

## **A multicultural personal growth group as a pedagogical strategy with graduate counseling students**

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*Abstract: The present study investigated a six-week multicultural personal growth group as a pedagogical strategy to support first-year graduate counseling students' (N = 20) levels of ethnic identity development (Phinney & Ong, 2007) and social-cognitive maturity (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Students' levels of ethnic identity and social-cognitive development did not change; however, 90% (n = 18) of the students reported valuing the group experience and appreciated the group leaders facilitation of the pedagogical strategy. Implications for the scholarship of teaching and learning are discussed.*

*Keywords: counselor education and development, multicultural counseling and development, scholarship of teaching and learning, social-cognitive development*

Multicultural personal growth groups may be an effective pedagogical strategy to promote graduate counseling students' ethnic identity development and social-cognitive maturity (e.g., Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Rowell & Benschhoff, 2008; Villalba & Redmond, 2008). Specifically, personal growth groups are experiential pedagogical strategies that foster emotional learning experiences and insight into an individual's strengths and areas necessitating strengthening (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). In addition, personal growth groups provide an opportunity for graduate students to engage in course material, participate in self-reflection, and promote feelings of hope and efficacy (e.g., Faith, Wong, & Carpenter, 1995; Lieberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973). Within graduate counseling programs, personal growth groups support students' development of multicultural competencies (e.g., Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Villalba & Redmond, 2008) and ethnic identity development (Rowell & Benschhoff, 2008). Furthermore, personal growth groups may promote graduate students' social-cognitive maturation, as group experiences encourage reflection, self-exploration, and disequilibrium (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Lambie & Sias, 2009).

Experiential learning activities (e.g., multicultural personal growth groups) are beneficial to graduate students: (a) exposing students to multiculturalism, (b) increasing multicultural awareness, (c) aiding in graduate student cultural empathy, and (d) challenging students' beliefs about diversity (e.g., Pope-Davis, Breaux, & Liu, 1997; Ridley & Lingle, 1996; Villalba & Redmond, 2008). Specifically, Leonard (1996) suggested that multicultural-focused groups or consciousness-raising groups are an integral part of building multicultural self-awareness and social awareness of oppressive systems for counselors-in-training. Nevertheless, to determine the

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effectiveness of multicultural pedagogical strategies, additional research is warranted (Hill, 2003; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Ridley, Espelage, & Rubenstein, 1997; Vasquez, 1997). In particular, an investigation of the impact of a multicultural personal growth group (pedagogical intervention) on graduate counseling students' ethnic identity development (Phinney & Ong, 2007) and social-cognitive maturity (Hy & Loevinger, 1996) would contribute to the scholarship of teaching and learning literature (SoTL; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011).

## **I. Ethnic Identity Development and Social-Cognitive Maturity.**

Scholars note the importance of ethnic identity development and social-cognitive maturity in the preparation of ethical and effective counseling professionals. We described these two constructs to set an accurate context for the SoTL investigation that follows.

### *A. Ethnic Identity Development.*

Ethnic identity development (Phinney & Ong, 2007) emphasizes an ethnic sense of belonging, positive attitudes towards ones' ethnicity, and commitment to ethnic traditions and practices in an individuals' cultural background (Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996). Unlike racial identity that emphasizes physical characteristics (e.g., skin color); ethnic identity encompasses the acquisition or maintenance of cultural characteristics that define a particular ethnic group (Helms, 1996). Phinney's (1990) *Ethnic Identity Model* offers a conceptual framework of ethnic identity development as an awareness and commitment to ones' cultural background (e.g., engaging in cultural practices). In addition, the *Ethnic Identity Model* (Phinney, 1990) is organized into three distinct hierarchical levels: (a) unexamined ethnic identity, (b) ethnic identity search/moratorium, and (c) ethnic identity achievement according to individuals' identity formation surrounding their ethnicity. Phinney's model of ethnic identity development provides a comprehensive exploration of ethnicity while being inclusive in application for all ethnicities (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999).

Ethnic identity development has been empirically tested with diverse populations (e.g., Phinney, 1989; Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney & Ambarsoom, 1987; Phinney & Tarver, 1988; Roberts et al., 1999; Sobansky et al., 2010; Syed & Azmitia, 2008; Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2002). In addition, higher levels of ethnic identity development are predictive of multicultural competence in counseling and counseling psychology graduate students (Chao, 2006). Specific to graduate counseling students, ethnic identity development correlates with cultural competence (e.g., Evans & Foster, 2000; Middleton et al., 2005; Neville et al., 1996; Vinson & Niemeyer, 2000), which is a desirable counselor quality. In addition, a small group experience in a multicultural counseling course promotes greater levels of students' self-identified scores of ethnic identity development as compared to non-participant students (Rowell & Benschhoff, 2005). Nevertheless, additional research is needed to examine the impact of a pedagogical intervention (multicultural personal growth group) on graduate counseling students' ethnic identity development.

### *B. Social-Cognitive Development.*

Social-cognitive development (Loevinger, 1976; 1998), or *ego development*, describes the paradigm in which individuals perceive themselves and others through interpersonal and

intrapersonal experiences. In Loevinger's theory of social-cognitive development, ego maturation is central to an individual's personality formation, including domains of cognitive development, character development, interpersonal style, and conscious preoccupations (Loevinger, 1976). Within social-cognitive development, individuals mature through nine invariant hierarchical levels: (a) E2 - Impulsive, (b) E3 - Self-protective, (c) E4 - Conformist, (d) E5 - Self-aware, (e) E6 - Conscientious, (f) E7 - Individualistic, (g) E8 - Autonomous, and (h) E9- Integrated (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Individuals' levels of ego functioning are based on their interaction with their environment, where assimilating new information into existing schema results in ego stability and adapting their existing schema to accommodate new information promotes developmental growth (Lambie & Sias, 2009). Furthermore, the levels of ego maturity are not age-specific, but are descriptive of hierarchical growth in a sequential manner based on individuals' interactions with their environment (Manners & Durkin, 2000).

Within the graduate counseling research, social-cognitive development (Loevinger, 1976; 1998) relates to desirable counselor qualities, such as resistance to burnout (Lambie, 2007), counselor effectiveness and perceptions of clients (Borders, Fong, & Neimeyer, 1986; Zinn, 1995), levels of multicultural competence (Cannon & Frank, 2009) and racial identity development (Watt, Robinson, & Lupton-Smith, 2002), acquisition of ethical and legal knowledge (Lambie, Hagedorn, & Ieva, 2010), the ability to develop a counseling theoretical orientation (Warren, 2008), and wellness (Lambie, Smith, & Ieva, 2009). In addition, counselors' social-cognitive development is important in their ability to be effective helping professionals working with clients and their diverse needs (e.g., case conceptualization; flexibility; Cannon & Frank, 2009; Lambie, 2007). Moreover, higher levels of ego maturity correlate with increased openness to individual differences and less stereotypical thinking (Watt et al., 2002). Furthermore, the fifth level of social-cognitive development (Self-aware, E5) was identified as the minimal level of function for counselors to be effective with their clients (Zinn, 1995). Nevertheless, research is warranted to examine whether a group experience may have the potential to promote student development (e.g., social-cognitive maturity) within graduate counselor preparation programs in graduate students.

## **II. Purpose of the Study.**

Given the significance of ethnic identity development (Phinney & Ong, 2007) and social-cognitive maturity (Hy & Loevinger, 1996) in counselors' practice (e.g., counseling skills, counselor wellness, multicultural competencies; Evans & Foster, 2000; Lambie et al., 2009; Middleton et al., 2005; Vinson & Niemeyer, 2000); we examined the impact of a six-week multicultural personal growth group on graduate counseling students' levels of these two constructs in an effort to identify potential implications for supporting future counselor effectiveness and SoTL. The two research questions investigated were (a) What is the impact of a six-week multicultural personal growth group on graduate counseling students' levels of ethnic identity development and social-cognitive maturation? and (b) What are graduate students' perceptions of a multicultural personal growth group experience as a pedagogical strategy?

### III. Methodology.

#### C. Procedures and Participants.

The sample included 20 masters-level counseling students at a large metropolitan research university in the southeastern United States. All the students were in their first-semester in a counselor education program and were enrolled in an *Introduction to the Counseling Profession* course. We attained approval to conduct the study from the university's Institutional Review Board. The data collection began during the first *Introduction to the Counseling Profession* class meeting and concluded following the completion of the six-week multicultural personal growth program. To protect the rights and confidentiality of participants, participation was voluntary, students' names and identifying information were not collected, and none of the data collected were reviewed or scored until after the completion of that academic semester. Of the 23 students participating in the group pedagogical intervention, 20 students completed all the data collection instruments (resulting in an 87.0% usable response rate).

#### D. Participant Characteristics.

The 20 graduate counseling students that participated were divided into two multicultural personal growth groups, where eleven students were in *Group One* and nine students were in *Group Two*. Overall, men were less represented than were women: there were five men (25%) and 15 females (75%). The ages of participants ranged from 22 - 51 years ( $M = 26.80$ ,  $SD = 7.28$ ). In addition, the racial/ethnic background identified reported by the participants was: Caucasian, 55% ( $n = 11$ ); African American, 20% ( $n = 4$ ); Hispanic/Latino, 5% ( $n = 1$ ); Other, 15% ( $n = 3$ ); and Asian, 5% ( $n = 1$ ). Furthermore, participants were asked to indicate their level of cultural competence on a four-point Likert Scale (e.g., one being satisfied) and 10% ( $n = 2$ ) identified as "very satisfied," 75% ( $n = 15$ ) "somewhat satisfied," and 15% ( $n = 3$ ) were "somewhat dissatisfied." Lastly, the participants represented three counseling specialties: (a) 55% ( $n = 11$ ) mental health, (b) 30% ( $n = 6$ ) marriage and family, and (c) 15% ( $n = 3$ ) school counseling.

#### E. Pedagogical Intervention (Multicultural Personal Growth Group).

The multicultural personal growth group curriculum consisted of six closed group sessions that were one hour in duration. Each group session contained semi-structured activities that were co-facilitated by masters-level clinicians enrolled in counselor education doctoral programs who had previous group work experience. The activities focused on counselor self-awareness (a multicultural competency domain; Arredondo et al., 1996), which stipulates that it is imperative for counselors to be aware of their own cultural values and beliefs. Specifically, the group activities within the counselor self-awareness domain assert that: (a) culturally skilled counselors believe cultural self-awareness is essential; (b) counselors are aware of their cultural background have influenced values and biases about psychological processes; (c) counselors are able to recognize their limits of multicultural competency and expertise; and (d) counselors recognize their discomfort regarding differences between themselves and others related to race, ethnicity, and culture (Arredondo et al., 1996). Therefore, the groups pedagogical activities were designed to foster interpersonal and intrapersonal reflection, facilitate exploration in the students' self-

awareness of ethnic identity (e.g., commitment and exploration of their ethnic identity), and promote the students level of social-cognitive development.

Accordingly, the six sessions of the multicultural self-awareness groups facilitated graduate students' introspection of their biases and assumptions.

*Group Session One* consisted of introducing group members to the multicultural personal growth group, discussing group procedures (e.g., confidentiality), and an icebreaker activity to help group members become acquainted with one another. Pedagogical objectives included: (a) establishment of group rules, (b) introduction of group leaders and members (e.g., name, counseling specialization, reasons for wanting to be a counselor) through a think-pair-share activity, and (c) discussion of how group members' cultural background may influence their work as a future counselor. The think-pair-share activity encouraged group members to be reflective of their desire to be counselors and their ethnic background.

*Group Session Two* consisted of an activity where group members discussed the origins of their beliefs and attitudes regarding cultural diversity. Therefore, the pedagogical group objectives were to: (a) have group member define various types of diversity and (b) discuss how they learned about diversity. The activity was completed in pairs to facilitate more self-disclosure of group participants. Once the pairs completed their sharing, the group leader facilitated the group session with guiding questions (e.g., at what age do you remember learning about people who were different from you?). At the conclusion of group session two, the group facilitator asked each group member to bring in a tangible object that represented his or her cultural background for discussion in the subsequent group session.

*Group Session Three* involved group members sharing their tangible representation of their culture or ethnic background with their group members in a "round robin" fashion. The group leader facilitated the discussion with the following prompts: (a) discuss the significance of this cultural artifact to you; (b) what did you learn about yourself, your family, culture as a result of this activity?; and (c) how are your beliefs and attitudes shaped by your culture in terms of your worldview and how you treat others that are different from you? The purpose of this pedagogical strategy was to encourage group member participation, interpersonal learning, and appreciation of various cultural backgrounds.

*Group Sessions Four and Five* included a two-part activity where the objective was for the participants to reflect on spoken and unspoken messages from their upbringing and current beliefs and attitudes. An adaptation of an activity, called DOTS: Understanding your "hidden" biases from the principal researcher's institution was utilized where group leaders wrote a belief statement on the top of a poster board with "True" and "False" underneath with True on the far left side and False on the far right side. The statements included:

- (a) If you are poor, it is because you are lazy.
- (b) People with disabilities or mental disorders should be "hidden" from society.
- (c) Homosexuality is wrong.
- (d) Men are more competent than women are.
- (e) Belief in God according to Christianity is the only way to heaven.
- (f) If you work hard enough, you will be successful in America, regardless of race/ethnicity.

Group members were given color-coded dots that represented where group members received these messages. Red dots represented family of origin, blue dots were friends and peers, green dots represented K-12 school years, and orange dots were the media. Thus, group members were instructed to place their sticker on the True-False continuum as it pertained to the message they

received in their upbringing. Once students placed the stickers on each poster board, the group leader asked the group members if they noticed any patterns on the poster board. Additionally, the processing statements/questions helped guide the group discussion, for example, explain why you placed the dot where you did on the continuum of True-False.

*Group Session Six*, the final group, consisted of a closing activity where group members verbalized how they define themselves as cultural beings through a structured activity. The pedagogical objectives of the activity were to: (a) recognize moments when they were proud to be identified by one of the descriptors and (b) detect moments when it was painful to be identified with one of the descriptors. The group experience ended with the following processing questions for group members to discuss: (a) what have you learned from this experience and (b) how can you apply what you have learned to personal and professional life as a future counselor. For further information related to the pedagogical strategies integrated into the multicultural personal growth group, please contact us for a copy of the group curriculum.

#### *F. Instrumentation.*

The two constructs and the instruments used to measure these constructs were (a) ethnic identity development (*Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure* [MEIM-R]; Phinney & Ong, 2007) and (b) social-cognitive development (*Washington University Sentence Completion Test* [WUSCT]; Loevinger & Hy, 1996). Study participants completed the instruments at two points during the semester: (a) first class of the semester and (b) last class of the semester. The primary variables used to examine the constructs were overall mean ethnicity identity development scores (pre- and posttest) and social-cognitive development level and total protocol scores (pre- and posttest) scores. In addition, the participants completed the *Students' Perception of Multicultural Personal Growth Group Experiences Questionnaire* (SPMPGGEQ), which is a six-item questionnaire regarding the students' overall perceptions of the pedagogical strategy.

*Multi-group Ethnic Identity-Revised Measure.* The MEIM-R (Phinney & Ong, 2007) measures the construct of ethnic identity development and is appropriate for use with all ethnicities (Ponterotto et al., 2003). Additionally, research findings support the administration of the MEIM-R with various age groups (e.g., adolescents and young adults; Phinney, 1989; 1990; 1992, Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Phinney & Tarver, 1988). Hence, the MEIM-R is applicable for college-age adults, the population for our investigation.

The MEIM-R is a ten-item assessment, revised from the original 14-item MEIM, and begins with an open-ended prompt for participants to specify their self-identified ethnic group. Following the open-ended prompt, participants rate themselves on a Likert scale (e.g., *5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, and 1-strongly disagree*) relating to six statements that assess ethnic identity. For instance, "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group." Moreover, these six questions consist of two subscales: (a) exploration (items 1, 4, and 5) and commitment (items 2, 3, and 6). The exploration subscale assesses whether individuals are engaged in activities related to their ethnicity, while, the commitment subscale describes the level of attachment to ones' ethnicity. The eighth question asks participants to categorize their ethnicity based on the ethnic groups provided. Lastly, the final two questions (questions nine and ten); request identification of the ethnicities of the participants' mother and father using the provided ethnic categories.

Scoring of the MEIM-R consists of either averaging individual subscale scores (e.g., exploration and commitment), or averaging combined subscale scores. Nonetheless, the

instrument authors' suggested the mean calculation of the total score for "studies concerned only with the overall strength of ethnic identity or the degree to which ethnic identity is achieved" (Phinney & Ong, 2006, p. 278). Therefore, an averaged total score of 3.33, for example, indicates moderate ethnic identity development on a scale of one to five, where five represents high levels of ethnic identity. Thus, high MEIM-R scores indicate higher levels of ethnic identity development.

The MEIM is a psychometrically sound instrument with adolescent and adult populations (Phinney & Baldelomar, 2006; Phinney & Ong, 2006; Roberts et al., 1999). Specifically, an exploratory factor analysis of the MEIM-R calculated two subscales (e.g., exploration and commitment) which measure ethnic identity development (Phinney & Ong, 2006). In a sample of 192 university students, moderate reliability was found in the subscales of exploration and commitment, respectively, with Cronbach's alphas of .83 and .89 (Phinney & Ong, 2006). In addition, Phinney and Ong (2007) conducted a confirmatory analysis with a sample of 241 university students and concluded the two-factor model (e.g., exploration and commitment to an individuals' ethnic identity) to be a good fit for the construct of ethnic identity (e.g.,  $\chi^2/df = 1.91, p < .001$ ; AGFI = .96, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .04).

*Washington University Sentence Completion Test.* The WUSCT (Hy & Loevinger, 1996) measures social-cognitive development of individuals and is suitable for individuals in pre-adolescence through adulthood and in numerous settings (e.g., K-12 schools, universities, and hospitals; Manners & Durkin, 2001). Our participants completed the short form of the WUSCT (Form 81-1; 18 sentence stems), which is a semi-projective inventory with open-ended sentence stems. For example, one sentence stem is, "The thing I like about myself is."

We scored the 18-item WUSCT using the technical foundations manual (Hy & Loevinger, 1998), which includes practice exercises reviewed by experts in the field in a three-step process. The first step consisted of scoring each individual sentence stem in the assessment and matching it to an ego maturity level. Secondly, we summed the ego levels for each individual assessment; this number represented the total protocol rating (TPR). Lastly, we matched the TPR to ego maturity levels in the technical foundations manual. The TPR included a range of scores: (a) Impulsive (E2) TPR = 36 - 67, (b) Self-Protective (E3) TPR = 68 - 75, (c) Conformist (E3) TPR = 76 - 81, (d) Self-Aware (E5) TPR = 82 - 90, (e) Conscientious (E6) TPR = 91 - 100, (f) Individualistic (E7) TPR = 101 - 108, (g) Autonomous (E8) TPR = 109 - 118, and (h) Integrated (E9) TPR = 119 and above. Therefore, higher WUSCT TPR scores and ego levels correlate with increased social-cognitive development.

The psychometric properties of the WUSCT (Hy & Loevinger, 1996) are strong (e.g., Manners & Durkin, 2001; Novy & Francis, 1992). Specifically, Novy and Francis (1992) sampled 265 adults and found a high and significant reliability for half of the WUSCT with the first half coefficient  $\alpha = .84$  and the second half coefficient  $\alpha = .81$ . In addition, the construct validity (e.g., Westenberg & Block, 1993), predictive validity (Hart & Hilton, 1988), and discriminant validity (e.g., Hauser, 1976; Loevinger, 1979) of the WUSCT have been supported.

*Students' Perception of Multicultural Personal Growth Group Experiences Questionnaire.* We administered the SPMPGGEQ, which is an anonymous six-item survey at the end of the last multicultural personal growth group to gain insight into the graduate students' perceptions of the experience with this pedagogical strategy. Group leaders explained that completing the survey was voluntary and left the room for students to complete the questionnaire. Twenty of the graduate students completed the SPMPGGEQ that included the following question prompts:

- (a) Describe the experience that you had with the facilitators of the multicultural personal growth group.
- (b) Was there anything that you would change about how the group was facilitated?
- (c) What did you like about the personal growth group experience?
- (d) What did you dislike about the personal growth group experience?
- (e) How did you like the activities that were part of the personal growth group?
- (f) Do you feel that participating in the PGG was a valuable learning experience to learn about ethnic / cultural identity?

### *G. Data Analysis.*

A time-series research design was selected for our investigation as the primary variables (pedagogical intervention, multicultural personal growth group) were manipulated without random assignment. Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) suggested that time series designs are utilized to assess the effect of an intervention before and after the intervention. Nevertheless, threats to validity may influence findings from a time-series research design, such as history (factors other than the intervention influencing change) and testing (due to a practice effect; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2011).

After the data collection process, the data were scored and entered into a database and analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Version 19.0) using paired-sample *t*-tests. Prior to beginning the data analysis process, data was screened and preliminary analyses were conducted (e.g., assessing normality and checking for outliers). A sample size of 20 was acceptable for identifying a large effect size (power = .80) at the .10 level (Cohen, 1992).

## **IV. Results.**

### *H. Ethnic Identity Development.*

The MEIM-R (Phinney & Ong, 2007) was used to obtain participants ethnic identity development scores ( $N = 20$ ) on a five-point Likert Scale (e.g., 1 = *strongly disagree*). The pre-test and post-test MEIM-R scores, with descriptive data are presented in Table 1. A paired-sample *t*-test indicated that the graduate students' MEIM-R mean scores did not change from the initial assessment to the posttest,  $t(19) = .86, p > .05$ . Therefore, the graduate students did not experience a significant change in their ethnic identity development per the pedagogical intervention.

### *I. Social-Cognitive Development.*

The WUSCT-Form 81 (Hy & Loewinger, 1996) was used to obtain participants' ( $N = 20$ ) social-cognitive development scores. The pre-test and post-test WUSCT scores with descriptive data are presented in Table 1. The pretest WUSCT level scores were Self-Protective (E3;  $n = 1$ ; 5%), Conformist (E4;  $n = 3$ ; 15%), Self-Aware (E5;  $n = 11$ ; 55%), and Conscientious (E6;  $n = 5$ ; 25%). The mean pretest social-cognitive maturity level was Self-Aware (E5;  $M = 5.00, SD = .79$ , range = E3 - E6; TPR score,  $M = 87.10, SD = 6.04$ , range = 75 - 98). The students' posttest level scores were Self-Protective (E3;  $n = 1$ ; 5%), Conformist (E4;  $n = 3$ ; 15%), Self-Aware (E5;  $n = 11$ ; 55%), Conscientious (E6;  $n = 4$ ; 20%), and Individualistic (E7;  $n = 1$ ; 5%). The average

posttest social-cognitive maturity level was Self-Aware (E5;  $M = 5.05$ ,  $SD = .89$ , range = E3 - E7; TPR score,  $M = 86.55$ ,  $SD = 7.25$ , range = 71 - 101).

A paired-sample  $t$ -test indicated that the graduate students' WUSCT mean level scores did not change from the initial assessment to the posttest,  $t(19) = .24$ ,  $p > .05$ . Similarly, there was no change from pretest WUSCT TPR and posttest WUSCT TPR scores,  $t(19) = .44$ ,  $p > .05$ . Thus, graduate students did not experience a change in social-cognitive maturity because of the pedagogical intervention.

### *J. Students' Perceptions of the Multicultural Personal Growth Group Experience.*

Overall, the graduate students' perception of the multicultural personal growth group questionnaire results indicated that 90% ( $n = 18$ ) of the students valued the group experience and appreciated the group leaders facilitation of the groups. The first SPMPGGEQ question asked participants to describe their experience with group facilitators of the multicultural personal growth groups. We divided the feedback into two themes (a) group facilitators' behaviors and (b) group facilitators' demeanor. Overall, group members reported that the group leaders set a positive foundation for the groups, as evidenced by, facilitating the discussion of group rules and creating a safe place to discuss intimate details of their life. Moreover, the students reported valuing the facilitators' ability to engage students in self-exploration, balance "airtime" between group members, and challenge members when necessary. Additionally, the students described the group facilitators' demeanor, to be positive, supportive, encouraging, helpful, honest, and non-judgmental.

The second SPMPGGEQ question asked for suggested changes to how the group leaders facilitated the groups. Approximately, 75% ( $n = 15$ ) of the students reported that they enjoyed the groups the way they were. There was some conflicting feedback where one participant felt the group was too long (because the groups were after class), while another student wanted more time to process during the group. In addition, a student noted that the group activities could have been more challenging and the inclusion of experiential activities outside of the group would have been beneficial.

The third SPMPGGEQ question asked the students what they enjoyed about the personal growth group experience. The main themes students identified were: (a) ability to share and help one another in the group setting, (b) cohesion within the group, (c) personal growth, (d) enjoyed the weekly topics, and (e) feeling hopeful about the future. The fourth SPMPGGEQ question, asked the students what they disliked about the group experience. The main themes derived from this question were students felt there was not enough time to process group content, and the duration of the group could have been longer (e.g., a semester). In addition, one student noted there was a lack of conflict in the groups and wanted to delve into deeper issues. Finally, one other student reported an interest in receiving more feedback from his or her peers regarding a topic raised in the group.

The fifth SPMPGGEQ question asked specifically about the group activities and if the students liked or disliked them. Overall, the students reported enjoying the group activities because they *promoted self-reflection* and were *insightful*. However, some students felt the activities were too structured, impeding group interaction. Lastly, the final SPMPGGEQ question asked the students to reflect on the group experience as it related to learning about their ethnic and cultural identity. The main themes the students expressed were: (a) learning about personal biases, (b) learning about own cultural background and group members' cultural group, and (c)

realizing there are more similarities than differences between cultures. One student stated, *it's not often you get the chance to have such personal encounters with so many ethnicities*, while another group member stated, *I learned a lot about other races and more importantly how people feel about their identity*. Finally, one graduate student disclosed, *I have come to terms with things I haven't been able to in years and its due only to the fact that this group made me comfortable to speak*.

**V. Discussion.**

The present study facilitates intentional scholarly inquiry of faculty members into their pedagogical practices (e.g., integrating multicultural personal growth groups in the *Introduction to Counseling Profession* course) to examine graduate counseling student development (e.g., ethnic identity development and social cognitive maturity; Hutchings et al., 2011). The literature and research indicated a need to investigate the potential impact of a multicultural personal growth group on graduate students' ethnic identity development and social-cognitive maturity scores. The results of the statistical analysis identified that graduate students in these multicultural personal growth groups levels of ethnic identity development and social-cognitive maturity did not change.

**Table 1. Ethnic Identity Development and Social-Cognitive Maturity Descriptive Statistics.**

Variables	Ethnic Identity Development (MEIM-R)		Social – Cognitive Maturity (WUSCT-Form 81) Level (TPR)	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Graduate Counseling Students (N=20)				
<i>M</i>	3.61	3.71	5.00 (87.10)	5.05 (86.55)
<i>SD</i>	.89	.79	.79 (6.04)	.89 (7.25)
Range	1.7 – 5.0	2.0 – 5.0	E3 – E6 (75 – 98)	E3 – E7 (71 – 101)

*Note.* MEIM-R = Multi-group Ethnic Identity-Revised Measure; WUSCT—Form 81 = Washington University Sentence Completion Test, short form; TPR = Total protocol rating; E = ego development scheme level.

The findings presented here are inconsistent with previous empirical research investigating the influence of multicultural group experiences with ethnic identity development (Rowell & Benschhoff, 2008). Specifically, Rowell and Benschhoff (2008) employed a quasi-experimental research design to investigate the impact of a multicultural personal growth group on participants' (N = 183) ethnic identity scores and found that participants' in the group experience increased their ethnic identity development scores more than individuals not participating in the groups. The inconsistency between our findings and Rowell and Benschhoff's results may be attributed to differences in sample sizes and length of the pedagogical intervention (group experience). Moreover, the activities in Rowell and Benschhoff's personal growth groups could have initiated more introspection into their ethnic identity and the groups occurred throughout the semester.

The findings that the graduate counseling students' social-cognitive maturity scores did not change following the completion of the six week multicultural personal growth group

experience was also consistent with previous research. Specifically, Lambie and colleagues (2010) found that participating in a 13-week course in ethical and legal issues in counseling did not change counselor education students' levels of social-cognitive maturity. Therefore, promoting developmental growth in the area of social-cognitive maturity may be more difficult in a short period of time (six-weeks). Specifically, Sias, Lambie, and Foster (2006) suggested that pedagogical interventions designed to promote developmental growth in adults should be a minimum of six months to one-year in length.

Nevertheless, change in social-cognitive maturity has occurred in models such as, the Deliberate Psychological Education (DPE; Sprinthall & Mosher, 1978). The DPE curricula include a combination of course work and action-oriented experiential activities (e.g., field experiences). Cannon and Frank (2009) utilized the DPE with graduate counseling interns and found a statistically significant difference in social-cognitive maturity scores between treatment group participants in the DPE program ( $n = 20$ ) and control group participants who did not experience the DPE model ( $n = 39$ ). Thus, the incorporation of experiential activities (e.g., service learning opportunities) that promote cognitive dissonance may be necessary to increase graduate students' levels of social-cognitive development.

The graduate counseling students' SPMPGGEQ data supported that the group experience was helpful to the participants' personal development, understanding of personal biases, and an opportunity to have an intimate encounter with peers of different ethnicities. Therefore, the students' levels of ethnic identity and social-cognitive development may not have changed per the pedagogical strategy; however, the participants appeared to grow and benefit from the experiential group intervention.

#### *K. Implications for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.*

Although our findings were mixed, no changes in the graduate counseling students' ethnic identity development and social-cognitive maturity scores, yet, students' indicated personal growth and awareness, which are relevant implications for SoTL. However, interpretation of the study findings should be done with caution as self-report data can be biased (Fraenkel et al., 2011). In other words, students may have responded on the SPMPGGEQ in a socially desirable way and/or felt they changed when change may not have occurred. Therefore, graduate counseling faculty members can integrate multicultural personal growth groups to assess students' ethnic identity and social cognitive development with measures that do not solely rely on student perceptions (e.g., observation checklists) in a time-series research design. Graduate students may experience development due to the introspective nature of the group activities. Moreover, as group experiences are required in graduate counseling curricula for accreditation (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs; CACREP, 2009), programs may want to incorporate these multicultural group experiences to provide cathartic opportunities for graduate students. In addition, a multicultural-focused group experience may be used as part of group counseling courses to encourage self-reflection of cultural identity in a group setting.

To investigate the efficacy of multicultural personal growth groups in the future, faculty can strengthen the pedagogical intervention by increasing the duration of the groups in order to support graduate students' developmental growth. The present study utilized a six-week group curriculum; however, a longer group experience (e.g., 15 weeks) may result in a change in graduate counseling students' ethnic identity and social cognitive development. Likewise, the

intensity of the pedagogical group experience may be increased by modifying activities within the group curriculum to create more cognitive dissonance in students, which may result in additional intrapersonal growth.

*L. Limitations of the Study.*

Limitations are present in all studies and need to be appreciated when interpreting results. A limitation of our study was convenience sampling (participants from one university) and the sample size ( $N = 20$ ), restricting the generalizability of the findings and potentially influencing the statistical analysis results. Second, as ethnic identity development and social cognitive maturity may occur over longer periods of time, the pedagogical intervention may have been too short to influence change in students' development.

*M. Recommendations for Future Research.*

In spite of the stated limitations, the findings of this preliminary study offer suggestions for effective SOTL research, which include: (a) having a long-term intervention (e.g., semester-long) and (b) using data collection methods that are not solely self-report. Additionally, future research can focus on obtaining a larger sample size in order to increase generalizability of the study's findings. More study participants engaged in the pedagogical intervention from various graduate counseling programs may yield statistically significant findings. Furthermore, the inclusion of a control group that is not receiving the pedagogical invention may strengthen the research design.

Multicultural competence is supported as a necessary skill of counselors-in-training and is positively correlated with ethnic identity and social cognitive development (Evans & Foster, 2000; Middleton et al., 2005; Neville et al., 1996; Vinson & Niemeyer, 2000; Watt et al., 2002). We investigated the impact of a pedagogical intervention (multicultural personal growth group) graduate counseling students' levels of ethnic identity development and social-cognitive maturity, and their perceptions of their experience with this experiential group intervention. The results were limited; nevertheless, the graduate student survey data indicated the inclusion of a group experience was beneficial to group participants' growth. Therefore, our study offers a sound initial investigation of the instructors' pedagogy and offers areas for future SoTL research.

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