a full time counselor who can speak Spanish. In being aware of this bias, agencies could ask clients which counselors they would prefer to see, if after taking a questionnaire it is revealed of a hidden preference.

Conclusion

In conclusion research has proven that client satisfaction, in terms of continued counseling, can greatly be affected by the differences that exist between the counselor and the client's race, gender, and sexual orientation. In the research it was shown that female therapists establish a better rapport with clients, thus making them feel more comfortable in the counseling setting.

David: overall this was short (barely 1 ½ pages); you did not address 10 recommendations; sources weren't always cited.

SCORE: 20/30

References

Bonner, B.W. (1997). Black male perspectives of counseling on a predominantly white university campus. *Journal of Black Studies*, 27(3): 395-408.

Flaherty, J.A., & Adams, S. (1998). Therapist-patient race and sex matching: predictors of treatment duration. *Psychiatric Times*, 15(1).

Jackson, C.T., Allen, G., Essock, S.M., Felton, C.J., & Donahue, S.A. (2006). Clients' satisfaction with project liberty counseling services. *Psychiatric Services*, 57(9).

About the Author

I am a senior in the UTC Social Work Program. I am currently an intern at the counseling center of the Partnership for families, children and adults. I hope to graduate this year and go on next year to pursue my master's degree in counseling.

Table 1

Demographic distribution of participants in telephone interviews and questionnaires about satisfaction with Project Liberty counseling services compared with all service recipients in 2003^a

Data source	Total N	Men		Women		English was primary language		Caucasian ^b		African American		Other race		Hispanic	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Brief questionnaires															
Pilot	107	38	36	68	64	83	79	59	61	25	26	13	13	30	29
Programwide	356	145	42	203	58	269	79	206	64	39	12	76	24	75	22
Telephone interviews															
Crisis counseling															
recipients	153	48	31	105	69	125	82	86	58	26	17	37	25	29	20
Enhanced services															
recipients	93	33	35	60	65	78	84	71	78	7	8	13	14	20	21
Service encounter logs ^c	194,029	92,705	48	100,051	52	149,033	77	61,063	32	90,598	26	23,012	12	57,787	30

^a Some data are missing for each of the pilot samples, and percentages are based on only existing data.
^b On the service encounter logs, Hispanic and Caucasian were mutually exclusive racial categories, whereas in the interviews and on the brief questionnaires race and ethnicity were separate questions. Like categories can be compared by summing the Caucasian and Hispanic categories from the logs and comparing those sums to the Caucasian groups for the interviews and brief questionnaires.
^c For calendar year 2003.