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Counsellor's views of diversity and difference in an NGO counselling environment

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Abstract

The topic of this research is lay counsellors' attitudes towards difference in an NGO organization that offers a counselling service based on Carl Rogers' Person-Centred approach. South Africa post-apartheid is a fragmented and traumatized society and attempts at redressing past inequities have largely overlooked the mental health care sector. As a result, NGO's are increasingly having to fill the gap, with little co-ordination with or co-operation from professional mental health care practitioners. With critical race theory as a theoretical point of departure, Lacau and Mouffe's discourse theory was used to analyze results from in-depth semi structured interviews with counsellors at an NGO in Johannesburg. The findings confirmed that counsellors' attitudes towards difference are shaped by their and the client's racialized identities, with the adherence to Rogerian principles and the need to be a 'good' counsellor, foreclosing any opportunity to critically examine subject positions and the role of history in how such positions are constructed. The introduction of a training component that includes historical analysis and courageous conversations about difference would better equip counsellors to carry the burden of complex presenting issues from a diverse clientele.