

The Relationship between Self-Appraisal, Professional Training, and Diversity Awareness among Forensic Psychology Students: A Pilot Formative Evaluation

Donald S. Chandler Jr., Ph.D.

Adjunct Instructor/Coordinator
Masters of Arts in Forensic Psychology

Michele D. Chandler, LPC (ABD)
CCA Behavioral Health, PLLC

Sgt. Quelanda C. Clark. D.M.
Adjunct Instructor
Masters of Arts in Forensic Psychology
Dallas Police Department

Academic Affairs
Argosy University-Dallas

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Correspondences can be sent to dschandler@argosy.edu or by phone at 214-695-2467. Additional information can be sent to: Donald S. Chandler, Jr., Ph.D. 424 S. Corinth St. Rd., Dallas, Texas 75203

Abstract

Currently, there is a growing need for formal training in forensic psychology. This pilot study examines the relational-behavior model (RBM) as a method of intrinsic motivational instruction, perceived academic competence, and program competency among a sample of forensic psychology students. In theory, the RBM suggests that self-appraisal, professional training, and diversity awareness are essential factors in profiling an effective forensic instruction and training. Moreover, RBM divides the profile into two areas: perceived academic competency and program competency. In this study, results of both profiles suggested high levels of academic and program competency. A Spearman rho analysis further suggested that the self-appraisal, professional training, and diversity awareness were interrelated competency factors. Future studies utilizing the RBM were discussed.

Overview

With the growth of U.S. incarceration, victimization, and psychological trauma, the need for formal training in forensic psychology has become paramount for criminal justice professionals, psychologists, and therapists (Chandler, 2005; Chandler & Perkins, 2007). In the context of training, some believe that effective forensic instruction is based on methods that promote a high degree of intrinsic motivation (Chandler, 2008). Intrinsic motivation refers to a trainee's perceived mastery beyond external gains such as grades or credentials (Chandler, 2000). According to Allen and Robbins (2008), forensic trainees with high levels of intrinsic motivation have higher levels of course completion and career determinism. Although there are several approaches to stimulate intrinsic motivation, the relational-behavior model (RBM) suggests that effective forensic instruction is contingent upon the instructor's ability to provide self-appraisal, professional training, and diversity awareness (Chandler, 2008). Despite the use of the RBM to conceptualize psychological instruction, there is a need to empirically examine the use of the model among forensic programs. With this in mind, the purpose of this formative evaluation was to investigate the RBM factors, perceived academic competence, and program competence among a newly formed forensic psychology program.

Method

Participants

The participants consisted of forensic graduate students enrolled in professional school of psychology located in the southwest region of the United States. The sample reflected 38% of the overall forensic student population. The total number of forensic students in the program was 26. The projected growth of the program was 10 new students per calendar quarter. The average number of forensic psychology courses completed by the sample (ground or blended courses) was two. The estimated GPA of the sample was 3.75.

Measures

The Masters of Arts in Forensic Psychology (MAFP) survey was used to assess the perceived forensic competence among the student sample and program competence from the coordinator's perspective. The MAFP is 25 item Likert-scaled survey of perceived academic knowledge/skills; assessment/intervention skills, awareness/sensitivity skills, and professional behavior/conduct. The following scaling was provided on the MAFP survey: 0=N/A, 1=Unsatisfactory, 2=Needs Improvement, 3=Meets Expectation, 4=Exceeds Expectation, 5=Outstanding. The MAFP survey was also used to operationally define the RBM factors. Self-appraisal was defined as the use of personal ethics and decision making activities; professional training was defined as the use of intervention skills; and diversity awareness was defined as the perceptions of cultural sensitivity and multiculturalism.

Procedures

A convenience sampling procedure was used to collect the data. Prior to the study, the MAFP survey was approved by academic affairs and provided to the coordinator/program chair of the forensic psychology program. The coordinator utilized the Forensic Student Group (FSG) representatives to select volunteer student participants. Prior to the completion of the surveys, each volunteer participant was notified about the nature of the survey and confidentiality. Using the MAFP, the program coordinator examined each volunteer's program competency. The MAFP survey was also distributed to each student volunteer to examine their perceived forensic competency while attending the program.

Data Analysis and Conclusion

Figures 1-2 indicate the profiles of the perceived forensic competency and program competency. The range for the RBM factors is 0-15. Based on the data, the students and overall program provided high levels of competency. Moreover, a Spearman rho analysis suggested a moderate positive relationship between the student's perceived professional training and diversity awareness, $\{\rho = .70, p < .05\}$; and a moderate positive relationship between the student's self-appraisal and diversity awareness, $[\rho = .73, p < .05]$. Although the results were preliminary, the data suggested a high degree of intrinsic motivation, perceived academic competency, and program competency within the forensic psychology program. Future studies utilizing the RBM factors may be essential in formative and impact evaluations.

References

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Figure 1. Perceived Forensic Competency

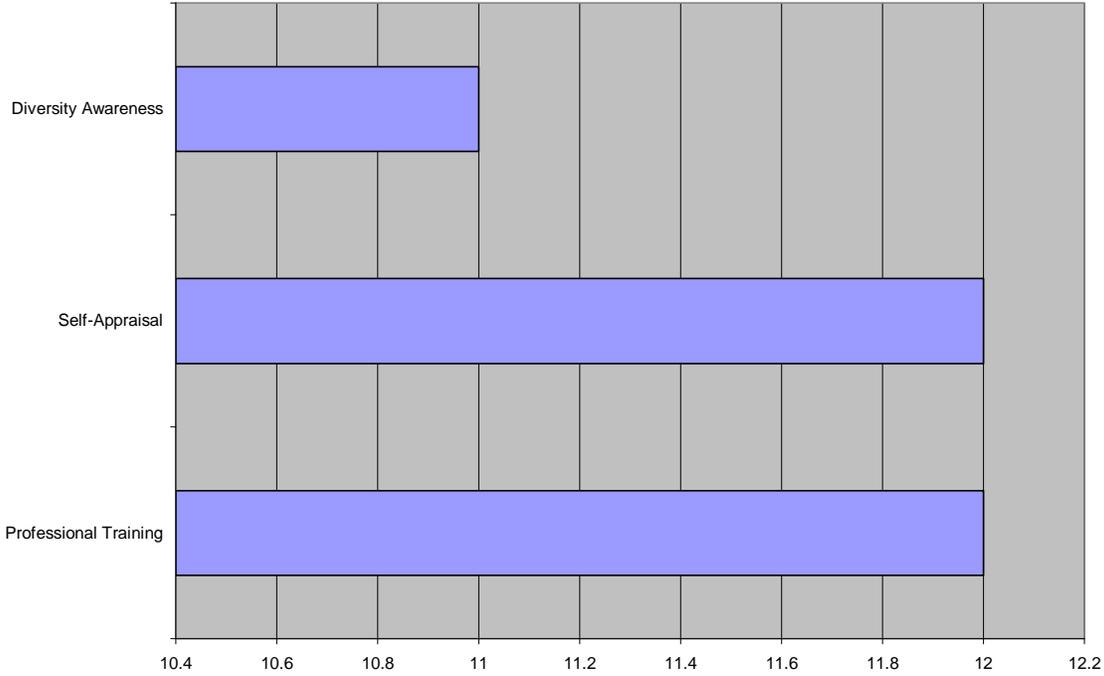


Figure 2. Forensic Program Competency

