

# The Multicultural Journey to Cultural Competence: Personal Narratives

Sue, D.W. (2008). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice*. (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

**R**eading *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice* (CCD) is very likely to elicit strong emotions among readers. Not only may the content of the book challenge your racial reality, but it is passionate, direct, and likely to arouse deep feelings of guilt, defensiveness, anger, sadness, hopelessness, and anxiety in some of you. Becoming culturally competent in mental health practice, however, demands that nested or embedded emotions associated with race, culture, gender, and other sociodemographic differences be openly experienced and discussed. It is these intense feelings that often block our ability to hear the voices of those most oppressed and disempowered. How we, as helping professionals, deal with these strong feelings can either enhance or negate a deeper understanding of ourselves as racial/cultural beings and our understanding of the worldviews of culturally diverse clients. Sara Winter (1977, p. 24), a White female psychologist, powerfully enumerates the reactions that many Whites experience when topics of race or racism are openly discussed. These disturbing feelings, she contends, serve to protect us from having to examine our own prejudices and biases.

*When someone pushes racism into my awareness, I feel guilty (that I could be doing so much more); angry (I don't like to feel like I'm wrong); defensive (I already have two Black friends . . . I worry more about racism than most whites do—isn't that enough); turned off (I have other priorities in my life with guilt about that thought); helpless (the problem is so big—what can I do?). I HATE TO FEEL THIS WAY. That is why I minimize race issues and let them fade from my awareness whenever possible.*

On the other hand, many marginalized groups react equally strongly when issues of oppression are raised, especially when their stories of discrimination and pain are minimized or neglected. Their reality of racism, sexism, and homophobia, they contend, is relatively unknown or ignored by those in power because of the discomfort that

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pervades such topics. Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., an African American attorney and former confidant of President Bill Clinton, made this point about racism in startling terms. In making an analogy between the terrorist attacks of September 11 (known by an overwhelming majority in our nation) and those suffered by Blacks (seemingly minimized by the public), Jordan stated:

*None of this is new to Black people. War, hunger, disease, unemployment, deprivation, dehumanization, and terrorism define our existence. They are not new to us. Slavery was terrorism, segregation was terrorism, and the bombing of the four little girls in Sunday school in Birmingham was terrorism. The violent deaths of Medgar, Martin, Malcolm, Vernon Dahmer, Chaney, Shwerner, and Goodman were terrorism. And the difference between September 11 and the terror visited upon Black people is that on September 11, the terrorists were foreigners. When we were terrorized, it was by our neighbors. The terrorists were American citizens.*

Our opening chapter is meant to be a reflective and emotional one. While the entire volume is filled with the knowledge base of multicultural counseling and therapy derived from research findings, it is important to realize that cognitive understanding and intellectual competence are not enough. Concepts of multiculturalism, diversity, race, culture, ethnicity, and so forth are more than intellectual concepts. Multiculturalism deals with real human experiences, and as a result, understanding your emotional reactions is equally important in the journey to cultural competence. To aid you in your journey, we present two personal narratives concerning the text you are about to read. We hope that you will carefully monitor your own emotional reactions, not allow them to interfere with your journey to cultural competence, and try to understand them as they relate to your own racial/cultural awakening and identity.

### **My Personal and Professional Journey as a White Person: Reactions to "Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice"**

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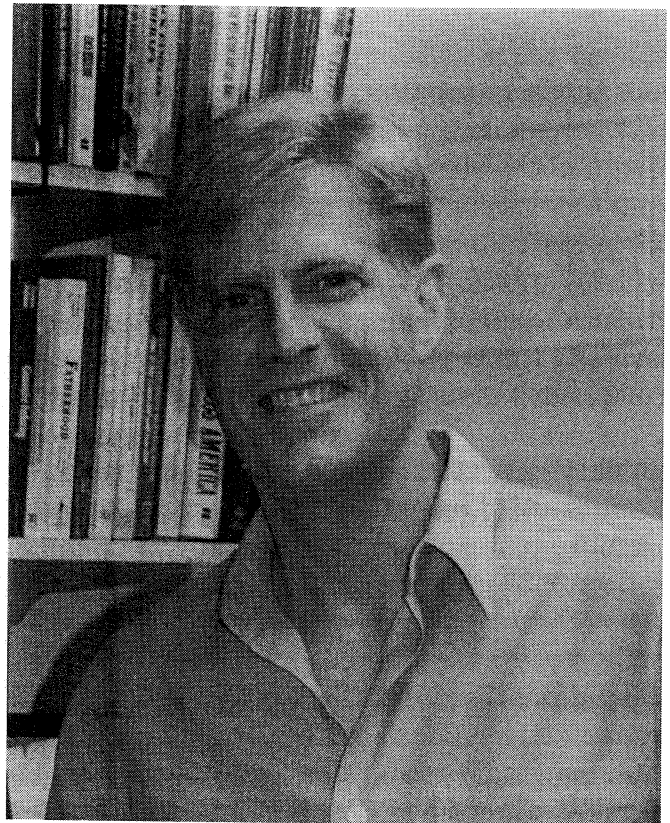
by Mark S. Kiselica

I was shaken to my core the first time I read *Counseling the Culturally Different* (now *Counseling the Culturally Diverse*) by Derald Wing Sue (1981). I can remember the moment vividly. I was a doctoral candidate at Penn State University's counseling psychology program, and I had been reading Sue's book in preparation for my comprehensive examinations, which I was scheduled to take toward the end of the spring semester of 1985.

I wish I could tell you that I had acquired Sue's book because I was gen-

Figure 1.1

Mark S. Kiselica



uinely interested in learning about multicultural counseling, or, as it was labeled back then, "cross-cultural counseling." I am embarrassed to say, however, that that was not the case. I had purchased Sue's book purely out of necessity, figuring that I had better read the book because I was likely to be asked a major question about cross-cultural counseling on the comps. During the early and middle 1980s, taking a course in multicultural counseling was not a requirement in many graduate counseling programs, including mine, and I had decided not to take my department's pertinent course as an elective. I saw myself as a culturally sensitive person, and I concluded that the course wouldn't have much to offer me. Nevertheless, I understood that Dr. Harold Cheatham, the professor who taught the course, would likely submit a question to the pool of material being used to construct the comps. So, I prudently went to the university bookstore and purchased a copy of *Counseling the Culturally Different* (CCD) because that was the text Dr. Cheatham used for his course. I had decided that reading and studying the book would prepare me for whatever question Dr. Cheatham might devise, so I read it carefully, making sure to take detailed notes on everything Sue had to say.

I didn't get very far with my highlighting and note taking before I started to react to Sue's book with great anger and disgust. Early on in the text, Sue blasted the mental health system for its historical mistreatment of people who

were considered to be ethnic minorities in the United States. He especially took on White mental health professionals, charging them with a legacy of ethnocentric and racist beliefs and practices that had harmed people of color and made them leery of counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists. It seemed that Sue didn't have a single good thing to say about White America, and I was ticked off at him! I resented that I had to read his book, and couldn't wait for the task to be over. I wished that there were some other way than reading Sue's book to get through the comps, but I knew I had better complete his text and know the subject matter covered in it if I wanted to succeed on the examinations. So, out of necessity, I read on, and struggled with the feelings that Sue's words stirred in me.

I was very upset as I read and reread Sue's book. I felt that Sue had an axe to grind with White America and that he was using his book to do so. I believed his accusations were grossly exaggerated and, at least to some extent, unfair. And I felt defensive because I am White and my ancestors had not perpetrated any of the offenses against ethnic minorities that Sue had charged. I was so angry at Sue that I vowed I would toss his book away once I passed the comps. I looked forward to the day when I would be relieved of him and his writings.

Yet, for reasons I didn't fully understand at the time, my anger, defensiveness, and resentment began to fade, and rather than dumping Sue's book, I found myself reading it again and again. Something was happening to me, and I couldn't put my finger on it. Surprisingly, once I had reached the point where I understood the content and theory provided in Sue's book, and hence, had achieved my purposes for reading the text, I kept opening it up again. And strangely, with each fresh reading, I experienced new waves of emotions. Instead of reacting with bitterness, I was now feeling sadness—mild sadness at first, but later, a profound sense of sadness, and even grief. At times, my eyes filled with tears, and I found myself now wanting to absorb the message that Sue was trying to convey. *What was happening to me?*

I tried to make sense of my emotions—to ascertain why I was drawn back to Sue's book again and again in spite of my initial rejection of it. I know it may sound crazy, but I read certain sections of Sue's book repeatedly, and then reflected on what was happening inside of me. I spent quite a bit of time alone with Sue's book, sometimes in my office. A couple of other times, I went for long walks in the woods, trying to understand why this book was becoming so important to me. *My life was changing and I needed to know why.*

The tears kept coming. I began to discover important lessons about me, significant insights, prompted by reading Sue's book, that would shape the direction of my future. I gradually realized that over my entire life I had identified with oppressed peoples because my ancestors and my immediate family had encountered so many hardships throughout our history. My mother's family was from Ireland, and throughout the ages, they had suffered severe

poverty and political and cultural domination by the British. Their language, Gaelic, had been taken from them. They were forced to change the spelling of their last name. They left Ireland for a better life in America, realizing that they would never be able to return to their homeland, and their hearts were ripped apart by such a heart-wrenching departure. Yet, they arrived in America with the hope of providing something better for their children, and they stood up to the terrible stereotypes about and maltreatment of the Irish by the American establishment. My maternal grandfather worked as a railroad laborer until it killed him, and my grandmother cleaned the homes of wealthy Americans until she could work no longer, still poor and living in a ghetto at the time of her death. All of these images came back to me as I read Sue's book, and with their arrival, the tears began to fall.

More images entered my mind, this time regarding my father's family, who were from Slovakia. They, too, had been poor. They, too, suffered through years of external domination and persecution, including the destruction of their homes and villages by invading armies and the desecration of their churches and political institutions. My paternal grandparents fled to the United States, and my father was raised in a poor, immigrant neighborhood where English was his second language. My father was learning disabled and lame from a horrific leg injury for which he received inadequate medical care. For decades, he labored in factories under deplorable conditions that would eventually disable him. Yet, all he ever dreamed about was giving my brothers and sisters and me a better life. Sue's book reminded me of my father and all that he and his family went through, and their suffering surged through me, leaving me teary-eyed.

These memories helped me to look at Sue's book from a different point of view. They caused me to realize more fully that the historical experiences of other racial and ethnic groups were similar in some respects to those of my family. And with that particular realization, more tears swelled in my eyes—tears of empathy, and tears of shame. I began to feel—*really feel*—for what people of color had experienced in this country, and I was ashamed of the fact that it had taken me so long to develop that level of empathic understanding. "How could I have been so clueless?" I wondered to myself at the time.

My head began to spin as a vortex of thoughts swirled in my mind. I now realized that Sue was right! The system *had* been destructive toward people of color, and although my ancestors and I had not directly been a part of that oppressive system, I had unknowingly contributed to it. I began to think about how I had viewed people of color throughout my life, and I had to admit to myself that I had unconsciously bought into the racist stereotypes about African Americans and Latinos. Yes, I had laughed at and told racist jokes. Yes, I had used the "N" word when referring to African Americans. *Yes, I had been a racist.*

Admitting that I have been racist is not an easy thing for me to do. It isn't

easy now, and it certainly wasn't easy in 1985, when I naively thought I was such a culturally sensitive person. I had good reasons to conclude, albeit erroneously, that I was *not* a racist. I had never been a member of the Ku Klux Klan. When I was a boy, I had had a handful of Cuban American and African American friends. My family and I had always supported the Democratic Party and liberal legislative initiatives. Yes, I was one of the good guys, so the word "racist" couldn't apply to me. But I was wrong, blinded by the insular world in which I had been raised, a world of well-meaning Whites in an era of racial segregation that dictated little substantive contact with people who were different from me: a world that socialized American Whites, including me, to become racist.

Sue's book forced me to remove my blinders. He helped me to see that I was both a product and an architect of a racist culture. Initially, I didn't want to admit this to myself. That is part of the reason I got so angry at Sue for his book. "His accusations don't apply to *me*!" was the predominant, initial thought that went through my mind. But Sue's words were too powerful to let me escape my denial of my racism. It was as though I was in a deep sleep and someone had dumped a bucket of ice-cold water on me, shocking me into a state of sudden wakefulness: The sleep was the denial of my racism; the water was Sue's provocative words, and the wakefulness was the painful recognition that I was a racist.

It was very unsettling to achieve this recognition, and I faced a tough dilemma afterward: Should I continue to confront my ethnocentrism and racism and experience all of the discomfort that goes with that process, or should I retreat from that process and go on living my life of comfort in my White-dominated world? What else would I discover about myself if I continued with the process of exploring my cultural biases? Where would it take me?

As I wrestled with this dilemma, two considerations helped me to move beyond my anxiety about fully committing myself to becoming a more culturally sensitive person. I realized I had an obligation to my ancestors to confront my fears and cultural biases, for without further growth on my part, I would continue to do to others what had been done to my ancestors. I also was deeply moved by the historical experiences of people of color in the United States. Sue and the contributing authors who wrote some of the chapters in the first edition of his book did a nice job of summarizing these experiences. Their work inspired me to learn more about the history and experiences of people who were culturally different from me.

As I look back on this period of soul-searching, I now realize that the reading of *CCD* sparked a period of important White racial identity development for me. Prior to reading Sue's book, I had not thought of myself as a racial being nor considered my role as a White person in a racist society. Reading *CCD* pushed me to have a greater awareness of racial issues. My de-

cision to explore racial matters further led me to make an important professional decision that would have a lasting impact on me and move me to yet deeper levels of understanding about my Whiteness: I decided to apply for and accept a predoctoral internship in clinical child and adolescent psychology in the outpatient unit of the Community Mental Health Center of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), which was located in the heart of Newark, New Jersey. Because the center at UMDNJ served primarily African American and Latino families, the internship provided me with extensive contact with people who are culturally different from me. So, when I left Penn State in the summer of 1986 to begin my internship in Newark, I was about to immerse myself in a cross-cultural experience.

The year I spent in Newark changed me forever. Developing everyday relationships with African American and Latino colleagues at UMDNJ, studying about the history and traditions of African Americans and Latinos, and counseling children, adolescents, and families from these two racial/ethnic groups gave me a real-world feel for the material I had first read about in *CCD*. By immersing myself in the cultures of these two populations, I acquired an affective understanding about racism and oppression, which is a form of understanding that Sue said is necessary for true multicultural growth. I also became acutely aware of my Whiteness. Being one of the few White, non-Latino people at UMDNJ, I was now the minority, and I stood out as a White person. I enjoyed many conversations with my colleagues and clients about our respective roots. I learned that we shared distinct, yet overlapping, historical experiences. I understood for the first time the advantages I had enjoyed by being White in America, of how the system is open to people who look like me but is often closed and dangerous for people of color. To put it in a different way, I recognized that my White skin and blond hair and blue eyes afforded me "White privilege" in a racist society. Best of all, I experienced the joy that comes with crossing cultural boundaries and discovering the beauty of different cultures and people.

When my year in Newark was over, I felt compelled to write an account of these experiences, which had been prompted by reading *CCD*. I had a week off between the completion of my internship and the start of a new job at the Piscataway campus of UMDNJ. Rather than go on vacation, I sequestered myself in the bedroom of our apartment in Bordentown, New Jersey, where my wife and I lived at the time, pouring my heart into writing about my cross-cultural experiences. When that week was over, I had completed the first draft of a manuscript titled *Reflections of a Multicultural Internship Experience*. I sent the manuscript to Dr. Cheatham, who was still a professor at Penn State, and asked him to critique my paper, even though I had never enrolled in his course. In a gesture of kindness and generosity I will always appreciate, Harold not only reviewed the manuscript, but he encouraged me to try to

publish it. Shortly afterward, I noticed a call for manuscripts for a special issue of the *Journal of Counseling and Development* (JCD) on multiculturalism as a fourth force in counseling, which was to be edited by Paul Pedersen, a well-known multicultural scholar who was a professor of counseling at Syracuse University at the time. I considered sending my manuscript to Dr. Pedersen but hesitated due to several doubts I had about the paper. I had little experience as a writer and feared that my paper was too personal and heartfelt for a professional journal. I also felt vulnerable knowing that I was about to allow others to read my intensely personal experiences. I nevertheless submitted the manuscript to Dr. Pedersen. Much to my surprise, the manuscript was accepted for publication after the reviewers who read it commented that it was a very special article representing a unique voice in the field.

I was now on my way to complementing my clinical experiences of counseling the culturally different with extensive scholarship on the subject. In the fall of 1990, I took a position as an assistant professor of counseling psychology at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, and my article about my multicultural internship appeared in *JCD* during the following year. Over the course of the next 15 years, I would focus many of my 100-plus publications on the subjects of multicultural counseling and education, and the process of confronting prejudice and racism. I owe much of my productivity in multicultural counseling to Dr. Derald Wing Sue, not only for the influence *Counseling the Culturally Diverse* had on me, but also for the personal manner in which Dr. Sue has mentored me. That he and I would become friends is yet another reason why I am grateful that I read his book.

On January 30, 1995, approximately 10 years after I had read *CCD* for the first time, I decided to write a letter to Dr. Sue. By this point in my career, I was an assistant professor of counselor education at Trenton State College (now The College of New Jersey). I had just published my first book, *Multicultural Counseling with Teenage Fathers*, the seventh volume in the Sage Series on Multicultural Aspects of Counseling. I wanted to mark the publication of my book by expressing my gratitude to Dr. Sue for the profound impact he had on me. So, once again, I poured my heart into words, composing a three-page letter to Dr. Sue. In my letter, I told him the entire story about my comprehensive exams, my initial and later reactions to his book, and the racial identity development his words had prompted in me. I also described the impact of some of his subsequent publications on me, and I thanked him for the role he had played in my life.

A few weeks later, the phone in my office rang, and Dr. Sue was on the other end of the line. He introduced himself to me and then reported that, although he had received many letters from people about his book over the years, he had never read any commentary about his book that was as moving and honest as mine. So, he was calling to thank me for my thoughtfulness.



I will cherish that phone call for the rest of my life. It was a fantasy come true to talk with a man who had become one of my idols. We talked for a while about our lives and our interests. When I hung up the phone at the conclusion of our conversation, I was in a state of disbelief. Derald Wing Sue had just taken the time to call and thank *me*.

This thoughtful gesture was just one of many acts of kindness by people like Derald, who understand the importance of affirming multicultural allies. People like Harold Cheatham, Cheryl Thompson, Joe Ponterotto, Paul Pederesen, Don Locke, MaryLou Ramsey, Roger Herring, Allen Ivey, Michael D'Andrea, Judy Daniels, Larry Gerstein, Leo Hendricks, Sharon Bowman, Kelley Kenney, Mark Kenney, Nancy Boyd-Franklin, Courtland Lee, Bea Wehrly, John McFadden, Fred Bemak, Rita Chung, Charles Ridley, Chalmer Thompson, Sandra Tomlinson-Clarke, Vivian Ota Wang, Mary Swigonski, and Amy Reynolds—all accomplished, respected scholars who have supported and affirmed my efforts to be a positive contributor to the multicultural movement. This support was crucial to me because the emotionally laden process of developing multicultural sensitivity did not stop with the completion of my internship in 1986. On the contrary, my cultural immersion experience in Newark was only one phase of my White racial identity development, and I would need the understanding and counsel of these and other friends as I struggled with the ups and downs of my never-ending multicultural journey.

What were these struggles? For one, I went through a period of over-identifying with people of color, which is a common reaction of Whites who experience guilt after they have an awakening about themselves as racial beings. For a while, I acted as though I were one of the saved, a former racist who was now on a mission to save other, fellow Whites from their racism. At times, I became a judgmental nuisance to my White friends. I also became overbearing with friends who were people of color, seeking their approval for my conversion and annoying them in the process. I got slammed a few times for this behavior, and at other times, as I continued to cross cultural boundaries, I encountered the stinging resentment of me by people of color who drew conclusions about my character based simply on that fact that I am White. As I became more involved in intercultural forums and organizations, I grew weary of the tensions that had to be negotiated about racial matters. These were painful times, so I retreated from substantive interracial contact for about a year, feeling that the price I had to pay for my cross-cultural involvement just wasn't worth it. During this hiatus I did a lot of soul-searching, and I confided in people I trusted about the feelings I was having, emerging with some new perspectives about racial matters and relations. I realized that we will never make progress with the racial problems that have plagued our country unless Whites like me are willing to accept and manage the pain and discomfort associated with negotiating racial issues. I recognized

more fully the complicated nature of racial issues and was less prone to judge others for their racism, even though I stood ready to confront racism whenever it reared its ugly head. I gradually re-engaged myself in the work to promote cultural harmony, joining national organizations, such as the Southern Poverty Law Center, and local movements, such as the Newtown Township No Place for Hate Campaign, to combat prejudice in all its forms. Through my work with these organizations and my continued interchange with students, colleagues, and friends about racial issues, I have realized that a variety of different tactics are necessary in the battle to eliminate hate. Virulent racism must be confronted with strong systemic policies and community-wide stands communicating that hatred will not be tolerated. More subtle forms of racism can be addressed by taking a less ardent approach, one that involves the tricky challenge of balancing discomforting confrontation with empathic understanding. I have learned that the language we use to promote multiculturalism can be problematic, and that we must replace certain terminology, such as "teaching tolerance," with the words, "fostering appreciation." People who sense that they are being "tolerated" don't feel welcome, but people who know that they are being "appreciated" feel that they have an honored place at the table.

As I have made these discoveries and moved toward higher stages of White racial identity development, Derald Wing Sue has repeatedly influenced me along the way, affirming me and promoting my growth through his continued writings and encouragement. For example, in one especially cogent article, Derald criticized the professions of counseling and psychology for sometimes lacking a soul (Sue, 1993), thereby affirming that there must be a place in the professional literature for publications like mine, which tend to be written both from the head *and* the heart. Bolstered by his words, I have published several influential manuscripts in which I have merged material from counseling theory and research with narratives about my own highly personal reflections regarding racism, anti-Semitism, and multicultural education (Kiselica, 1991, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2003). Derald has also reinforced my belief that people from different backgrounds must work together in order to address interracial difficulties when he wrote, "If we are to move forward, both minority and majority researchers must make a genuine effort to reach out to one another for mutual understanding and respect" (Sue, 1993, p. 245). In addition, Derald has welcomed Whites like me to the multicultural movement by expressing his belief, "We should view them [White multicultural scholars] as allies because the future of multiculturalism depends on the positive alliances we form with our White brothers and sisters" (p. 248). Finally, like me, Derald emphasized the importance of empathic understanding regarding racial matters when he offered this compassionate statement regarding White racism:

*I do not believe that any of us were born wanting to be biased, prejudiced, racist, or sexist. These statements are not meant to absolve White people from the guilt of bias and discrimination (although guilt is counterproductive), but to indicate that some White researchers are engaged in a different battle: overcoming negative aspects of their cultural conditioning. (Sue, 1993, pp. 247–248)*

Derald's influence on me has not been limited to these writings or that one unforgettable phone call he made to me in 1995. On two occasions, he and I served on the same panels at conference symposia pertaining to multicultural counseling and education (Iwamasa, 1995; McCree & Bromley, 2002). A few years ago, I played a key role in convincing the administration of The College of New Jersey to bring Derald to our campus to give an address for our Multicultural Lecture Series, during which he shared his keen observations about the status of racial relations in our country. Every time we see each other at conferences of the American Psychological Association, the American Counseling Association, and other professional organizations, we enjoy a warm exchange, updating each other about our families and our work. From time to time, we talk via the phone or e-mail, discussing both professional issues and personal matters that are important to us.

Throughout all of these contacts, Derald Wing Sue has welcomed me to the multicultural movement and made me feel that I am his respected colleague. To think that he and I have reached this stage in our relationship in spite of my initial, unfair reactions to the first edition of *CCD* is a remarkable accomplishment, for which we both deserve credit and about which I am once again moved to tears. As for me, I feel proud of the fact that I worked through my strong, harsh reactions to Derald's book and saw the truth and wisdom in his observations. I am grateful to Derald for writing that book because it was the catalyst for so much growth in me. I know that his words will echo in my mind for years to come as I continue on my multicultural journey. I also have no doubt that this, the fifth edition of *Counseling the Culturally Diverse*, will have a positive influence on a new generation of counseling students, just as it did with me over 20 years ago. To those students, I send my warmest regards and my wish that you will embrace this book and the soul-searching that it will stimulate in you. And if you struggle with unsettling feelings as you read Dr. Sue's latest edition, please know that I will be there to help you during your multicultural journey, just as Derald Wing Sue was there to support me with mine.

In closing, to Derald Wing Sue, I say this: Thank you for being my brother!

## My Personal and Professional Journey as a Person of Color: The Heart and Soul of "Counseling the Culturally Diverse"

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by Derald Wing Sue\*

I am grateful to Mark Kiselica for his willingness to share such deep personal reflections with all of us. Mark's honesty in confronting his own racism is refreshing, and his insights invaluable to those who wish to become allies in the struggle for equal rights. He is a rarity in academic circles, even rarer because he was willing to put his words on paper for the whole world to read as a means to help others understand the meaning of racism on a human level. Mark Kiselica's courageous and open exploration of his initial reactions to *CCD* indicates what I have come to learn is a common, intensely emotional experience from many readers. Because *CCD* deals openly, honestly, and passionately with issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia, and challenges our belief that we are free of biases, it is likely to evoke defensiveness, resentment, and anger in readers. In Mark's case, he did not allow these reactions to sabotage his own self-exploration and journey to cultural competence.

*Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice* represents a labor of love, and is written from my heart and soul. It is filled with all the passion, frustration, and anger concerning the detrimental nature and harm our society and its helping professions have wrought on many marginalized groups, albeit unintentionally. Its goals are to enlighten you about how counseling and psychotherapy may represent cultural oppression, and to provide a vision of change that is rooted in social justice. Let me say at the onset that my anger is not directed at White Americans nor our country. The anger *is* directed, however, at White supremacy, sexism, heterosexism, and the many manifestations of bigotry and discrimination that accompany it. As someone once said about racism, "White people are not the enemies, but White supremacy is!"

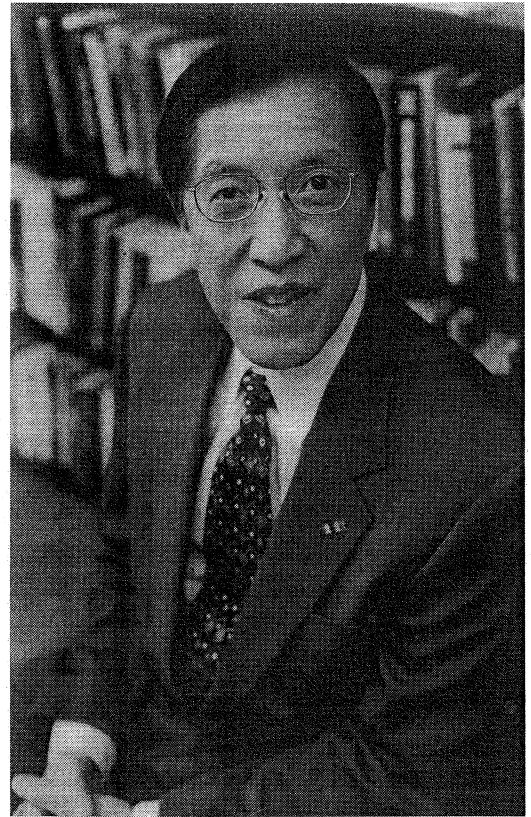
When first written in 1981, I knew my words and assertions would come across as provocative and accusatory and would make many in the field defensive and angry, despite the fact that it was based heavily on research findings. Upon publication, that was what happened. I received calls from colleagues who criticized the book and claimed that it was a prime example of White bashing. Strangely enough, while many colleagues and students found the book distressful and disturbing, it became a success that surprised

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\*Adapted from Sue, D. W. (2005). The Continuing Journey to Multicultural Competence. In R. K. Conyne and F. Bemak (eds.), *Journeys to Professional Excellence: Lessons from Leading Counselor Educators and Practitioners* (pp. 73–84). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association. Reprinted with permission

Figure 1.2

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Derald Wing Sue

even my publisher. Much of this was fueled by scholars and students of color who embraced it and claimed it was one of the few texts that spoke to their experiential reality. Since its publication, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse* has gone through four revisions, and I am proud to say it is now the most frequently used text on multicultural counseling; further, it forms the knowledge base of many items on counseling and psychology licensing exams. Many have credited the text as the forerunner of the cultural competence movement, but in actuality the product was the result of many pioneers of color whose important contributions have been overlooked, ignored, or neglected.

Many professors and students have written to me about their reactions to *CCD*. Some assert that it is too political and too emotional. I have also discovered that my writings are often seen by people in the profession as too filled with emotions, and not consistent with the objective style so prevalent in academia. That has been one of my pet peeves regarding so-called "scholarly writings" in the field. Many of my colleagues operate from a mistaken notion that rational thought can only come from objective discourse, devoid of emotions. To me, speaking from the heart and with passion is not antagonistic to reason. Further, speaking the truth, especially pointing out how counseling and therapy have oppressed, harmed, and damaged marginalized

groups (often unintentionally) is difficult for many of my White colleagues and students to hear. They are likely to react negatively, making it difficult for them to accept challenges to their concept of mental health practice, and perhaps their own complicity in perpetuating unjust treatment of clients of color. I suppose they view my writings as accusatory and off-setting. Yet, how does one "nicely" and objectively speak about stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination in the helping professions and the helping professional? Should I soften the message and not speak about the unspeakable?

### Being Chinese American in a Monocultural Society

To understand the passion of *CCD*, it may be helpful to share some of my life experiences as a minority in this society. The lessons I have learned as a Chinese American, born and raised in a predominantly White western society, have played a central role in the content and context of this text. I was born and raised in Portland, Oregon, to proud parents who believed strongly in the primacy of the family and extolled the virtues of hard work and achievement. My father emigrated from China; indeed, he stowed away on a ship to the United States at the age of 14. Not knowing how to speak English and unfamiliar with this country, my father survived. And that has been the story of our family, surviving in the face of great odds. My brothers and sister have learned that lesson well, and *it has been watching my mother and father deal with our early experiences of poverty and discrimination that has taught us to struggle and fight against social injustice. I attribute my work on social justice, multiculturalism, and diversity to these early experiences.*

As a family, we have always been in awe at the courage it must have taken for our father to journey to a strange country without family, friends, formal education, or employable skills. Yet, my father married, raised five sons and one daughter, and was able to provide for the family. He met my mother and married her when she was 16, both never attaining an education beyond the third grade. My mother taught herself to read and write English, but my father refused to part with the old ways; his pride in being Chinese was immense, and he eventually made his mark in Portland's Chinatown, where he became a respected elder in the community. Prior to that, he found work in the shipyards and as a gambler, and provided as best he could for the family. Despite the limited schooling of my parents, they always stressed the importance of an education. They instilled within us the value and importance it had for our future. It always amazes my colleagues when I tell them that I have three brothers with doctorates, all in the field of psychology. My sister, unlike her brothers, became a computer programmer.

The earliest memories of my childhood are filled primarily with images of a close-knit family who struggled economically to make ends meet. For the brief period we were on welfare, I could sense the shame and humiliation my

parents felt. Everyone in the family worked to contribute until we could again stand with our heads held high. *People who have never seriously lacked the necessities of life will never truly understand the experience of being poor, constantly worrying about how to pay even the most inexpensive bills, what a catastrophic event a broken appliance represents, not being able to pay for school field trips, walking miles every day to save bus fare, working after school till midnight to help the family financially, purchasing soda or candy as holiday gifts for one another, having to completely support ourselves through college and graduate school, and knowing that others seemed to shun us because we were poor.* To deal with our isolation, we kept to ourselves as a family, and learned to depend only on ourselves or one another.

In graduate school I recall how my classmates in counseling psychology often spoke about the desire to help those less fortunate than them, actively spoke against inequality in our society, and spoke of their desire to work on behalf of social justice. I never doubted their sincerity, but I often doubted their ability to understand what they spoke so passionately about. To me, the many social injustices they talked about were purely an intellectual exercise. While well intentioned, they seemed much more interested in private practice, opening an office, and hanging out their shingles. Perhaps I am being harsh on them, but that was how it struck me then. *These experiences led me to conclude that helping others required understanding worldviews influenced by socioeconomic status and race on both cognitive and emotional levels.*

When I was in fourth grade, my father wanted better housing for his family, and moved us outside of Chinatown. The new neighborhood, which was primarily White, was not receptive to a family of color, and we were not only objects of curiosity, but of ridicule and scorn as well. *As I reflect upon it now, this was the beginning of my racial/cultural awakening and my experience with racial prejudice and discrimination. And, while I did not know it then, it was the beginning of my journey to understanding the meaning of racism, and the many social injustices that infect our society.* But in those early days, I allowed the reactions of my classmates to make me feel ashamed of being Chinese.

My older brother David and my younger brother Stan entered Abernathy grade school with me, where we immediately became objects of hostility and constant teasing. We were called "ching-chong chinaman," made fun of because of our "slanty eyes" and strange language. In Chinatown, we lived among other Chinese Americans, accepted by the community and protected and buffered from the larger society. In the southeast district of Portland, we were no longer in the majority, and were considered undesirable by many. As I recall, this was the most unpleasant and painful part of my early childhood. We were the victims of stereotyping, considered to be nerds—passive, weak, inhibited, and subhuman aliens. Because my brother Dave was the oldest, he was often forced to fight White classmates on behalf of his younger brothers.

I vividly recall one incident that was to forever change my perception of being Chinese American. A large group of White students, who had been antagonistic to us for the better part of our early school years, chased the three of us to our front yard. There they circled us, chanting unmentionable names, and told us to leave the neighborhood. I was truly frightened, but stood shoulder to shoulder with Dave and Stan to confront the large group. All three of us were much smaller than our White peers and I kept glancing to our house porch, trying to get my brothers to break for it. Dave, however, kept inching toward the group, and I could see he had somehow turned his fear to anger. I realized later that for us to start running would reinforce the stereotype that Asians were weaklings and were afraid to fight.

Just as it appeared a fight was imminent, my mother opened the door of the house, strode to the edge of the porch, and in a voice filled with anger, asked what was going on. When no one responded, she said if a fight was to happen, it should be fair. She identified one of the ringleaders, probably the biggest of the boys in the group. Then she asked my brother Dave to fight him. This not only shocked us, but the entire group of boys. To make a long story short, Dave gave the other boy a bloody nose due to a series of lucky blows. The fight ended as fast as it had begun. At times, I have often wondered what would have happened if he had lost. It was a gamble that my mother was willing to take, because she believed that despite the outcome, pride and integrity could not be lost.

I will never forget that incident. *It taught me several important lessons in life that have remained with me to this day and form the basis of much of my professional work. First, we live in a society that has low tolerance for racial/cultural differences. Our unconscious social conditioning makes it easy for us to associate differences with deviance, pathology, and lesser value in society. Second, stereotypes held by society can also do great harm to racial/ethnic minorities. Not only are they held by the majority culture, but they can become deeply ingrained in minorities as well. When facing the wrath of the band of boys, I never imagined Dave would stand his ground and fight as he did. More astonishing, however, was to witness a tiny Asian woman—my mother—take charge of the situation and encourage a fight. Any thought on my part that Asians were weak and unable to fight back disappeared that day. Third, I felt a sense of pride in being a member of the Sue family and of being Chinese; something my Dad had always stressed. No group, I realized, should be made to feel ashamed of themselves.*

### The College and Graduate School Years

In my college and graduate school years, I continued to feel like an outsider. Perhaps that was the reason I chose to go into the field of psychology. Not only was I always trying to understand people as an observer, but I became attuned to myself as a racial/cultural being. While my classmates were friendly and accepting, I felt that the curriculum often lacked validity and did



not seem to match my experiential reality. *I found psychology fascinating, but the theories of human behavior seemed culture bound and limited in their ability to explain my own personal journey as an Asian American.* This was especially true when I entered the counseling psychology program at the University of Oregon.

Despite being enthused and motivated by graduate work, my education continued to be monocultural. Indeed, while the terms *multicultural*, *diversity*, *cultural competence*, and *racial identity* are common in psychology curricula today, they were nonexistent during my graduate school years. While issues relating to minority groups were occasionally raised in my courses, the focus was always on the uniqueness of the individual or the universal aspects of the human condition. My professors operated with the certainty that similarities could bridge all differences, that stressing differences was potentially divisive, and that we were all the same under the skin. *It was only later that I realized why I was so alienated from these concepts, although they had a degree of legitimacy. First, as an Asian American, the avoidance of discussing racial differences negated an important aspect of my racial identity. Second, I realized that my professors knew little about racial groups and felt uncomfortable with talking about group differences.*

During my undergraduate and graduate years, I became very involved with the Vietnam antiwar movement, participated in teach-ins, demonstrations, and other educational forums, trying to get others to see the moral injustice of the United States' actions. For the first time in my life, I no longer felt like an outsider. *I felt a powerful kinship and camaraderie that made me realize the power of the collective and group action. At times it was almost spiritual.* I also became involved intellectually with the Free Speech movement and the Third World Strike. I longed to be at Berkeley or San Francisco State University, where all the demonstrations and outpouring of intellectual thought emerged. I could relate well to the denunciations of oppression and injustice, and they stirred up feelings from my childhood. The Black Power movement, rise of the Black Panthers, the words of Malcolm X, Huey Newton, H. Rap Brown, and other activists seemed to resonate with my experiential reality. They spoke about oppression, injustice, prejudice, and discrimination in a way that made more sense to me than much of my graduate school education.

### First Job—A Counseling Psychologist

I guess you would say that it was no coincidence that my first job was as a counseling psychologist at the University of California, Berkeley, Counseling Center. Throughout my doctoral studies, I always believed that I wanted to practice and work with clients. While I interviewed at places that offered me a larger salary, the allure of Berkeley and its social activism was too much to resist. *As it was at the end of the Third World Strike, my Berkeley years represented a*

*racial and cultural awakening for me unsurpassed in any other period of my life.* In Oregon, there were few Asian Americans, but at Berkeley, the student body was greatly represented by Asian Pacific Islanders.

While I was working at Berkeley, I had the good fortune to meet my future wife, Paulina. She was in her last year of obtaining a teaching credential, and was a resident assistant at one of the dormitories on campus. I must confess that I was originally attracted to her because of her startling beauty. But, it did not take me long to realize that she was exceptionally intelligent and firm in her beliefs and values, and I marveled at her racial/ethnic pride. Contrary to my early feelings of inferiority associated with being Asian, she had never experienced such feelings; another important seed was planted in my journey to cultural awareness and pride. We eventually married and raised two children, a son and a daughter, whom I hope will always feel pride in their ethnic heritage.

At the counseling center, I saw many Asian American clients, many of them expressing personal and social problems that were similar to mine. *It was not the cultural differences, and the invalidation of being a racial minority in this country, that seemed to affect their lives, but the sociopolitical pressures placed upon them.* Like me, they were made to believe that being different was the problem. *It was at that period in my life that I came to the realization that being different was not the problem. It was society's perception of being different that lay at the basis of the problems encountered by many racial/ethnic minorities.* While I like to think that I helped them in their adjustment to societal intolerance, I confess that they helped me more. They validated my thinking, made me see how counseling/therapy attempted to adjust them to an intolerant system, and demonstrated how the practices of clinical work were antagonistic to their cultural and life experiences, and the importance of realizing that much of the problems encountered by minorities lay in the social system.

### Going into Academia

While I enjoyed working with clients, I was not satisfied with the slow pace of therapy and the knowledge that the problems encountered by many clients were due to external circumstances. *I discovered that many of the problems encountered, for example, by Asian Americans and other people of color were due to systemic forces such as discrimination, prejudice, and injustice.* Having access to data at the Berkeley Counseling Center on Asian American students led me to conduct a series of studies on Chinese and Japanese students. The results reaffirmed my belief that sociopolitical forces were important considerations in the lives of people of color. The results of my early research instilled a hunger in me to contribute to the knowledge base of psychology. At that time, getting research published in top-notch psychology journals was difficult. Editors and editorial boards did not consider ethnic research of importance or of

major relevance to the profession. It was a difficult time to get multicultural research published.

My early work on Asian American psychology and my eventual move into academia, however, eventually brought me to the attention of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (now the American Counseling Association), and I was appointed editor of their flagship journal. As the youngest editor ever appointed (at the age of 31), I was still quite naive about the internal organizational politics of the association. I radically altered the appearance of the journal, appointed many racial/ethnic minority members to the editorial board, and changed the philosophy of the journal to be more inclusive. The journal published major articles on racial/ethnic minority mental health, work with minorities, systems intervention, and psycho-educational approaches. Many of our special issues pushed the envelope on social justice; one of them, on human sexuality, caused quite a stir in the profession. There was a move to remove me as editor because of the controversial nature of the topics and my stand on social justice issues. While it was one of the most painful periods of my professional life, fortunately many colleagues rallied to my defense. Nevertheless, the toll from those who called for my resignation or removal made me decide not to continue in my second term. *The lesson, however, that I learned from this experience was that swimming upstream, or going against the prevailing beliefs/practices of the times, can lead to great stress and pain.*

### Work on Multicultural Counseling and Therapy

Throughout the 70s, my clinical experience and research on minority mental health led me to conclude that traditional counseling and psychotherapy were Western European constructions that were oftentimes inappropriately applied to racial/ethnic minorities. Indeed, I began to realize that while mental health providers could be well intentioned in their desire to help clients of color, the goals and process of counseling and psychotherapy were often antagonistic to the life experiences and cultural values of their clients. *Without awareness and knowledge of race, culture, and ethnicity, counselors and other helping professionals could unwittingly engage in cultural oppression.* Studying the culture-bound nature of counseling led me to study other racial groups as well. What I found were similar concerns among African American, Latino/Hispanic American, and Native American colleagues. All felt that traditional mental health concepts and practices were inappropriate and sometimes detrimental to the life experiences of the very clients they hoped to help.

My work led to several publications that attacked the culture-bound nature of mental health practice and suggested radical changes in the delivery of services to a diverse population. Because I took great pains to document my work, it was well received on an academic level, but failed to have

a major impact on mental health delivery systems. Psychologists continued to believe that traditional forms of counseling and psychotherapy could be universally applied to all populations and situations.

In the early 1980s, things began to change. Increasingly, ethnic minority psychologists voiced concerns with the need for counselors to own up to their biases, stereotypes, and inaccurate assumptions of people of color. I credit two major events that radically altered my work and influence on the field. First, Leo Goldman, a valued colleague and elder in the field of counseling psychology, asked me to write a book for his series on counseling and human services. He was one of the few White psychologists who seemed genuinely to understand my research and ideas. More importantly, being a critic himself of traditional counseling, he encouraged me to put what I had to say in a book that would be unconstrained by reviewers. Concurrently, Allen Ivey, then president of the division of counseling psychology, asked me to chair the education and training committee and to develop standards or competencies for multicultural counseling. These publications became two of the most frequently cited in the field (Ponterotto & Sabnani, 1989).

### Expanding Social Justice Horizons

In 1997 I was invited to address President Clinton's Race Advisory Board on what the average American could do to help eradicate racism. As some of you may recall, the National Dialogue on Race was one of President Clinton's attempts to address what many of us consider to be one of the great social ills of our society, that of racism. *The preparation that went into the national address, which was shown on C-Span, CNN, and many major outlets, combined with my increasing awareness of racism and the hate mail that I received as a result of my testimony, made me realize several things. First, honest discussions of racism are difficult for our society, and hot buttons are pushed in people when this is brought to their attention. Second, negative reactions are often the result of defensiveness brought forth by their denial of personal responsibility for racial inequities in our society. Third, it made me realize the reason why many have difficulty in the battle to eliminate racism. It is because they are unaware of their own personal and professional complicity in perpetuating racism.*

That experience had a major impact on my current work and my burgeoning belief that social therapy or work toward social justice is also a part of what helping professionals should be doing. I do not mean to minimize the importance of counseling and therapy (it will always be needed), but such an approach tends toward remediation rather than prevention. *If injustice in the form of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of social oppression form the basis of the many individual and social ills of society, do not we as helping professionals also have a moral and ethical responsibility to address those systemic forces responsible for psychological problems?* R. D. Laing, an existential psychotherapist, once

made a statement that went something like this: Is schizophrenia always a sick response to a healthy society? Or, can schizophrenia be seen as a healthy response to a sick society? Changing the individual to adjust or conform to a sick system or unhealthy situation may (unwittingly) be the goal of unenlightened therapy. If depression, anxiety, and feelings of low self-esteem are the result of unhealthy societal forces (stereotyping, limited opportunities, prejudice, and discrimination), shouldn't our efforts be directed at eradicating societal policies, practices, and structures that oppress, rather than simply changing the individual?

*While all of us must make choices about where to place our efforts, it is now clear to me that multiculturalism and the eradication of racism are about social justice.* And this current edition of *CCD* is filled with this belief. Social justice is about equal access and opportunity and about building a healthy, validating society for all groups. That is why it is so important that psychology, and especially counseling, move toward cultural competence and multiculturalism. In this edition, I make several important points that have since guided my understanding of prejudice and discrimination. First, the goal of our society—and by association, of the helping professions—should be to make the invisible, visible. What I call ethnocentric monoculturalism and *whiteness* represent invisible veils that define the reality of most White Americans. Second, power resides in the group that is able to define reality (in this case, White America). Last, the group that owns history possesses the power to impose their worldview or reality upon less powerful groups. As such, if one's reality or truth does not correspond with those in power, unintentional oppression may be the result. From viewing the importance of changing individuals so they can function better in our society, to work with organizations and systems, I have become increasingly involved in social policy.

In closing, please note that understanding the worldview of diverse populations means not only acquiring knowledge of cultural values and differences, but being aware of the sociopolitical experiences of culturally diverse groups in a monocultural society. This perspective means the ability to empathize with the pain, anguish, mistrust, and sense of betrayal suffered by persons of color, women, gays, and other marginalized groups. *Sad to say, this empathic ability is blocked when readers react with defensiveness and anger upon hearing the life stories of those most disempowered in our society.* I implore you not to allow your initial negative feelings to interfere with your ultimate aim of learning from this text as you journey toward cultural competence. I have always believed that our worth as human beings is derived from the collective relationships we hold with all people; that we are people of emotions, intuitions, and spirituality, and that the lifeworld of people can only be understood through lived realities. While I believe strongly in the value of science and the importance psychology places on empiricism, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse* is based on the premise that a profession that fails to recognize the

heart and soul of the human condition is a discipline that is spiritually and emotionally bankrupt. *In many respects, CCD is the story of my life journey as a person of color.* As such, the book not only touches on the theory and practice of multicultural counseling and psychotherapy, but also reveals the hearts and souls of our diverse clienteles.

### Implications for Clinical Practice

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1. Listen and be open to the stories of those most disempowered in this society. Counseling has always been about listening to our clients. Don't allow your emotional reactions to negate their voices because you become defensive. Know that while you were not born wanting to be racist or sexist, your cultural conditioning has imbued certain biases and prejudices in you. No person or group is free from inheriting the biases of this society. It does not matter whether you are gay or straight, White or person of color, or male or female. All of us have inherited biases. Rather than deny them and allow them to unintentionally control our lives and actions, openly acknowledge them so that their detrimental effects can be minimized. As a helping professional, the ability to understand the worldview of clients means listening in an open and non-defensive way.
2. Understanding groups different from you requires more than book learning. While helpful in your journey to cultural competence, it is also necessary to supplement your intellectual development with experiential reality. Socialize, work with, and get to know culturally diverse groups by interacting with them on personal and intimate levels. You must actively reach out to understand their worldviews. After all, if you want to learn about sexism, do you ask men or women? If you want to learn about racism, do you ask Whites or persons of color? If you want to understand homophobia, do you ask straights or gays?
3. Don't be afraid to explore yourself as a racial/cultural being. An overwhelming number of mental health practitioners believe they are decent, good, and moral people. They believe strongly in the basic tenets of the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Concepts of democracy and fairness are present throughout these important and historic documents. Because most of us would not intentionally discriminate, we often find great difficulty in realizing that our belief systems and actions may have oppressed others. As long as we deny these aspects of our upbringing and heritage, we will continue to be oblivious to our roles in perpetuating injustice to others. As mentioned in this chapter, multiculturalism is about social justice.

4. When you experience intense emotions, acknowledge them and try to understand what they mean for you. For example, *CCD* speaks about unfairness, racism, sexism, and prejudice, making some feel accused and blamed. The “isms” of our society are not pleasant topics, and we often feel unfairly blamed. However, blame is not the intent of multicultural training, but accepting responsibility for rectifying past injustices and creating a community that is more inclusive and equitable in its treatment of racial/ethnic minorities are central to its mission. We realize that it is unfair and counterproductive to attribute blame to counselors for past injustices. However, it is important that helping professionals realize how they may still benefit from the past actions of their predecessors and continue to reap the benefits of the present social/educational arrangements. When these arrangements are unfair to some and benefit others, we must all accept the responsibility for making changes that will allow for equal access and opportunity. Further, our concerns are directed at the present and the future, not the past. While history is important in many ways, there are certainly enough issues in the here and now that require our attention. Prejudice and discrimination in society are not just things of the past.
5. Don't be afraid or squelch dissent and disagreements. Open dialogue—to discuss and work through differences in thoughts, beliefs, and values—is crucial to becoming culturally competent. It is healthy when we are allowed to freely dialogue with one another. Many people of color believe that dialogues on race, gender, and sexual orientation turn into monologues in order to prevent dissenting voices. The intense expressions of affect often produce discomfort in all of us. It is always easier to avoid talking or thinking about race and racism, for example, than entering into a searching dialogue about the topics. The academic protocol, and to some extent the politeness protocol, serve as barriers to open and honest dialogue about the pain of discrimination, and how each and every one of us perpetuate bias through our silence or obliviousness.
6. Last, continue to use these suggestions in reading throughout the text. While every chapter ends with a section titled “Implications for Clinical Practice,” we encourage you to apply these five suggestions at the end of every reading. What emotions or feelings are you experiencing? Where are they coming from? Are they blocking your understanding of the material? What do they mean for you personally and as a helping professional? Take an active role in exploring yourself as a racial cultural being, as Mark Kiselica did.