

DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN COUPLE AND FAMILY THERAPY TRAINING:

AN EVALUATION OF ACCREDITED PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

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Over the past 15 years, the literature in the field of couple and family therapy (CFT) has called for training programs to make issues of social justice a central concern in the training of couple and family therapists (Guanipa, 2003; Laszloffy & Hardy, 2000; Leslie & McDowell, 2004; McGeorge, Carlson, Erickson, & Guttormson, 2006).

During that time the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) made several changes to the accreditation standards that required programs to integrate social justice principles and practices into CFT training. Recently, however, the COAMFTE removed many of these social justice requirements from its most current accreditation standards. Most notably, programs are now able to create their own definitions of diversity in addition to their own benchmarks for achieving diversity. The purpose of this study was to examine how CFT programs are currently defining diversity and whether or not those definitions are consistent with the current feminist and social justice training literature. Nineteen participants from different accredited CFT programs participated in the study. The results demonstrated inconsistency in the ways that programs define diversity and an overall lack of measureable benchmarks for achieving diversity.

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INTRODUCTION

The field of Couple and Family Therapy (CFT) has a history of integrating issues of diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice to its graduate training programs (Avis, 1989; Constantine, Juby, & Liang, 2001; Falvoic, 1983; Goldner, 1985; Guanipa, 2003; Hare-Mustin, 1978; Hardy & Keller, 1991; Ho, 1987; James & McIntyre, 1983; McDowell, Fang, Brownlee, Young, & Kharma, 2002; McGoldrick, 2002; McGoldrick, Pearce, & Giordano, 1982; Papajohn & Spiegel, 1975; Winkle, Peirce, & Hovestadt, 1981). Initially, these discussions were critical of the lack of awareness in the field of CFT related to issues of gender, race, sexual orientation, class, etc. (Guanipa, 2003; McGoldrick, Almeida, Preto, Bibb, Sutton, Hudak, & Hines, 1999; McDowell et al., 2002; Zimmerman & Haddock, 2001). These initial critiques eventually led the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE), in 1988, to change their educational standards to require programs to “address issues of gender and ethnicity as they relate to marital and family therapy” in the standard curriculum (COAMFTE 1988, p.14). The COAMFTE mandated programs to specifically teach about issues of gender and ethnicity in two separate courses or to have a single integrated course that addressed both of these issues. In addition, the COAMFTE suggested programs “should emphasize sexism and gender role stereotyping along with an examination of social, cultural, educational, economic, and behavior factors that may influence ethnic minority family life and interactional styles” (COAMFTE 1998, p.15).

While the changes implemented in 1988 by the COAMFTE were an important step for the field, the COAMFTE made additional changes to the accreditation standards that reflected a growing awareness and commitment to diversity. For example, in 1994, the

COAMFTE added standard 201.00009 which required programs to “recruit faculty and students to ensure diversity in age, culture, ethnicity, gender, race, and religion.”

(COAMFTE, 1994). In 1997, the commission added requirements for programs to not only recruit but to maintain a faculty and student body that is “diverse in age, culture, ethnicity, gender and race” (COAMFTE, 1997; Standards 130.08 and 140.12). Additionally, the COAMFTE added required courses that included significant material on issues of sexuality, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status and culture (COAMFTE, 1997; Standards 330.04, 330.05, and 330.06).

Several authors continued to call for the field to do more than simply include content on issues of diversity (McDowell & Jeris, 2004; McGeorge, Carlson, Erickson, & Guttormson, 2006; Storm, York, & Keller, 1997). These authors argued that the traditional approaches to diversity training, which emphasize the appreciation of difference, did nothing to address the systemic inequalities that exist for members of minority populations (Inman, Meza, Brown, & Hargrove, 2004). Those critical of traditional approaches to diversity training argue that training programs need to critically address issues of gender, race, sexual orientation, social class from a perspective of power, privilege, and oppression (Guanipa, 2003; Laszloffy & Hardy, 2000; Leslie & Clossick, 1996; McDowell, 2004; McGeorge, Carlson, Erickson, & Guttormson, 2006; McGoldrick et al., 1999; Whipple, 1996). For McDowell et al. (2002), “This means going beyond the celebration of difference to reflect a deep, active commitment to both diversity and social justice” (p. 1). This social justice perspective acknowledges that inequalities in regard to a person’s social location are enforced and maintained at the institutional level and that any attempt toward greater equality and increased diversity must involve an analysis of the power structures that grant

privileges to certain groups and disadvantages to others (McDowell et al., 2002; McGoldrick, et al., 1999; Storm, York & Keller, 1997; Zimmerman & Haddock, 2001).

In response to these critiques, the COAMFTE made significant changes to their standards that showed a greater concern and commitment to issues of social justice (COAMFTE, 1999; Standards of Accreditation 10.0). The COAMFTE's commitment to diversity and social justice was clearly articulated in the preamble to Standard of Accreditation 10.0. In the preamble the commission states "The standards apply to the training of marriage and family therapists and are based on a relational view of life in which an understanding and respect for diversity and non-discrimination are fundamentally addressed, practiced, and valued" (COAMFTE, 1999). Additionally, the commission also addressed the concern about the lack of racial diversity in the field by stating that "The Commission believes that a great area of concern for our profession and accredited programs is the inclusion of racial diversity in our training contexts and in the student body of our programs" (COAMFTE, 1999). The commission also changed the language of the educational requirements for training programs to more specifically situate diversity within a social justice context. Standard 300.01 states that:

Programs are expected to infuse their curriculum with content that addresses issues related to diversity and power and privilege as they relate to age, culture, environment, ethnicity, gender, health/ability, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation, spirituality, and socioeconomic status (COAMFTE, 1999).

McGeorge et al. (2006) argue that the inclusion of the terms power and privilege represented an important shift for the field as it acknowledged a more critical understanding of the systemic nature of inequalities faced by minority communities.

However, the commission's commitment to create systemic change in regard to diversity in the composition of faculty and students in accredited programs has appeared to change in recent years. In the preamble to the Standards of Accreditation 10.2, the commission reaffirms its concern with racial inequality but then makes the following statement “. . . we have removed all diversity standards pertaining to numbers of individuals. Programs will be able to decide for themselves whether they want to enhance diversity in their training contexts or maintain the status quo” (COAMFTE , 2003). In lieu of requiring programs to increase the representation of traditionally marginalized groups (i.e., people of color, women, and LGBT persons) the commission created standard 100.05 which states that:

Programs will establish their own definition of diversity, which will include race, religion, culture, etc. Programs will provide a rationale for establishing their definition and a plan to achieve diversity. The plan will establish benchmarks by which the Commission can evaluate the progress of the program in achieving its own stated definition of diversity (COAMFTE, 2003).

Version 10.2 of the accreditation standards (Standard 300.01), however, maintained the requirement for programs to “infuse their curriculum with content that addresses issues related to diversity and power and privilege” (COAMFTE, 2003). Considering the previous acknowledgments by the commission that issues of diversity and inequality need to be addressed at the systemic and institutional level, the changes found in Standards of Accreditation 10.2 appear to be contradictory.

The most recent Standards of Accreditation (11.0) once again acknowledge the problem of a lack of racial diversity in the CFT field. However, programs continue to be

able to create their own definitions and benchmarks for achieving diversity. The COAMFTE defines benchmarks as “measurable milestones, activities, and plans for maintaining or increasing diversity among the student body, supervisors, and the faculty in areas of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, culture, environment, health/ability, nationality, religion, spirituality, and socio economic status” (COAMFTE 2005, p. 22). The new standards also remove the educational requirement to address issues of power and privilege when teaching about diversity. In place of the previous educational requirement, section I-B of version 11.0 states that “educational outcomes [of accredited training programs] reflect an understanding and respect for cultural diversity” (COAMFTE, 2006). Cultural diversity is defined by the commission “as representation of multiple groups in the student body, supervisors, and faculty with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, culture, environment, health/ability, nationality, religion, spirituality, and socio economic status” (COAMFTE, 2003, Glossary). Interestingly, this definition only refers to groups of persons and is not related to any educational philosophy related to the teaching of diversity or to specific required content.

These most recent changes represent a dramatic shift from the values that were initially expressed in Standards of Accreditation 9.0 to 10.0. While it is impossible to know why the commission decided to back away from its previous commitments to a systemic approach to increasing diversity in the composition of students and faculty in CFT training programs and including diverse educational content, it seems important to explore what impact these changes have had on the composition of accredited programs in terms of diversity in faculty and students. Additionally, because programs are now allowed to provide their own definition of diversity, it seems important to examine the definitions

provided by these programs to determine whether or not they are consistent with the current commitments in the training literature related to diversity and social justice. Finally, since programs are also allowed to establish their own benchmarks to achieving diversity, it seems equally important to examine whether or not these benchmarks represent a meaningful commitment to enhancing cultural diversity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which training programs incorporate social justice perspectives into their understandings of diversity, the literature review provides an overview of the current literature in the field of CFT related to social justice and CFT training. Before beginning with this review, it is important to offer a definition of social justice as it relates to CFT training.

Defining Social Justice

Social justice is often defined as a collaborative process within a community where people are concerned for the equality and rights of all groups and individuals to have the same basic rights and privileges (McGeorge et al., 2006; Reisch, 2002). McGeorge, et al., suggest:

social justice addresses the inequalities and injustices associated with the institutionalization of racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. In order to address these inequalities and injustices, a social justice perspective actively seeks to involve marginalized communities in the larger dialogue by giving priority to their voices, perspectives, and concerns (p. 6).

Social justice also examines the systemic nature of oppression and discrimination as it relates to issues of social location and therefore explores how power and privilege, along with oppression, influence the lives of marginalized communities (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002; McGeorge, et al., 2006). Social justice focuses on how individuals, couples, and families are embedded in a larger social structure and how these social contexts influence the lives of marginalized communities.

Social Justice and CFT Training

Feminist scholars were the first to challenge the many sexist assumptions and practices in the field of CFT and raised awareness of the importance of examining how patriarchal values had permeated theory, research, and training practices. (Avis, 1989; Carter, 1992; Goldner, 1985; Hardy & Keller, 1991; Hare-Mustin, 1978; Storm, York, & Keller, 1997; Taggart, 1985; Wheeler, 1985). These scholars also argued the need to make issues of gender and power central to the practice of CFT and the training of future CFTs (Avis, 1989; Carter, 1992; Goldner, 1985; Hare-Mustin, 1978). These feminist critiques paved the way for other scholars to address how other issues of inequality (e.g., racism, classism, and heterosexism) were also embedded into the theory, research, practice and training in family therapy.

Due to the feminist critiques, CFT training during the 1990's was marked by an increased focus on issues of diversity and multicultural education (Hardy & Keller, 1991; Hardy & Laszloffy, 1995; Leslie & Clossick, 1996; McGoldrick et al., 1999; Storm et al., 1997; Whipple, 1996). This increased focus was based on: 1) the recognition of the increased numbers of multicultural families and individuals seeking the services of CFT's (Zimmerman & Haddock, 2001), and 2) the realization that "traditional approaches have been skewed in the direction of the dominant culture-white, male, heterosexist, and prioritizing the needs and experience of the middle and upper classes" (McGoldrick et al., 1999, p.192).

Based on these realizations, many scholars have argued that CFT training programs need to transform typical education and recruiting practices to incorporate diversity and social justice from a power and privilege perspective (McDowell et al., 2002; McGeorge et

al., 2006; McGoldrick, et al., 1999; Storm, York, & Keller, 1997; Zimmerman & Haddock, 2001). This transformation calls for programs to “center their training in a context that critically evaluates the institutionalization of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, etc., and their corollaries of white privilege, male privilege, class privilege, heterosexual privilege, etc.” (McGeorge, et al., p. 6). Since larger systems and discourses within society perpetuate inequalities in human relationships, it is argued that educators have an ethical responsibility to attend to social justice issues in their training of future CFTs (Avis, 1989; McDowell & Shelton, 2002). Zimmerman and Haddock (2001) suggest that:

Because we are all products of a racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic society, we must directly challenge these attitudes and behaviors in ourselves. Failing to do so will result in therapists providing less effective treatment, and most likely, even unwittingly cause harm to our clients (p. 2).

Zimmerman and Haddock (2001) also argue that simply adding some classes and readings on diversity is not a satisfactory method to address these social justice and diversity issues. They contend that a complete transformation of programs and curriculums must occur, making social justice the “central organizing principle of the entire program” (p. 4). Zimmerman and Haddock further state that this includes placing social justice as the framework through which CFT theories are taught and applied, research is conducted, and program decisions are made.

Similarly, McDowell and Shelton (2002) suggest that CFT training programs need to better prepare therapists to advocate for minority clients and the injustices they experience. They argue that since these injustices are maintained by cultural practices and social structures created by dominant groups, students need to be taught how to intervene in

these systems on behalf of their clients. Specifically, these authors suggest using role-plays with family scenarios that consist of issues related to oppression, diversity, power, gender differences, and sexual orientation. These authors also suggest examining family backgrounds by addressing how immigration, social status, regional influences, historical events, gender, etc. have affected the student's lives. They also require students to write a paper related to social justice, diversity and family therapy, along with another paper on a theory focusing on foundational assumptions of the theory, populations the theory has been effective with, and a personal critique of the theory. These scholars also have the students keep a journal which requires them to address students' positions on being advocates for social justice.

McGeorge et al. (2006) also believe that CFT training needs to be centered in a commitment to social justice and feminist principles. They argue that the "additive approach," "which is simply adding multicultural/diversity content to the curriculum" (p. 10) falls short of addressing the issues that face marginalized families. These scholars suggest using a "centering model" in which "feminism and social justice serve as the center place from which all aspects of the program are interpreted and subsequently carried out" (p. 11). McGeorge et al. state that:

it is imperative that feminist and social justice perspectives serve as the primary lens through which we interpret CFT theory, training, research, and practice. In this way, feminism and social justice serve as a corrective lens that makes these hidden prejudices, privileges, and power structures more visible (p. 11).

McGeorge et al. present a comprehensive model that demonstrates how social justice can be centered in every aspect of training. McGeorge et al., also "invite the students to apply

and live these principles through the use of social justice projects in the local community” (p. 12). They have also developed social justice internship sites, where students get hands on experience working with diverse and marginalized communities. These efforts represent an overall commitment to be accountable to the marginalized communities in the local area where the programs reside.

Green (2002) argues that programs should define themselves as multicultural in terms of the areas of knowledge, attitudes, and clinical skills. Green argues all faculty members should have a commitment to social justice principles in their teaching and supervision. Green also recommends that programs should have an outside “authority” that monitors (by assessments) the program’s progress towards multicultural commitments. He also contends that programs need to recruit people for example of different races, sexual orientations, social economic classes, etc, in addition to infusing the curriculum with multicultural content. Additionally, Green argues that each course needs to address social justice ideas, rather than having one or two separate classes to address social justice ideas. Green further argues that students should be required to demonstrate their knowledge of multicultural issues and student’s continuation in the program should be based on their progress of developing social justice ideas.

Laszloffy & Hardy (2000) contend that it is essential for therapists to address social injustices with clients. They suggest that before therapists can address issues of racism, for example, they themselves need to become both racially aware and sensitive. Racial awareness is defined as “the ability to recognize that race exists and that it shapes reality in unequal and unjust ways” (p. 36). To be racially sensitive requires a person “to actively challenge attitudes, behaviors, and conditions that create or reinforce racial injustice” (p.

36). Laszloffy and Hardy suggest programs have a responsibility to help students become racially aware and sensitive. They argue that therapists need to be taught how to explore with their clients how racism affects the presenting problem and how racism is an underlying factor that contributes to problems faced by clients of color.

Guanipa (2003) believes “just being multiculturally sensitive and aware is not enough to be an effective therapist. MFT trainers and educators need to act multiculturally as well” (p. 88). She argues that acting multiculturally involves more than simply learning to work effectively with diverse groups, but also requires learning to be an advocate for diverse clients. Guanipa argues that for this to be accomplished students need to be involved in activism in the community and that such activism be a part of CFT training and education.

McGoldrick and colleagues (1999) argue that students need to be taught “to use a very widely angled sociocultural lens that places families in the cultural, class, and gender contexts of the communities and society in which they live” (p. 191). They suggest that this is best achieved as students gain a perceptive of how systems of power, privilege, and oppression operate at different levels in their own lives. For example, McGoldrick and colleagues require students to examine “their own experiences of oppression, their personal relationship to power and privilege, and their group’s connection to institutional power, privilege, and oppression” (p. 204).

Diversity and Standards of Accreditation of Other Mental Health Disciplines

Other mental health disciplines such as psychology, social work, and counseling also provide guidance to their accredited programs in regard to diversity. These disciplines have created expectations regarding diversity that are consistent with the current social

justice training literature in the field of CFT. For instance, the accreditation standards for The American Psychological Association (APA) in the Guidelines and Principles for Accreditation of Programs in Professional Psychology requires that program(s) “engage in actions that indicate respect for and understanding of cultural and individual diversity” (APA, 2007, p. 9). The standards further address that “respect for and understanding of cultural and individual diversity is reflected in the program’s policies for the recruitment, retention, and development of faculty and students, and in its curriculum and field placements” (APA, 2007, p. 9). Additionally, the APA requires programs to include “(a) theories and methods of assessment and diagnosis and effective intervention, (b) theories and/or methods of consultation, evaluation, and supervision, (c) strategies of scholarly inquiry, and (d) issues of cultural and individual diversity that are relevant to all of the above” (APA, 2007, p. 9).

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards suggest that “service, social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, competence, human rights, and scientific inquiry are among the core values of social work” (CSWE, 2008, p. 2). The CSWE accreditation standards further state that “social workers appreciate that as consequences of difference, a person’s life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim (CSWE, 2008, p. 4). The CSWE accreditation standards continue to state that social workers will “recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power; gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups; and recognize and

communicate their understanding of the importance of difference in shaping life experience” (CSWE, 2008, p. 4).

The Council of Accreditation Counseling and Related Education Programs (2008) also identifies and addresses social justice and cultural diversity in its accreditation standards. The CACREP implements that students will understand “how living in a multicultural society effects clients who are seeking clinical mental health counseling services and the effects of racism, discrimination, sexism, power, privilege, an oppression on one’s own life and career and those to clients (CACREP, 2008, p. 31). There accreditation standards also provide specific strategies of how programs will incorporate social justice and diversity into program curriculums. For example, their standards state that programs need to incorporate “specific experiential learning activities designed to foster students’ understanding of self and culturally diverse clients; theories of multicultural counseling, identity development, and social justice; individual, couple, family, group, and community strategies for working with and advocating for diverse populations, including multicultural competencies; and counselors’ roles in developing cultural self-awareness, promoting cultural social justice” (CACREP, 2008, p.10).

Research Questions

Given the above literature review, the research questions that will be used in this study are: (1) How are accredited MFT programs currently defining diversity? and (2) What are the benchmarks the programs have set to achieve their definition of diversity?

METHODS

Programs

A total of 18 program directors representing 18 different accredited CFT programs completed the survey for this study. Of the 18 programs, 7 were Master's programs, 4 were Ph.D. programs, and 7 represented both Master's and Ph.D. programs. Among the 19 accredited CFT programs, 2 were from private non-religious institutions, 3 were from private religious institutions, and 13 programs were from public institutions.

Participant Recruitment

Potential programs were identified via the AAMFT website as program directors of each of the 84 COAMFTE accredited programs. Program directors were sent an email inviting them to participate in the study. The email contained information regarding the purpose of the study, informed consent, and procedures for completing the study. Two reminder emails were sent at two week increments.

Data Collection

Programs were asked to provide the program's definition of diversity and the benchmarks and educational outcomes it has established to meet COAMFTE requirements (See Appendix A). Since this information is required by the COAMFTE, program directors were able to simply cut and paste their established definitions and benchmarks into the online survey. Programs were also asked to provide basic demographic information (see Appendix B).

Data Analysis

Because the purpose of this study was to determine how programs are defining diversity and to examine the benchmarks that they have established to achieve diversity in

their programs, this study will use a qualitative methodology. The specific method of analyses for each research question will be outlined below.

Research Question #1: Defining Diversity

The first research question was analyzed through the use of thematic analysis (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Each program's definition of diversity was examined in order to identify possible themes that exist among the different definitions of diversity provided by each program. This was accomplished by following the procedures: 1) reading through each of the definitions of diversity provided by the programs in order become familiar with the data, 2) reading through the definitions a second time highlighting significant words or phrases, 3) reading through the definitions a third time and identifying categories within each definition, and 4) reading through the definitions a fourth time comparing the categories previously identified and developing themes that are common across definitions.

Research Question #2: Benchmarks for Achieving Diversity

The second research question was analyzed through the use of thematic analysis and will follow the same procedure outlined above. However, this analysis examined the specific benchmarks that programs have established to achieve their goals related to diversity.

Statement of Reflexivity

In an effort to be transparent about my particular values and beliefs and how they may influence the interpretation of the data it is important to provide some information regarding my own personal context. First, I feel that it is important to acknowledge that I attended at CFT program that is based on a commitment to social justice principles. Social justice is important to the way I live both my personal and professional life. I currently

work at an agency that primarily serves marginalized communities and I witness, on a daily basis, the negative effects that discrimination and oppression have on the lives of my clients.

RESULTS

The thematic analysis of the first research question, programs statements regarding how CFT programs are currently defining diversity, resulted in two primary themes: (1) Value Based Definitions and (2) Composition Based Definitions. A further analysis of these primary themes resulted in the emergence of two sub-themes that provided additional insight to programs rationale for their definition of diversity. The thematic analysis of the second research question, programs statements regarding the benchmarks programs have set to achieve their goals in relation to diversity, resulted in three main themes: (1) Recruitment and Retaining, (2) Curriculum, and (3) Opportunities to Work with Diverse Clients. Additional analysis of these themes resulted in two sub-themes that provided further information regarding how programs are setting benchmarks.

Research Question One: Definitions of Diversity

As mentioned previously, programs' responses to research question one resulted in two primary themes. The first theme represented definitions of diversity that clearly articulated diversity as an important value or commitment of the program. In contrast to the first theme, the second theme represented definitions of diversity that were based solely on the make-up or composition of students and faculty in the program. A summary of the main findings from each theme will be presented below.

Theme One: Value Based Definitions

The first theme, value based definitions, represented programs who defined diversity as a value or belief system that influenced the overall functioning of the program. The following quote provides an example of a value based definition that is consistent with this theme, "Diversity is seen as a fact of human life in that no individuals have the same

lived experiences and narratives around those experiences.” While programs in this theme used value based language to define diversity, there appeared to be a difference in the types of values that were being communicated. These differing values resulted in the emergence of two sub-themes: (1) Diversity as systemic oppression and (2) Diversity as respecting difference.

Definitions of diversity as systemic oppression. The first sub-theme represented programs who defined diversity in a way that communicates an understanding of the systemic nature of discrimination and inequality. For these programs diversity is seen through the lens of systemic oppression and represented a commitment on the part of their respective programs to directly address issues of systemic inequality. Examples of definitions that fit this sub-theme can be found below:

The definition of diversity is organized on the principle that race, socioeconomic status and gender are the most primary and obvious variables underlying discrimination, negative stereotyping and oppression both in American society and throughout the world. It is understood that other significant areas of diversity such as sexual orientation, religion, age and ability will also be present in both the faculty and student bodies.

All humans must be afforded dignity and respect and that the oppression of any member or group within a society occurs to the detriment of all members of that society. Our rationale stems as well from our belief that without intentional intervention to resolve sources of discrimination and oppression, all social systems contribute to the continuation of the oppression of underprivileged individuals and groups.

The courses lead students to view families as entities within larger social systems and promote collaborative, inclusive, and integrative systems approaches. The curriculum offers students in the family therapy program an optimal perspective for supporting individuals, families, and communities in urban environments, and provides them with a framework for developing skills to facilitate dialogue with marginalized individuals, families, and communities.

In each of the above definitions, programs articulate their belief that diversity needs to be defined in a way that views inequality and discrimination as a result of larger social and systemic processes that work to oppress marginalized groups. While all of the above definitions raise the issue of systemic oppression in some way, the second quote, appears to highlight that another central component to a definition of diversity is the need for “intentional intervention to resolve sources of discrimination and oppression.” This is important because it acknowledges that progress in regard to achieving diversity requires not only an appreciation of difference but active efforts to intervene in systems that deny equal access to marginalized groups.

Diversity as respecting difference. The second sub-theme, definitions of diversity as respecting differences, represented programs’ beliefs that respecting and valuing differences that exist among people and groups in society is central to a definition of diversity. With these definitions, diversity was expressed as respecting and appreciating differences of people regardless of their race, religion, socioeconomic status, etc. Examples of definitions that fit this sub-theme can be found below:

Diversity represents our moral imperative to respect and appreciate all human differences including, but not limited to ethnicity, class, culture, sexual orientation, gender, and religion. This imperative is not just a passive posture, but we commit to be active in creating space, conversation, pedagogy, policies, and institutional support for same. These differences are to be represented in our faculty as well as our student body so that an optimal learning environment would be sustained.

The Couple and Family Therapy Program is committed to the value of all people regardless of race, ethnic/minority background, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. We believe that our work as clinicians, researchers, and academicians, and students should reflect this core belief.

The above definitions, articulate a belief that appreciation of differences that exist among people is central to understanding diversity. Some of the programs in this sub-theme

suggest that programs should do more than just appreciate difference, but that appreciating difference requires an active commitment or “moral imperative” on the part of programs.

Theme Two: Composition Based Definitions

The second theme, composition based definitions, represented programs who defined diversity simply in terms of the makeup of their program. These programs provided statements that expressed the diverse nature of the faculty and students in their CFT program. For these programs, their focus appeared to be more on defining diversity as the actual representation of particular groups in their programs, rather than a central value or philosophy that guides the overall mission of their programs. Examples of definitions that fit this theme can be found below.

Our university is an Hispanic Serving Institution, and our student population is generally majority minority.

The MFT program seeks to admit and foster the development of students who are diverse in these many ways, including religious affiliation, ethnicity, educational and socioeconomic background.

Diversity in the program will be evident in a combination of trends over time and a mix of unique characteristics that represent differences in age, geographical region, ethnicity, gender, health/ability, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation, spirituality, and socioeconomic status, in the following areas: Student body; Faculty; and Client population.

Diversity is defined by the CFT Program as the representation of multiple groups in the student body, faculty/instructors, and supervisors with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, culture, environment, health/ability, nationality, religion, spirituality, and socioeconomic status.

An interesting finding is this theme is the range of areas the programs chose to address when defining diversity. For example, health and ability, geographical region, sexual orientation, spirituality, environment, age, race, nationality, ethnicity, socioeconomic status.

Research Question Two: Program Benchmarks

Research question two represented programs' responses to the specific benchmarks their program had established to achieve their definition of diversity, which resulted in three main themes. The first theme represented programs who believed recruiting and retaining diverse students and faculty was significant to achieving their diversity related goals. The second theme represented programs who believed a diverse curriculum was an essential goal to achieve diversity. Theme three represented programs who believed a diverse client population was an important benchmark to achieving diversity. A summary of these main findings will be discussed below.

Theme One: Recruitment and Retaining

The first theme, recruitment and retaining, represented programs who believed recruiting and maintaining diverse students and faculty was an important benchmark for their program to achieve. An example of this theme can be found in the following statement "Admit and retain high-quality minority students". Although all of the programs in this theme valued recruiting and retaining diverse students and faculty, there appeared to be a difference in how this was expressed. For instance, some programs simply stated they would recruit and retain students and faculty. In contrast, other programs reported specific methods of how they were going to recruit and retain diverse students and faculty. These differences in how programs reported recruiting and retaining diverse students and faculty developed in two sub-themes; (1) Active recruitment and retaining and (2) Passive recruitment and retaining.

Active recruitment and retaining. The first sub-theme represented programs who were clearly committed to recruiting and retaining diverse students and faculty. These

programs appeared to have a very active approach to recruiting and retaining and provided specific details as to how they planned to recruit and retain diverse faculty and students. These programs commitment to active recruitment and retaining was evidenced by active or value based language to describe their recruiting efforts, specific strategies for recruitment and retaining, and specific target numbers or percentages of diverse students and faculty that they hoped to attain.

The programs in this sub-theme used language that communicated a commitment to being actively engaged in the recruiting process of minority students. For example, programs used language like “active recruitment,” “establishing relationships,” and “actively advertise and promote program” to describe their efforts. The language used by the programs in this sub-theme stood out when compared to other programs descriptions of their recruiting efforts.

Some of the strategies that programs described that fit this sub-theme include: (1) establish relationships with and promote the program to minority student organizations on campus, (2) establish relationships with and promote program to colleges/universities that serve traditionally underrepresented groups (e.g., historically Black Colleges/Universities, Native American Tribal Colleges/Universities), (3) build relationships with international universities, and (4) establish mentoring programs for diverse undergraduate students interested in a career in family therapy.

In addition to identifying specific recruitment strategies, programs in this sub-theme also created specific goals for the number or percentage of diversity represented in their student bodies and faculty. For example, two programs identified a goal of “maintaining at least 20% minority students.” Another participant established a goal to “accept at least 3

diverse students into the program.” The fact that some programs chose to include specific numbers in their benchmarks is interesting given that it is not a requirement of the COAMFTE for them to do so. This represents a significant commitment to diversity on the part of these programs given that they will be evaluated by the COAMFTE based on their compliance with their own benchmarks.

Passive recruitment and retaining. The second sub-theme, passive recruitment and retaining, represented programs who identified recruiting diverse students and faculty as a goal, but failed to identify any particular strategies or efforts to accomplish those goals. Unlike the programs in the active recruitment sub-theme, programs in the passive recruitment sub-theme tended to simply use phrases like “recruit and retain students of color,” “maintain and recruit a diverse faculty,” and “increase number of students from diverse backgrounds” to describe their recruiting efforts. Examples of practical descriptions include: “The programs will actively recruit minority students and faculty from universities throughout the region, nationally, and internationally,” “maintain a student body that includes Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and others,” “maintain a faculty that represents a near gender balance”, “recruit and retain students of color”, “recruit students from economic diverse backgrounds,” and “retain racially-balanced core faculty.”

The programs statements in this sub-theme suggest that recruiting and retaining is an important benchmark for their programs. However, the lack of detail that programs provided related to how they plan to recruit and retain diverse faculty and students makes it difficult to measure their overall level of commitment to diversity and their ability to achieve their stated goals.

Theme Two: Curriculum

The second theme represented programs who identified a commitment to including diversity in the curriculum as a benchmark. Program comments in this sub-theme ranged from practical descriptions of fulfilling program requirements to descriptions that highlight diversity in the curriculum as part of the overall mission of the program. Examples of practical descriptions include: “program curriculum will contain at least 3 credits of coursework that openly reflects, through title and content, the program’s respect for cultural diversity” and “diversity will be addressed throughout the curriculum as evidenced in the course syllabi.” Examples of descriptions that reflect an overall value or ethic of diversity include: “diversity will be infused in all coursework through the use of case examples and/or application of MFT theory, techniques, or interventions,” “Maintain climate of diversity by ensuring that diversity is reflected at all levels of the program, including the leadership, mission, philosophy, educational objectives, curriculum and clinical training,” and “Diversity will be infused in all discussion of clinical work. Faculty will incorporate diversity into their research activities.”

The programs statements above suggest that a diverse curriculum is a significant benchmark to achieving diversity for these programs. Although these programs all acknowledged their programs having a diverse curriculum there did appear to be a slight difference in how programs incorporated a diverse curriculum. While some programs suggested their program would have designated credits or classes for cultural diversity other programs reported infusing all coursework and classes with cultural diversity content. It is interesting to note that some of the language used by programs reflects the previous accreditation standard regarding diversity in the curriculum that called for programs to

infuse issues of diversity throughout the curriculum and not just in one particular course (COAMFTE Accreditation Standards 10.0; 300.01).

Theme Three: Opportunities to Work with Diverse Clients

The third theme represented programs who identified opportunities to work with diverse clients as a benchmark to achieving their definition of diversity. Programs in this theme expressed a commitment to providing opportunities for their students to work with a diverse clientele. Some programs provided this opportunity by finding practicum sites that served diverse populations. For example one participant stated “three practicum sites will be identified that offer students increased opportunity to work with diversity.” Another participant reported that “placement sites are evaluated according to their ability to serve diverse populations.” Other programs in this theme reported that the program clinic would be used to serve diverse clients. For example one participant simply stated “the clinic population will be diverse.” Another participant set a particular benchmark to “increase diversity of client population seen at the Family Center by marketing our services to typically underserved populations.”

What is unique about the programs in this theme is that accreditation standard 11.0 does not specify the need for programs to establish benchmarks related to providing students with opportunities to work with diverse clients. Therefore, it appears that programs who chose to include such benchmarks demonstrate an important commitment to moving beyond a simple definition of diversity and toward actively extending opportunities for students to experience diversity in their clinical work.

Comparison of Patterns and Prevalence of Themes

After reviewing the themes several patterns became apparent that seemed important to further analyze. First, programs that offered a value based definition of diversity appeared to be more likely to provide specific benchmarks for achieving diversity compared to programs that used a composition definition of diversity. Second, within the theme of value based definitions, it also appeared that programs that offered a definition of diversity that included an understanding of systemic oppression were more likely to have included benchmarks that were specific when compared to programs that offered a definition of diversity based on a respect for difference. In order to determine whether or not these patterns actually existed, I compared the definitions within each theme (i.e., value based and compositional) to each of the themes identified in the review of program benchmarks (i.e., recruitment and retaining, curriculum, and working with diverse clients). Next, I compared the sub-themes in the value based definitions (i.e., systemic oppression and respect and difference) theme with the active and passive sub-themes in the recruitment and retaining theme. Both analyses supported the patterns identified above. Table 1 provides a detailed list of the findings of this analysis.

Table 1: Patterns and Prevalence of Themes

Definitions	Benchmarks			
	Recruitment		Curriculum	Clients
	Active	Passive		
Value Based				
Systemic Oppression	3	1	2	0
Respecting difference	0	5	4	2
Composition	1	1	0	2

N = 15

DISCUSSION

There are several interesting findings that seem important to address. First, the results of this study appear to demonstrate a lack of consistency in how programs are defining diversity and their benchmarks for achieving diversity. Second, there appears to be a difference in regard to the value that programs place on the overall importance of diversity.

Lack of Consistency in Definition and Benchmarks

One main finding from the data analysis was the inconsistency of definitions and benchmarks programs have established. Some programs defined diversity as the composition of students and faculty while others defined diversity as a value or guiding philosophy of the program. Similarly, the analysis of benchmarks also showed inconsistency in how programs are developing their goals to achieve their definitions of diversity. Some programs provided specific details and the steps that they would take in order to achieve their goals for diversity. However, other programs only mention basic goals such as “recruit and retain a diverse student body” but fail to provide any steps or strategies for how they would achieve those goals. The lack of consistency in defining diversity among programs suggests the COAMFTE may need to provide more specific criteria for programs to follow when developing their own definition of diversity. This lack of consistency in regard to defining diversity appears to be present in the accreditation standards themselves. For example, Standard I-B states that “educational outcomes reflect an understanding and respect for cultural diversity.” This standard appears to encourage programs to create educational outcomes that are part of an overall value or respect for diversity. However, the COAMFTE later, in the glossary section of Standards 11.0, uses a

compositional description of diversity in its explanation of cultural diversity. It states that cultural diversity refers to the “representation of multiple groups in the student body, supervisors, and faculty with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, culture, environment, health/ability, nationality, religion, spirituality, and socio economic status.” Considering the conflicting descriptions of diversity in the accreditation standards it makes sense that many programs chose to use a compositional rather than a value based definition of diversity. It would be important for the COAMFTE to clarify whether or not they want programs to provide definitions of diversity that are compositional in nature or if they want programs to offer a definition of diversity that is based more on the programs overall philosophy or commitment to diversity.

In regard to benchmarks, while the COAMFTE does provide an explanation that benchmarks should include “measurable milestones, activities, and plans for maintaining or increasing diversity” (COAMFTE 2005, p.22), it seems the programs had difficulty providing benchmarks that were consistent with the definition provided by the COAMFTE. For instance, some programs developed benchmarks that could be defined as “measureable milestones” while other programs developed more vague milestones that could not be measured. Additionally, almost half of the programs failed to provide any specific plans and strategies towards achieving diversity. One possibility for this lack of consistency could be related to the broadness of the definition of benchmarks that is offered by the COAMFTE. For example, benchmarks are defined as having three different components: measureable milestone, activities, and plans. It may be important for the COAMFTE to clarify what each of these components mean. In particular, it may also be important for the COAMFTE to consider what the difference is between a milestone and a goal.

Valuing Diversity

One of the most interesting findings in this study has to do with the differing values that were expressed in the programs definitions of diversity. As previously mentioned, programs' descriptions of diversity varied between value based and composition based definitions. Value based definitions represented differing understandings of diversity that appear to reflect the difference between the social justice training literature and the values expressed in the current COAMFTE accreditation standards. Several programs created definitions that were consistent with the current feminist and social justice training literature. For example, several authors suggest that CFT training programs need to transform typical education and recruiting practices to incorporate diversity and social justice from a power and privilege perspective (McDowell et al., 2002; McGeorge et al., 2006; McGoldrick, et al., 1999; Storm et al., 1997; Zimmerman & Haddock, 2001). This social justice stance appears to be consistent with how some programs currently define diversity. For instance, one participant stated that "diversity is organized on the principle that race, socioeconomic status and gender are the most primary and obvious variables underlying discrimination, negative stereotyping and oppression both in American society and throughout the world." Another example of a definition that is consistent with the social justice training literature is found in the following definition by one of the programs:

All humans must be afforded dignity and respect and that the oppression of any member or group within a society occurs to the detriment of all members of that society. Our rationale stems as well from our belief that without intentional intervention to resolve sources of discrimination and oppression, all social systems contribute to the continuation of the oppression of underprivileged individuals and groups.

Although some programs based their definitions on an understanding of systemic oppression, other programs based their definition of diversity in ways that are more

consistent with the respect based definition that is more closely aligned to the definition provided by the COAMFTE in its most recent standards of accreditation. For example, Section I-B of version 11.0 standards states that “educational outcomes reflect an understanding and respect for cultural diversity” (COAMFTE, 2006). This respect based understanding of diversity appears to be consistent with how some programs were defining diversity. One example of a definition that is consistent with a respect based understanding of diversity can be found in the following programs’ statement that “diversity represents our moral imperative to respect and appreciate all human differences including, but not ethnicity class, culture, sexual orientation, gender, and religion.” Similarity, another program stated that his or her program is “committed to orienting students toward understanding and having respect for diversity.”

Another interesting finding in the value based definitions was the apparent relationship between definitions of diversity and the benchmarks the programs established. A comparative review of definitions that were based on a systemic understanding of diversity and those that were based on respect or difference indicated that programs that used a definition that was based on systemic oppression were more likely to provide clear milestones and benchmarks for achieving their goals for diversity. Programs that used a respect or difference definition were more likely to create vague benchmarks without clear milestones for achieving diversity goals. Based on the arguments that exist in the social justice training literature (McDowell et al., 2002; McGeorge et al., 2006; McGoldrick, et al., 1999; Storm, York, & Keller, 1997; Zimmerman & Haddock, 2001) this finding makes sense as an understanding of systemic oppression is directly related to an understanding

that active efforts need to be created at the systemic level in order to achieve greater equality among privileged and marginalized groups.

Implications for Training Programs and the COAMFTE

The results of this study have some important implications for training programs and the COAMFTE. First, value based definitions appear to be linked with more concrete milestones and benchmarks for diversity. Based on this finding, the COAMFTE should consider requiring programs to create value based definitions that represent an overall program commitment to diversity. Secondly, it appears there is a lack of consistency in how programs are defining diversity. The COAMFTE has set standards that suggest programs need to create educational outcomes to reflect understanding and respect for cultural diversity, but then COAMFTE defines cultural diversity in a purely compositional manner. The current definition of diversity that is provided by the COAMFTE is unlikely to encourage programs to create the types of value based definitions that appear to be related with the development of the types of benchmarks that the COAMFTE is asking of its programs. Therefore, it would be important for the COAMFTE to revise its definition of diversity, as presented in the glossary of its standards of accreditation, to include a more values based definition that is more consistent with the current social justice training literature.

Limitations

A limitation to this study is the relatively small sample. Of the 84 possible programs, only 19 are represented in the results of this study. While the small response rate impacts the generalizability of the findings, this study provides initial insight that can inform future research. It is important to note that the definitions of diversity provided by

the programs represented a fairly even distribution of definitions according to the themes identified in this study. However, additional themes would likely have emerged if a greater number of programs would have participated in the study. Another limitation is the possibility of response bias. As with any survey research, it is possible that those who felt strongly about the topic of social justice, whether they were for or against it, were more likely to participate in the study. Another limitation that may be important to address is that programs were only asked to provide their definitions of diversity according to the accreditation standards, however, they were not specifically asked about their beliefs and values regarding social justice. Therefore, it is possible that some of the programs in this study may address social justice issues but did not feel like they were relevant to the specific way that the accreditation standards ask them to define diversity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it seems apparent that there is a lack of consistency in how CFT training programs are defining diversity and establishing benchmarks for achieving their goals associated with diversity. This inconsistency may be related to the lack of clarity on the part of the COAMFTE in regard to its own definition that is offered in the most recent standards of accreditation. While it clearly states that programs should demonstrate that their educational outcomes reflect an understanding and respect for diversity, they then go on to provide a definition of diversity that is compositional rather than value based. An important finding from this study is that programs that created definitions of diversity that reflected an overall commitment to diversity at the program level, were more likely to develop clear milestones and specific steps for achieving their goals. Additionally, it appears that programs that defined diversity on a systemic understanding of oppression were even more likely to develop benchmarks that included actual goals that included the representation of specific numbers or percentages of diverse students and faculty in the program. This finding is consistent with the current social justice training literature in the field of CFT that calls for programs to embrace an understanding that diversity takes into consideration the ways that inequality and discrimination are based on systemic oppression.

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APPENDIX A: CFT PROGRAM DIVERSITY SURVEY

1. The COAMFTE requires accredited MFT programs to develop their own definition of diversity (Standard #). Please provide your program's definition of diversity in the space below.

2. The COAMFTE requires accredited MFT programs to develop specific benchmarks for achieving diversity (Standard #). Please provide the benchmarks that your program has established for achieving diversity in the space below.

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Age: _____

Gender:

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Transgender
- d. Other (please specify) _____

What is your ethnicity/race?

- a. Latino (a) / Chicano / Hispanic
- b. African American / Black
- c. Native American
- d. Asian / Asian American
- e. Pacific Islander
- f. Middle Eastern / Arabic
- g. European-American / White / Caucasian
- h. Biracial / Multi-racial (please specify) _____
- i. Other (please specify)

How many years have you been a faculty member in an accredited MFT program: _____

What type of educational institution is your program a part of?

- a. Private – Non-Religious
- b. Private – Religious
- c. Public
- d. Other (please specify) _____

What degrees are offered in MFT at your institution?

- a. Master's Only
- b. Ph.D. Only
- c. Both Master's and Ph.D.

Which of your programs are accredited by COAMFTE?

- a. Master's
- b. Ph.D.
- c. Both Master's and Ph.D.

What year did your program first become accredited by COAMFTE?

How many tenure track faculty members are assigned to your MFT program?

_____ How many of the faculty members identify as male? _____

How many of the faculty members identify as female? _____

How many of the faculty members identify as transgendered? _____

How many of the faculty members are White? _____

How many of the faculty members are people of color? _____

Do you have a member of your MFT tenured track faculty who identifies as lesbian, gay, or bisexual?

a. Yes

b. No