

# Do the demographics of counselors have an impact on their clients' satisfaction?

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## ABSTRACT

In this research, client satisfaction will be defined as how comfortable a client is with the counseling service they are receiving. The purpose of this research is to evaluate if the race and ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation of counselors are major concerns for clients who are seeking counseling. In 1996, Liddle found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual therapists of both genders and heterosexual female therapists were all rated more helpful than heterosexual male therapists. Other research by Bichsel and Mallinckrodt (2001), found that female clients have a higher comfort level and are able to fully disclose personal information to female counselors. In 2002, Constantine discovered that clients belonging to ethnic minority groups expressed higher satisfaction when they viewed their therapist as being culturally competent. Client satisfaction will be measured by several items designed to assess how positively or negatively the client views their counselor; clients will respond to specific questions on a survey regarding their perceptions of their counselor's race and ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. I will control for factors such as religious affiliations, educational background, socioeconomic status and court ordered or employer referred clients. The value of this research will be to help the Partnership determine if they are appropriately meeting the specific cultural needs of their clients.

## PURPOSE/RATIONALE

The purpose of this research is to evaluate if the race and ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation of counselors are major concerns for clients who are seeking counseling and if so how does this effect client satisfaction. Also the rationale is to examine if the Partnership is offering the best possible cultural competent services.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Do clients have a preference for their counselors to be of the same race, gender, and sexual orientation?
- Is client satisfaction negatively impacted when a client's counselor isn't of the same race, gender, and sexual orientation?

## DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLING FRAME

The Partnership sees on average 62 new clients each month; 10% of those clients are court ordered or employer referred. The target population for this research will be men and women who are clients at the Partnership and range in age from ages 16-60 and have a diverse ethnic and SES backgrounds. The clinical staff at the Partnership consists of two females and one male all in the age range of 45-60. The male and one of the females are of European American decent and the other female is a mixture of European American and Native American descent. The females and the male identify with the heterosexual orientation.

## DESCRIPTION OF METHODS TO SELECT STUDY SAMPLE

The survey will be administered only to voluntary clients who are seeking counseling. My reason for not including court ordered or employer referred clients is that I felt they would already possess a bias toward the counselors simply based on the fact that they were forced to attend; this type of bias would interfere with my study. I will be using convenience-sampling methods to collect my data. The problem with using this method is that I may not receive a diverse pool of clients to survey.

## PROCEDURES AND DATA ANALYSIS STEPS

I will be using a self-created survey following the initial intake session to collect my data. I will give my survey to each of the three clinicians so that it can be attached to the evaluation form that the Partnership already administers after the first session. There will be a consent form that must be filled out by the client prior to participation. The survey should take 5 to 7 minutes to complete. After the client has finished with the evaluation forms, my survey will be separated in order for me to collect and record the results. After I have recorded the results, I will destroy the hard copy of the survey.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Results

An analysis of the overall sample (N=26) revealed that nine males and 17 females participated in the study. In regards to ethnicity, 30.8 percent of participants were African-American, 65.4 participants were Caucasian and 3.8 percent of participants were Biracial. Further, 88.5 percent of participants identified themselves as heterosexual and 11.5 percent of participants identified themselves as homosexual. Most participants in the overall sample were voluntary clients (69.2 percent), but some were also court ordered (3.8 percent) and referrals (26.9).

### T-test

An independent samples *t* test comparing the mean of the total sum score found significance between the means of the two groups ( $t(24)=-2.138$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The mean of the male group ( $M=18.78$ ,  $SD=8.121$ ) was significantly different from the mean of the female group ( $M=25.41$ ,  $SD=7.212$ ).

## RESULTS (cont.)

An independent samples *t* test comparing the mean of the total sum score found no significance between the means of the two groups ( $t(23)=(-.915)$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The mean of the African-American group ( $M=25.75$ ,  $SD=5.120$ ) was significantly different from the mean of Caucasian group ( $M=22.76$ ,  $SD=8.474$ ).

### Correlations

A Pearson correlation was calculated examining the relationship between clients' gender and the counselors' ethnicity. A weak correlation that was not significant was found ( $r(24) = .252$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Clients' gender and the counselors' ethnicity are not related. A Pearson correlation was calculated examining the relationship between clients' ethnicity and the counselors' ethnicity. A weak correlation that was not significant was found ( $r(24) = -.292$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Clients' ethnicity and the counselors' ethnicity are not related. A Pearson correlation was calculated examining the relationship between clients' gender and counselors' gender. A moderate correlation that was significant was found ( $r(24) = .448$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Clients' gender is related to counselors' gender. A Pearson correlation was calculated examining the relationship between clients' gender and counselors' gender. A moderate correlation that was significant was found ( $r(24) = .448$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Clients' gender is related to counselors' gender.

## DISCUSSION

In answer to question one, the research showed that clients do not prefer that their counselors be of the same ethnicity though there was moderate evidence showing a preference that their counselor be the same gender as themselves. In answer to question two: overall client satisfaction is not negatively impacted by the counselor's demographics. This study was limited in that the population was very small and not very diverse.