

Anusha Kassan

University of Calgary

Amy Rose-Green

University of Calgary

Jasmine Nathoo

University of Alberta

Multicultural Counselling Competencies with Newcomer Youth: A Phenomenological Study of Client Experiences

This phenomenological study investigated the experiences of newcomer youth who attended counselling during their adolescence after migrating to Canada. Specifically, the phenomenon under investigation was that of multicultural counselling competencies. Accordingly, 20 individuals between 19 and 23 years old completed a 90-minute, in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interview about their perceptions of their counsellors' cultural competence. Results yielded four significant categories highlighting the critical role of counsellor awareness, knowledge, and skills, as well as the multicultural counselling relationship. These findings highlight the manner in which multicultural counselling competencies needs to be targeted when working with young newcomers in their host country. Implications for practice, training, research, and policy are presented.

Keywords: Multicultural Counselling Competencies, Cultural Competence, Counselling, Newcomer Youth, Migration, Client Perspective, Phenomenology, Qualitative Research

In 2015, over 33,000 newcomers to Canada (that is, immigrants or refugees) were youth between the ages of 15 and 24 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015). Although adolescents share many challenges of migration with adult newcomers, including culture shock, prejudice and discrimination, and adjustment issues (Oppedal, Roysamb, & Sam, 2004; Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991), they also face unique concerns. Indeed, the demands of migration can exacerbate typical developmental difficulties for young people, including identity formation and autonomy development, as it situates these challenges in the context of an entirely new culture (Ellis, MacDonald, Lincoln, & Cabral, 2008; Ngo, 2009). Furthermore, aspects involved with successful academic transition, including language proficiency and

social adjustment, can present additional difficulties (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010a). These and other stressors can disrupt the typical developmental trajectory for adolescents, and impact their ability to succeed in their new environment.

Mental Health and Counselling Among Newcomer Youth

In addition to the immediate resettlement and integration tasks faced by young people, they must also deal with the emotional impact of migration. Newcomer youth may struggle with “cultural bereavement” (that is, the loss of one’s home country, cultural values, social structures, and sense of identity; Douglas, 2010), and may experience higher rates of mental health concerns (including, posttraumatic stress disorder and depression; Ellis, Miller, Baldwin, & Abdi, 2011). In light of these and other concerns, Stodolska (2008) recommended that counselling be available to support newcomer youth who are struggling. However, the literature suggests that this group tends to underutilize mental health services (Ellis et al., 2011; Nadeau, Jaimes, Johnson-Lafleur, & Rousseau, 2017). Although limited research indicates that some newcomer youth who accessed mental health services had positive experiences (Kassan & Sinacore, 2016), studies also suggest that they often terminate therapy early. For example, Carson and colleagues (2011) found that Haitian newcomer youth attended fewer counselling sessions and had more single sessions than white non-newcomer youth. This difference may be due in part to a lack of culturally competent services. In fact, in a study with young female newcomers, researchers found that some participants terminated counselling prematurely because of their counsellors’ lack of cultural competence (Kassan & Sinacore, 2016). Indeed, it is critical that newcomer youth’s counselling needs are conceptualized within the context of their multiple and intersecting cultural identities and social locations, and within the context of migration (Kassan, in press; Kassan & Sinacore, 2016). A lens through which to achieve this task may be that of multicultural counselling competencies (MCC) – an area that has received considerable attention in recent years in the field of counselling psychology.

Multicultural Counselling Competencies with Youth

Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) were the first to put forth a comprehensive model of MCC, where counsellor competencies are equated with *awareness* (identifying one’s biases and assumptions), *knowledge* (obtaining accurate understanding of clients’ cultural backgrounds), and *skills* (utilizing interventions that are culturally appropriate). Moreover, the counselling relationship has also been conceptualized to be an important component of cultural competence (Collins & Arthur, 2010; Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994). In more recent models of MCC, the

role of advocacy as a social justice competency has been given considerably more attention (Collins & Arthur, 2010; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Kent Butler, & Rafferty McCullough, 2016).

Although the majority of research in the area of MCC has been conducted with adults, some efforts have been made to adapt or develop frameworks or guidelines for culturally sensitive work with children and adolescents (e.g., Liu & Clay, 2002; McMahon, Mason, Daluga-Guenther, & Ruiz, 2014; Yeh & Kwan, 2010; Kassan, in press; Kassan & Sinacore, 2016). These efforts have been critical in drawing attention to and improving culturally responsive counselling practices and interventions with children and adolescents in general and, more specifically with newcomers. However, to better support newcomer youth in a counselling context, it is imperative that we turn to the clients themselves, to more fully understand their lived experiences of culturally competent counselling.

Rationale for the Current Study

Few studies have invited newcomer youth to talk about their experiences of counselling or mental health services in their new country. Further, no studies to our knowledge have explored the phenomenon of MCC among newcomer youth. Although conceptualizations of MCC have received tremendous attention within the counselling psychology field, they have yet to be researched with newcomer youth. As such, this study aimed to investigate the experiences of young newcomers who attended counselling during adolescence after migrating to Canada. More specifically, it aimed to describe participants' perceptions of their counsellors' MCC. To this end, this investigation was guided by the following research question: *Based on their counselling experiences during adolescence, what are newcomer youth's perceptions and descriptions of their counsellors' MCC?* This study was part of larger research project investigating the phenomenon of cultural competence among newcomer youth and service providers in a large urban city in Western Canada.

Methodology Research Design

A phenomenological methodology, which aims to describe the subjective perceptions of individuals in regards to a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), was used to obtain rich descriptions of participants' experiences. In the current study, the central phenomenon under investigation was multicultural counselling competencies (MCC). Thus, the aim was to elicit participants' perspectives of their counsellors' MCC. A descriptive phenomenology was used to emphasize the subjective experiences of each individual participant, as opposed to the group as a whole (Giorgi, 1985). This type of phenomenology emphasizes the importance of approaching data with an open mind and staying as close to participants' descriptions as possible

in order to capture the richness and complexity of the phenomenon as it is lived through first-person experiences (Giorgi, 2009; Wertz, 2005).

Procedure

Following ethics approval, participants were recruited via advertisements in various settings that offered services to newcomer youth in a large urban city in Western Canada. In order to participate, individuals had to be first-generation newcomers to Canada (that is, born outside of Canada) between the ages of 19 and 24. Moreover, they had to attend a minimum of one counselling session during their adolescence after migrating to Canada. Informed consent was obtained from interested individuals who met eligibility, who then completed a demographics questionnaire. Participants partook in qualitative in-depth, semi-structures, qualitative interviews, which were approximately 90 minutes each. To ensure that all participants had the opportunity to respond to similar topics reflected in the MCC literature, the interview protocol centered on the following areas: (a) warm up questions; (b) migration history; (c) counselling expectations; (d) client cultural factors; (e) peer relationships (f) family; (g) community; (h) cultural concerns; (i) helping professional; (j) cultural similarities and differences; (k) most and least helpful aspects of counselling; (l) additional sources of support; (m) advice for professionals working with newcomers; and (n) process questions. Participants received a \$30 honorarium for their time.

Participants

Twenty participants between the ages of 19 and 23 participated in the study. Participants had attended counselling during adolescence and completed a minimum of three sessions with the same counsellor. Participants who took part in the study migrated to Canada from a wide range of different countries. The sample was culturally diverse in that 40% identified as Chinese, 25% as Korean, 10% as Taiwanese, and 25% as other (i.e., Filipino, Indian, Lebanese, and Russian). Furthermore, 17 participants self-identified as female and three as male, and seventeen self-identified as heterosexual, two as bisexual, and one as gay. All participants were attending post-secondary education at the time of the interview.

Data Analysis

Qualitative interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. During this process, all identifying information was deleted. Transcripts were analyzed following the procedure outlined by Girogi (2009) for phenomenological research. First, each transcript was read from start to finish for familiarity, and then re-read with margin notes added. Next, horizontalization of the data was achieved for each transcript by identifying meaningful categories (that is, important aspects of participants' experiences). Corresponding data units (i.e. sentences or paragraphs) were

recorded for each category, and each category was compared and contrasted across all participants. Finally, a narrative on the essence of the phenomenon under investigation (MCC), based on the meaningful categories, was produced from the data analysis process.

Rigor

The research team that collaborated on this study included a professor and five graduate-level research assistants in counselling psychology. Together, they represented three different racial groups, six ethnicities, two sexual orientations, two gender identities, as well as first- or second- generation newcomers to Canada. To manage positionality among the research team and ensure overall rigour, multiple strategies were employed to increase the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). For example, the researchers' subjective stances were monitored through reflexivity, bracketing, and peer debriefing (Patton, 2002). The original interviewers verified the transcription for accuracy (Merrick, 1999), and a judge and an auditor substantiated the emerging categories to confirm they remained 'close to the data' (Girogi, 2009). A clear audit trail, including a detailed account of procedures, was maintained throughout the study (Morrow, 2005). Member checking was employed to ensure the findings accurately depicted participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). Finally, catalytic validity emerged while debriefing the interviews with participants (Stiles, 1993).

Results

Results yielded four categories of multicultural counselling competencies (MCC) that were deemed to be important for participants: (a) counsellor self-awareness, (b) counsellor knowledge, (c) counsellor skills, and (d) counsellor-client relationship. The latter three were divided into sub-categories that further described the experiences of newcomer youth (see Table 1).

Counsellor Self-Awareness

The majority of newcomer youth discussed the critical role of counsellor self-awareness; however, their experiences with respect to this competency varied. Many participants believed their counsellors demonstrated self-awareness, which was beneficial. Participants responded positively to counsellors' recognition of cultural and other differences between them. For example, attending to age differences helped some participants feel like the counsellor had expertise working with younger people, and might be more understanding. Furthermore, when counsellors were aware of and able to set aside their own biases, this helped participants build trust and open up with their counsellors. One participant reflected that: "She wasn't just saying whatever came to her mind, or you know... she wasn't showing her prejudices or whatever in the session."

Table 1. Overview of Results

Categories	Sub-categories	Corresponding data unit
Counsellor self-awareness		<i>She wasn't just saying whatever came to her mind, or you know... she wasn't showing her prejudices or whatever in the session.</i>
Counsellor knowledge	Knowledge of specific concerns/ systems	<i>With the help of my counsellor, he knew where to find information for me, so I wasn't that scared.</i>
	Culture-specific knowledge and understanding	<i>The counsellor was able to understand what culturally different was...</i>
Counsellor skills	Micro- and general skills	<i>Her eye contact and her feedback. Just her body language, it was directed towards you... it'd be phone calls and stuff, she wouldn't take it.</i>
	Multicultural skills	<i>They [discussions about culture] made me feel more comfortable about sharing and knowing that she would understand better than like some other people so I would talk more openly, yeah...</i>
	Tailored interventions	<i>I learned to keep like more helpful distance from my family like not too attached but also seek help when I need to and more appropriate ways to do that.</i>
Counsellor-client relationship	Acceptance and safety	<i>The moment I found out more about that specific counsellor, it made me realize, wow, she was someone I could trust and someone I could lean on...</i>
	Cultural matching	<i>They would have that cultural background to them that they would take into consideration. They won't suggest something like 'follow your heart.'</i>
	Expanding the relationship	<i>She made me feel back at home. I mean, as I told you, she did offer me to drink or eat something, she was talking very gently.</i>

On the other hand, some participants reported feeling that their counsellors were surprised by the cultural differences between them. Additionally, several participants mentioned that their counsellors lacked self-awareness of their own cultural identities. This sometimes translated to assumptions and stereotypes being expressed in session. Differences in values led to confusion, and participants felt that their counsellors did not understand them. Several participants also perceived that their counsellors were insensitive and biased towards their own cultures. In fact, several participants stated that their counsellors were judgmental. Furthermore, some participants felt that their counsellors made assessments about participants' capacities that were unjustified; stated one participant:

She was trying to be nice, she thought that it would be hard for me to get used to the English-speaking environment because I was in Korea for one year. But for me it was actually OK and I told her it wasn't gonna be hard for me, it wasn't gonna be tough.

She was like "no, you haven't experienced it yet, it'll be hard for you..."

Counsellor Knowledge. The majority of participants shared their perceptions of their counsellors' knowledge. Specifically, they spoke about competency in relation to: a) knowledge of specific concerns/systems as well as b) culture-specific knowledge and understanding.

Knowledge of specific concerns/systems

Many participants said that their counsellor demonstrated knowledge about participant concerns or comprehended systems within which participants were situated. Having their counsellors' understanding in these areas was important for the client-counsellor relationship, wherein participants felt more comfortable being open with them. Specifically, several participants felt that their counsellor's knowledge about the specific concerns that brought them into counselling helped to normalize their situations. In addition, their counsellors' having an understanding of familial and peer relationships as well as communication styles was important for participants, helping them make progress in counselling. Furthermore, counsellors' knowledge of different experiences, such as reasons for seeking counselling and the impact of counselling, was important. Participants also referred to counsellors' knowledge of various systems, such as academic, medical, and government systems, which for many was comforting and helpful – particularly when some participants were unable to turn to their parents for this information. For example, one participant shared that:

Just depending on my parents wouldn't work because they don't know as many sources in Canada to seek help, so with the help of my counsellor, he knew where to find information for me, so I wasn't that scared.

Culture-specific knowledge and understanding

Participants spoke about their counsellors' culture-specific knowledge. This included knowledge of immigrant experiences, cultural differences, and participants' personal and cultural identities. When counsellors demonstrated culture-specific knowledge, this allowed participants to better understand the process of counselling and helped them to feel understood. However, participants differentiated between *knowing* about cultural differences and *understanding* them, emphasizing that these were not synonymous ideas. Some participants expressed that it was challenging for them to explain everything to their counsellor, who may not fully understand due to their differing life experiences. For example, one participant stated:

I just felt like they didn't understand, they were just listening and giving general pointers,

I guess. But then I don't know if you can actually expect someone to understand what you are going through because they are not you. They are different...

When knowledge *did* translate to understanding, this was deemed beneficial. For some participants, this helped to ease the transition into Canadian society and make counselling a more comfortable experience. For example, one participant commented:

The counsellor was able to understand what culturally different was, I guess, she broke that barrier of my perception of what a typical Canadian high school counsellor is.

Some participants appreciated when their counsellor attempted to learn more about their culture, filling gaps in their knowledge. However, half of participants felt that their counsellors lacked culture-specific knowledge. At times this was frustrating for participants; one shared that:

I expected more counsellors, and more counsellors with a multicultural background and more experience with other students of other ethnicity but she didn't have any experience with that because [name of city] is kind of white dominated.

In addition, several participants discussed gaps in knowledge that occurred even when the counsellor shared the same cultural background. Alternatively, other participants felt that similarities in cultures allowed the counsellor to understand them better, but could also lead to indifference on the part of the counsellor.

Counsellor Skills

Eighteen participants made reference to their counsellors' skills. This category produced four sub-categories, a) micro- and general skills, b) multicultural skills, c) safety, and d) tailored interventions.

Micro- and general skills

Participants shared their perceptions of their counsellors' micro-skills. Counsellors' use of these skills helped participants to feel more comfortable in sessions and connect to their counsellors. Participants referred to micro-skills in general, including eye contact and body language, mentioning that this helped them to feel like their counsellors were open and listening. Similarly, participants also appreciated the focus, presence, and attentiveness that many counsellors demonstrated. In addition to micro-skills, participants appreciated general, more holistic skills used by their counsellors. For example, normalization helped to reduce participants' sense of isolation, and made them feel hopeful. Counsellors' displays of empathy and attempts to relate to participants were also perceived as helpful, and their reflections often helped participants understand more about themselves. One participant shared that:

... I think she based, she based my dad's assessment based on me and I think she was right in a sense because I am very much like my dad in nature, so for her to bridge that link between me and my dad, it was a very accurate perception that she made.

Some participants mentioned self-disclosure as a helpful skill that their counsellors used. These participants felt that appropriate self-disclosure made their counsellors seem more human, and easier to open up to and build a trusting relationship with. For example, one participant stated:

She told me she was divorced so she told me a little bit about herself. I think just her being human made me open up to her rather than being professional 'cos I did see another counsellor after that and she was more like strict business.

Participants also expressed that they valued their counsellors' professional experience, indicating that they felt that their counsellors were uniquely qualified to understand their concerns. One participant explained this form of specialization as follows:

It is kind of like how you feel physically going to a hospital and seeing a doctor versus going to a youth clinic and seeing a doctor. Like that sort of difference.

At the same time, several participants referred to their counsellors' lack of skills in certain areas. Some participants perceived that their counsellors had the tendency to talk too much, were overly analytical, or didn't really listen. This sometimes resulted in participants feeling resentful towards their counsellor, or feeling misunderstood. For example, one participant shared that,

after you see a few counsellors you get the feeling that sometimes they're not really understanding what you are talking about.

Multicultural skills

Several participants discussed specific multicultural counselling skills displayed by their counsellors. Many believed their counsellors lacked experience with multicultural clients. Some participants noted that their counsellors labeled culturally appropriate behaviour as dysfunctional. However, engaging in discussions about culture and tradition were viewed by many participants as being helpful; when asked why, one participant stated that

they made me feel more comfortable about sharing and knowing that she would understand better than like some other people so I would talk more openly.

However, many participants reported that their counsellors did not ask them about their culture, or spend enough time discussing the influences of culture. Indeed, participants whose counsellors only briefly discussed culture, or who felt the counsellor did not have a positive attitude towards their cultural background, found these conversations less helpful. For example, one participant shared that:

She asked me how I was doing in school and she would speak really slowly to me in English but she didn't ask me anything about culture because she didn't know anything about it.

In some cases, counsellors did not create opportunities for discussion about culture, even in circumstances where cultural differences resulted in a rupture in the relationship. For instance, one participant shared:

... When we talk in Korea when someone says something I say something back just to show that we are listening, my reaction shows that I'm listening. But then the counsellor was mad, when I retort to her. She would be talking and I would interject and she would get mad and say 'I am talking right now'.

At the same time, several participants questioned the relevancy of discussing culture in session, and suggested that counsellors should ask whether the client feels it is important. Relatedly, some participants felt that bringing up and drawing attention to culture caused them discomfort. One participant commented:

If I'm there for something completely unrelated, to bring it up would just make me more suspicious and uncomfortable and awkward because now I'd be questioning the counsellor's motives and wondering why did this even come up?

Tailored interventions

Participants shared their perceptions of counsellors' use of tailored interventions. One important skill that participants mentioned was their counsellors' ability to help them shift their perspective. Participants also appreciated practical assistance, such as with university applications and immigration services. Participants referred

to learning valuable skills from their counsellors, such as compromising, assertiveness, personal control, calming techniques, and other coping skills. These skills helped participants to cope on an ongoing basis outside of counselling. Participants also appreciated when counsellors were able to connect them to things that were important to the participants themselves, which helped ease their cultural transition (for example, using scripture in sessions). One participant stated:

... And she also told me one more thing about exercising because back at home I exercised a lot, at least 4 or 5 times, but when I was here I wasn't doing sports or anything. And she suggested that I should start doing sports again. And that helped a lot as well.

However, some participants reported that their counsellors did not provide adequate guidance, techniques, or resources. Some shared that explaining concepts more clearly and writing things down would have been helpful for them.

Counsellor-Client Relationship

All participants spoke about their relationships with their counsellors. From this category, four sub-categories were created, a) acceptance and safety, b) cultural matching, and c) expanding the relationship.

Acceptance and safety

The majority of participants felt that their counsellors were accepting and open. Participants specifically expressed that their counsellors' friendliness, non-judgmental and positive attitudes, and welcoming natures were a central part of their acceptance. This allowed participants to feel as though their counsellors cared for them and wanted to help. Participants specifically appreciated their counsellors' genuine openness and acceptance when it came to family and culture, which helped to build a strong relationship. Some participants appreciated having a confidant outside of their parents, as they often did not feel understood by their parents or did not want to burden them. To this effect, one participant stated:

A lot of things I would just keep it to myself and fight through them and I don't want to worry my parents, I don't want them to have extra psychological burden. They already have that, to find a job and stuff like that.

Participants spoke about a sense of safety in counselling, and how this helped them to feel more comfortable and less nervous about counselling. Participants felt that safety was reinforced by the knowledge that they had someone calming and reassuring to talk to. In addition, participants mentioned that dependability and consistency were important traits for their counsellor to have, as it enhanced their sense of safety and trust. Actions such as arranging follow-ups reinforced the idea that the counsellors were dependable and supportive. Lastly, counsellors'

informality also helped participants to feel safe and comfortable in counselling. One participant said:

I liked it because it was more like a casual talk, not like, oh he puts on this attitude that he knows everything and treats you like a student and whatever. It is more friendly type, which I feel less nervous and I am willing to communicate with him.

Confidentiality was an important component of establishing safety and trust for some participants, as they did not want their families to know they were seeking counselling. For example, one participant stated:

... I wasn't sure if someone else in the school can be trusted, but at that spur of the moment, the moment I found out more about that specific counsellor, it made me realize wow, she was someone I could trust and someone I could lean on...

In contrast, several participants did not feel accepted or safe with their counsellors, which impacted the therapeutic relationship. Twelve participants expressed that cultural barriers hindered the formation of a strong relationship with their counsellors. Additionally, several participants felt that their counsellors did not have enough time for them, which discouraged them from attending. Some struggled to connect with their counsellors, as they felt their counsellors did not understand them. Some participants felt that their counsellors were not invested in working with them, and others reported feeling that their counsellors were unwelcoming, unapproachable, and unavailable. One participant explained that, "for example, the counsellors, none of them even remember my name, even if I go there ten times." Additionally, after experiencing sudden termination, a few participants felt let down by their counsellors, and as though they did not get as much out of counselling as they could have.

Cultural matching

Participants referred specifically to cultural matching as an important aspect of the counsellor-client relationship. Several participants felt more comfortable with counsellors who shared their culture, beliefs, religion, gender, and/or age because they felt their counsellor understood them, and that they could trust them. For example, one participant shared:

... At the time it meant a lot to me. For some reason knowing that someone is a Christian meant that that person is a good person and I can trust that person.

Cultural matching also helped some participants mitigate cultural and language misunderstandings; for example, one participant shared that:

She [the counsellor] could switch back to Cantonese if we needed to, yeah 'cause there are certain things that can't be expressed in either language or only in one language and not the other.

On the other hand, some participants experienced challenges with counsellors who shared the same cultural background. These challenges included perceived discrimination, a lack of understanding, and being impacted by counsellors' assumptions and bias. Additionally, several participants found cultural mismatches to be helpful. To illustrate this, one participant stated:

I think it also helped that she was Caucasian and not Korean cos I think they might have sided with my Dad more, and I wanted to get out of that culture, I didn't want to be there. So I think that also helped, that I'm getting another person, like a third person's perspective.

Expanding the relationship

Some participants spoke about situations where their counsellors stepped outside of the traditional counselling role, and how this helped to strengthen their relationship. Counsellors incorporated aspects of culture and religion into counselling, including prayer, scripture, and eating at a Korean restaurant. These actions helped to comfort participants. Other counsellors took on a more casual demeanour as opposed to being authoritative, which helped some participants feel less nervous. Some counsellors offered food and drink in sessions, which fostered a sense of safety. Expanding the relationship helped some participants feel genuinely cared for, which helped to create a stronger therapeutic relationship. For example, one participant shared:

She actually came to my graduation and gave me a card and flowers. I don't think it's normal that every counsellor would do that but we developed a relationship. That made me, I actually told her I could tell her anything and everything and I would never do that with any other counsellor I don't think.

Discussion

This study describes the experiences of newcomer youth who attended counselling during their adolescence after migrating to Canada. Results suggest that current conceptualizations of multicultural counselling competencies (MCC) (e.g., Collins & Arthur, 2010; Ratts et al., 2016; Sue et al., 1992) are applicable to work with newcomer youth. That is, whether participants reported positive or negative experiences in counselling, they discussed the critical role of counsellor awareness, knowledge, and skills, as well as the multicultural counselling relationship. Findings also demonstrated that even at a young age, the newcomer youth who participated in

this study were quite perceptive and able to discuss critical elements related to their multicultural counselling experiences.

For example, with respect to counsellor awareness, some participants disclosed sensing judgement from their counsellors. At times, these negative views came from counsellors who were from the same cultural background as participants. These attitudes were detrimental to the counselling relationship and led some participants to terminate counselling prematurely. Such results are not entirely surprising, as previous studies have reported an underutilization of mental health services (Ellis et al., 2011; Nadeau et al., 2017) as well as early termination (Kassan & Sinacore, 2016) among newcomer youth. Thus, it is critical for counsellors to attend to their biases and assumptions on a regular basis, and find ways to set them aside while in the counselling room with young newcomer clients.

With respect to knowledge, the newcomer youth who participated in this study reported that it was critical for their counsellors to be knowledgeable about the larger systems impacting their transition to Canada (e.g., educational institutions or provincial health care). Moreover, they voiced appreciation for counsellors who directly helped them navigate those systems (e.g., assisting with university applications) as opposed to simply referring them to another service or resource. This emphasis on advocacy has peaked in recent years, with many counselling psychologist promoting the inclusion of this social justice activity as a separate competency (Arthur & Collins, in press; Ratts. et al., 2016).

Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of cultural-specific knowledge on the part of their counsellors. This knowledge sometimes centred on the specific cultural background of participants and at other times related to the migration process as a whole. This finding emphasizes the need for counsellors to become knowledgeable about the unique backgrounds and contexts relevant to newcomer youth clients in order to avoid appearing generic or even stereotypical in their counselling approach (Ellis et al., 2011; Kassan, in press). As participants in this study noted, it is also important for counsellors to remain open to new ways of knowing by learning from their clients, inquiring about what they could be missing, and recognizing when they may be inaccurate. According to Owen et al. (2016), practitioners must strike a balance between “holding onto their professional expertise” and asking questions such as “what if this is not the whole picture?” (p. 35).

All of the participants in this study discussed the critical role of using multicultural skills in counselling. Specifically, they highlighted how the appropriate use of self-disclosure was beneficial to normalizing their presenting problems and developing a more collaborative counselling relationship. The importance of counsellor self-disclosure has long been documented in the feminist literature (Enns, 2012) and results from this study highlight its applicability to work with newcomer youth. This skill appeared to be particularly useful when counsellors had a personal history of migration themselves and were genuinely able to empathise with the concerns of their clients.

Some participants disclosed that addressing their cultural backgrounds and migration experiences in counselling was extremely beneficial to their development. For others, such conversations detracted from their presenting concerns. Thus, it seems that counsellors need to exercise good clinical judgement as to when discussions of culture and migration are helpful and relevant to the therapeutic process. Such an assessment can only be made when counsellors open the door to cultural conversations and determine collaboratively with their clients when their backgrounds, identities, or migration experiences should make their way to the forefront of counselling (Liu & Clay, 2002; Kassan, in press; Kassan & Sinacore, 2016). Findings from Owen and colleagues (2016) are relevant here, which highlighted the importance of inviting the client to share aspects of their culture only when they are ready, to self-define identity, and to determine the most salient aspects of their identity or culture that they would like to explore in counselling.

For the newcomer youth who participated in this study, the multicultural counselling relationship represented a central point of entry in their work with their counsellors. That is, having a strong connection with their counsellor was necessary for a successful counselling outcome. This finding echoes much of the MCC literature, which has increasingly emphasized the role of the relationship. In fact in some models, the multicultural counselling relationship is seen as the bridge to enhancing cultural competence (Arthur & Collins, in press; Collins & Arthur, 2010).

Participants disclosed mixed experiences about working with a counsellor from the same background as them. In some cases, a cultural match between the client and counsellor was perceived to be helpful, but in others, it was thought to leave a cultural gap in the relationship. While research has not investigated the effectiveness of cultural matching for newcomer youth specifically, multicultural studies have shown mixed results for this practice (Maraba & Nagamaya Hall, 2002; Zane, Nagamaya Hall, Sue, Young, & Nunez, 2004). Many scholars have suggested that cultural matching is only one component of successful counselling with newcomer youth and as such have advocated for a more general approach to cultural competence where counsellors can consider the multiple and intersecting cultural identities and social locations that are relevant to newcomer youth at any given time (Arthur & Collins, in press; Kassan, in press; Kassan & Sinacore, 2016).

Lastly, participants shared that they developed stronger multicultural counselling relationships when their counsellors showed flexibility and a certain level of casualness. Such a helpful relational style could be associated to counselling adolescents in general (Martin, 2003); however, tailoring the relationship to the needs of each newcomer client (e.g., sharing a traditional meal or reviewing scripture) seems to be of particular importance. Given the fluctuating nature of the migration process, it may be helpful for counsellors to prioritize relationship building with newcomer youth in order to provide a safe space that feels a little bit more familiar to them.

Implications

Results of this study make an important contribution to the multicultural counselling competencies (MCC) literature and provide a unique empirical perspective on the multicultural counselling needs of newcomer youth. Essentially, this study supports the use of existing frameworks of cultural competence (Collins & Arthur, 2010; Ratts et al., 2016; Sue et al., 1992) when counselling newcomer youth. At the same time, it highlights the need to consider the multiple and intersecting cultural identities and social locations impacting newcomer youth on a daily basis (Kassan, in press; Kassan & Sinacore, 2016), and advocating for them when necessary (Arthur & Collins, in press; Ratts et al., 2016). Thus, when conducting counselling with newcomer youth, it is imperative to understand the concept of MCC broadly so as to go beyond the individual competencies of counsellor awareness, knowledge, and skills as well as the multicultural counselling relationship.

Findings of this study also support ongoing efforts to include multicultural education in psychology training programs. Studies have demonstrated that counsellors who receive more training in this area often work with more diverse clients and value MCC (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001; Atkinson & Israel, 2003). Further, the role of social justice training has recently been at the forefront of the discipline of counselling psychology (Arthur & Collins, 2014; Foud, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006), and its intergration into training programs would serve newcomer youth well.

Clearly, future research is needed to unearth the common and unique multicultural needs of newcomer youth, so as to avoid subsuming their experiences with that of other culturally diverse adolescents and young adults. Results of this study depicted largely positive experiences, which may have stemmed from the fact that participants in this study migrated to a cultural hub in Canada where counsellors may have been well equipped to support them in their process of migration. However, more studies are needed to showcase the experiences of newcomer youth who have not been to counselling or have had challenges when seeking support.

Finally, policies impacting the resettlement and integration of newcomer youth also need to reflect the inclusion of culturally sensitive programming and practice in order to ensure that they receive the support they need at this critical time of development. As identified in a recent study (Nadeau et al., 2017), the mental health needs of newcomer youth are more likely to be met when services a) provide an equilibrium between communication, collaboration, confidentiality, b) ensure a continuity of care within a welcoming environment at various systemic levels, c) include family and community interventions, and d) are inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional.

Strengths and Limitations

A major strength of this study lies in its rigorous phenomenological research design, which explored multicultural counselling competencies (MCC) from the perspectives of multiple newcomer youth. Indeed, there is a dearth of knowledge that explores clients' perceptions of counselling, despite evidence that client preference regarding services increases adherence and encourages better outcomes (McHugh, Whitton, Peckham, Welge, & Otto, 2013).

A potential limitation of this study is that it was retrospective in nature, as participants offered accounts of their previous counselling experiences. However, it can be argued that participants discussed the most salient aspects of MCC, given that they remembered these experiences and they remained important to them. Furthermore, van Manen (1997) argued that phenomenological reflections are actually "retrospective" (p. 10), as participants benefit from space to reflect on their experiences.

Given that this study centered on participants' counselling experiences, their descriptions were more individual, clustering around the competencies of awareness, knowledge, skills, and relationships. While they did address systemic issues, the role of advocacy could have been explored in greater depth. As such, future research is needed to investigate the role of social justice competencies in counselling with newcomer youth.

Conclusion

Many of the newcomer youth who participated in this study reported positive counselling experiences and perceptions of their counsellors' multicultural counselling competencies (MCC). At that same time, some participants shared negative views of their counsellors' MCC, which at times led them to drop out prematurely or disengage from counselling. The varied experiences that participants discussed highlight the importance of developing MCC within a context that takes into account the needs and experiences of newcomer youth as they migrate to Canada. Such an approach requires a great deal of self-awareness and forethought on the part of counsellors as well as the purposeful infusion of MCC on the part of educators, researchers, and policy makers.

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