

Becoming a Good-Enough White Therapist: Experiences of International Students in Psychology Doctoral Programs

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Abstract : As socio-economic globalization impacts education and turns knowledge into a commodity, institutions of higher education are becoming more intentional about infusing a global and intercultural perspective into education via the recruitment of international students. Coming from dissimilar cultures, many of these students are evaluated and held accountable to Euro-American values of independence, self-reliance, and autonomy. Not surprisingly, these students often experience culture shock with deleterious effects on their mental health and academic functioning. Thus, it is critical to understand the experiences of international students with the hope that such knowledge will keep the field of psychology from promulgating Eurocentric ideals and values and prevent the training of these students as good-enough White therapists. Using a critical narrative inquiry framework, this study elicits stories about the challenges encountered by international students as they navigate their clinical training in the presence of acculturative stress and potentially different worldviews. With its emphasis on story-telling as meaning making, narrative research design is hinged on the assumption that people are interpretive beings who make meaning of themselves and their world through the language of stories. Also, dominant socially-constructed narratives play a central role in creating and maintaining hegemonic structures that privilege certain individuals and ideologies at the expense of others. On this premise, narrative inquiry begins with an exploration of the experiences of participants in their lived stories. Bounded narrative segments were read, interpreted, and analyzed using a critical events approach. Throughout the process, issues of reliability and researcher bias were addressed by keeping a reflective analytic memo, as well as triangulating the data using peer-reviewers and check-ins with participants. The findings situate culture at the epicenter of international students' acculturation challenges as well as their resiliency in psychology doctoral programs. It was not uncommon for these international students to experience ethical dilemmas inherent in learning content that conflicted with their cultural beliefs and values. Issues of cultural incongruence appear to be further exacerbated by visible markers for differences like speech accent and clothing attire. These stories also link the acculturative stress reported by international students to the experiences of perceived racial discrimination and lack of support from the faculty, administration, peers, and the society at large. Beyond the impact on the international students themselves, there are implications for internationalization in psychology with the goal of equipping doctoral programs to be better prepared to meet the needs of their international students. More than ever before, programs need to liaise with international students' services and work in tandem to meet the unique needs of this population of students. Also, there exists a need for multiculturally competent supervisors working with international students with varying degrees of acculturation. In addition to making social justice and advocacy salient in students' multicultural training, it may be helpful for psychology doctoral programs to be more intentional about infusing cross-cultural theories, indigenous psychotherapies, and/or when practical, the possibility for geographically cross-cultural practicum experiences in the home countries of international students while taking into consideration the ethical issues for virtual supervision.

Keywords : decolonizing pedagogies, international students, multiculturalism, psychology doctoral programs

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