

# Reflective Integration of Multicultural and Transformative Approaches in Counseling Practice

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explore the integration of multicultural and transformative counseling approaches in counseling practice and their impact on counselee. Using a qualitative reflective-critical approach, the study collected data through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with counseling practitioners and counselee who have undergone counseling based on both approaches. The results show that, despite challenges in combining techniques from both approaches, counselee reported positive changes in their self-awareness and sense of identity. Practitioners who are sensitive to cultural diversity and adapt their counseling techniques reflectively to meet the needs of counselee are more successful in creating a safe and effective counseling space. This study concludes that the integration of multicultural and transformative counseling can have a significant impact on counselee but requires flexibility and critical reflection from practitioners. The implications of this study highlight the need for ongoing training for practitioners to develop skills in effectively integrating both approaches while considering cultural factors in every counseling session.

**Keywords:** Multicultural and Transformative Approaches; Counseling Practice

## INTRODUCTION

The ideal landscape of contemporary counseling practice is one in which every individual, regardless of culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, language, or other identity markers, encounters a helping relationship that is culturally grounded, critically conscious, and substantively just. In such a context, counselors do not merely recognize diversity as a demographic characteristic or institutional slogan, but engage with it as an ethical obligation and central dimension of professional responsibility (Collins et al., 2015). Counseling becomes a relational space where experiences shaped by inequality, discrimination, marginalization, trauma, and structural violence are acknowledged rather than minimized, pathologized, or universalized (Timothy, 2020). Counselee are supported not only to adapt and cope, but also to interpret their struggles within broader social realities, reclaim agency, affirm their identities, and negotiate more equitable life possibilities (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Moving toward this ideal condition requires a paradigm that transcends cultural awareness, understood as mere technical adjustment. Instead, it embeds justice-oriented transformation at the core of counseling philosophy, practice, and education.

Within this broader shift, multicultural counseling has been foundational in challenging monocultural and Eurocentric norms that historically dominated psychological theories and therapeutic models (Singh et al., 2020). Conceptualizations of multicultural competence, often framed in terms of awareness, knowledge, and skills, have emphasized the importance of self-reflection on personal biases and assumptions, understanding counselee'

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sociocultural backgrounds, and adapting interventions to align with values, worldviews, and cultural practices. Culture is frequently treated as a fixed variable or set of traits to be learned, rather than as a dynamic, contested, and historically situated field that is deeply intertwined with power, ideology, colonial legacies, and institutional arrangements (N'dri, 2016). As a result, multicultural practice can stagnate at the level of politeness and representational inclusivity without substantially shifting how counselors analyze, name, and respond to injustice.

Transformative counseling offers an alternative and complementary lens that emphasizes profound shifts in meaning-making, critical reflection, and emancipatory change (Yıldırım & Gazioglu, 2024). Grounded in transformative learning theory, critical pedagogy, and social justice-oriented traditions, this approach regards counseling as a dialogical process through which individuals examine internalized narratives, expose taken-for-granted assumptions, identify mechanisms of oppression, and progressively construct more empowering perspectives on themselves, their relationships, and society (Ukpokodu, 2016). Rather than limiting its focus to symptom reduction or individual adjustment, transformative counseling connects psychological well-being with social and cultural contexts, highlighting how structural conditions shape emotional suffering and life chances. It encourages counselors and counselee to engage in reflection that is not only introspective but also political and ethical, situating personal change within broader movements toward equity, dignity, and collective responsibility (Collins & Arthur, 2017).

Recent developments in counseling scholarship and training indicate an emerging convergence between multicultural frameworks and transformative, social justice-oriented approaches (Jun, 2024). Discussions on intersectionality, decolonial critiques, indigenous and community-based healing practices, feminist and queer perspectives, antiracist interventions, and trauma-informed care have introduced more complex understandings of identity, oppression, and resistance into the counseling discourse. Supervision models increasingly encourage reflexivity regarding privilege, positionality, and institutional norms, while some professional guidelines explicitly incorporate advocacy and systemic intervention as ethical expectations (Llamasa, 2024). These trends reflect a growing recognition that effective counseling in diverse societies cannot be limited to cultural sensitivity, but must deliberately address the concrete realities of racism, sexism, xenophobia, religious intolerance, heteronormativity, ableism, economic exploitation, and other forms of structural harm that shape counselee's experiences. This evolving orientation represents a significant state-of-the-art in the field.

However, despite these encouraging shifts, the relationship between multicultural counseling and transformative counseling remains only partially articulated and unevenly operationalized. Many multicultural competence models are still interpreted primarily as individual attributes or checklists to be fulfilled by counselors, without sustained engagement with the political and structural dimensions of culture (Ridley et al., 2021). Conversely, transformative or social justice-oriented frameworks may foreground critical awareness and activism, but are sometimes insufficiently grounded in established multicultural counseling principles or inadequately contextualized within specific cultural and community realities. In practice, multicultural topics are often isolated into single courses, workshops, or policy statements (Egan & Bendick, 2008). At the same time, institutional structures, evaluative systems, and everyday routines continue to reproduce dominant norms and maintain unequal power relations. This disjunction between discourse and practice reveals that the potential integration of multicultural and transformative counseling is far from fully realized.

The central gap emerging from this situation lies in the absence of a coherent, critically informed, and praxis-oriented framework that systematically links multicultural counseling and transformative counseling as a continuous movement from awareness to transformation. Existing literature has not consistently demonstrated how counselors can move beyond cognitive recognition of diversity toward sustained reflexive engagement that reshapes their professional identities, relational stances, and intervention choices. There is limited exploration of how transformative processes can be grounded in concrete multicultural competencies while remaining attentive to context, consent, and client autonomy. In light of these gaps, this study aims to provide a critical reflection on

integrating multicultural counseling and transformative counseling as an intentional pathway from awareness to transformation in counseling practice.

This critical reflection further aspires to generate implications for counselor education, professional development, and organizational practice. By examining how multicultural and transformative commitments can be woven into pedagogical design, supervisory relationships, evaluation criteria, and service delivery models, the study encourages institutions to move beyond symbolic inclusion toward structural alignment with equity-oriented values. The discussion invites counselor educators to design learning experiences that foster reflexivity, ethical sensitivity, humility, and courage in navigating complex cultural and political issues. It also encourages supervisors and practitioners to adopt reflective practices that continuously question their own assumptions and the hidden curricula of their institutions, while fostering collaborative learning communities that support critical dialogue and collective transformation.

This study positions the integration of multicultural counseling and transformative counseling as both a conceptual and ethical imperative in pluralistic and stratified societies. By articulating how multicultural awareness can evolve into transformative engagement, it challenges counselors, educators, and institutions to reconsider the purposes and boundaries of counseling itself. The movement from awareness to transformation is proposed not as a rhetorical flourish, but as an ongoing praxis in which counseling becomes a site for fostering liberation, restoring dignity, and expanding possibilities for more just interpersonal and social relations. In doing so, the study contributes to the development of a more robust and critically grounded framework that aligns counseling practice with the complex realities and moral demands of the contemporary world.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, reflective-critical design, aiming to explore, analyze, and understand the integration of multicultural and transformative counseling from a critical perspective. This approach enables the researcher to delve into the experiences, views, and reflections of practitioners and individuals involved in both counseling approaches. The study also aims to investigate how these two approaches complement each other, the challenges encountered during their integration, and their impact on client transformation.

The study was conducted in 2025. The objects of this study are counseling practitioners, multicultural counselors, and transformative counselors with experience in applying both counseling approaches in their practice. Additionally, the study includes counselee who have received counseling services based on both multicultural and transformative approaches, providing insight into the changes they experienced during the counseling process.

Data collection for this study is conducted through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with counseling practitioners and counselee. In-depth interviews aim to explore practitioners' experiences regarding the challenges and benefits of integrating multicultural and transformative counseling. FGDs will involve discussions between practitioners and counselee to gain a broader perspective on how the integration of these two approaches influences counseling outcomes and client transformation. Additionally, with permission, counseling session documentation will also be used as supplementary data to explore the techniques applied and the progress of counselee.

Data analysis in this study will employ thematic analysis with a reflective-critical approach, consisting of several steps. First, data transcription will be done to ensure that all in-depth interviews and FGDs are transcribed wholly and verbatim. Next, data coding will be performed to identify key themes emerging from the conversations and shared experiences. These codes will be grouped based on critical reflection themes related to the integration of multicultural and transformative counseling. Afterward, key themes will be identified based on a reflective and critical understanding of the integration of both counseling approaches, including cultural values, techniques employed, challenges encountered, and their impact on counselee. A critical analysis will be conducted to connect the findings with existing theories, evaluate how these theories are applied in real-world practice, and explore the

impact of this integration on counselee' personal transformation. Finally, reflection on the findings will identify the limitations of this approach and offer suggestions for further development in multicultural and transformative counseling practices.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of this study provide an overview of the integration between multicultural and transformative counseling, as well as its impact on counselee and counseling practitioners. The findings suggest that while integrating the two approaches poses challenges, successful counseling can be achieved by considering cultural diversity and allowing practitioners to engage in critical reflection. This integration allows for more flexible and culturally sensitive techniques, which in turn lead to positive outcomes for counselee in their personal transformation. Additionally, practitioners who reflect on their methods and adapt their techniques to meet the cultural needs of their counselee are more likely to create a safe and effective counseling environment. Despite the difficulties faced, the integration of these approaches offers significant benefits for both the counseling process and client outcomes.

**Table 1.** Integration of Multicultural and Transformative Counseling: Challenges, Impacts, and Implications for Practitioners and Counsel

No.	Theme/Aspect	Sub-theme/Variable	Main Findings	Implications and Critical Reflection
1	Counseling Practitioner Experience	Experience Integrating Multicultural and Transformative Counseling	Practitioners face challenges in combining multicultural and transformative techniques, especially in terms of accepting differing cultural values.	Further training is needed on applying transformative principles within a multicultural context.
2	Challenges in Counseling Techniques	Barriers in Integrating Counseling Techniques	The use of transformative techniques is often considered difficult to apply in contexts where counselee have very different cultural backgrounds.	A more flexible and adaptive approach to counseling techniques is needed, considering the cultural diversity of the counselee.
3	Impact on Counselee	Psychological and Social Changes	Counselee report positive changes in their self-understanding and identity after receiving counseling that integrates both multicultural and transformative approaches.	Counseling that integrates both approaches has a positive impact on the development of identity and emotional well-being of counselee, but its long-term effects should be continually evaluated.
4	Success in Maintaining Diversity	Sensitivity to Cultural Diversity	Practitioners who are more sensitive to cultural diversity can create a safer and more open counseling space for counselee from diverse backgrounds.	Cultural diversity should always be a primary consideration in every counseling session, ensuring that the perspectives and cultural values of counselee are not overlooked.

No.	Theme/Aspect	Sub-theme/Variable	Main Findings	Implications and Critical Reflection
5	Role of Reflection in the Counseling Process	Critical Practitioner Reflection	Counseling practitioners who engage in critical reflection on their approaches tend to be more effective in adapting techniques to the needs of counselee.	Practitioners need to be guided to continue reflecting on their methods to remain flexible and effective in helping counselee grow.
6	Social and Cultural Factors	Influence of Social and Cultural Factors on Counseling	Social factors and cultural norms, such as social stigma or specific cultural norms, often influence counselee' acceptance of the counseling techniques applied.	It is important to develop a more integrated approach that not only considers individual factors but also the social and cultural context of the counselee.
7	Development of Counseling Practice	Enhancement of Practitioner Competence in Counseling	Practitioners feel the need to further develop their knowledge and skills regarding both approaches to improve the effectiveness of their counseling.	Further training programs integrating multicultural and transformative counseling theories are essential to enrich practitioners' capacities.
8	Sustainability of the Transformation Process	Long-Term Transformation	Counselee' transformations appear more sustainable when counseling is conducted with an approach that values cultural differences and supports positive change.	The integrative approach should be applied over the long term to support positive changes that last in counselee' lives.

The results table indicates that integrating multicultural and transformative counseling presents challenges for practitioners, particularly in aligning different techniques with the cultural values of counselee. However, the study also found that when practitioners are more sensitive to cultural diversity and reflectively adjust their approaches, counselee experience positive changes in their self-understanding and identity. Practitioners who engage in critical reflection on the methods they use are more effective in adapting techniques to meet the needs of counselee. Therefore, ongoing training is necessary to enhance practitioners' competencies in integrating these two approaches, while considering the social and cultural factors that influence the counseling process. Cultural diversity should be a primary focus to ensure counseling is more inclusive and has a lasting impact on counselee.

### Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that practitioners encounter a wide range of challenges when integrating multicultural and transformative counseling approaches. In particular, they struggle to reconcile differing cultural values with transformative principles that emphasize deep personal change, critical self-awareness, and shifts in worldview. These contrasting value systems often create ambiguity in selecting appropriate intervention techniques, especially when transformative processes conflict with cultural norms that prioritize harmony, tradition, or collectivism. Such tensions reveal that integration is not merely a technical combination of methods but also a negotiation of complex cultural meanings. This demonstrates that merging the two approaches requires

not only a strong theoretical foundation but also a high degree of cultural sensitivity, reflexive awareness, and professional adaptability to maintain both respect and effectiveness.

Technical difficulties in integrating transformative and multicultural perspectives emerge as one of the primary obstacles in counseling practice. Transformative techniques which demand deep reflection, paradigm shifts, and critical examination of social or cultural structures are often perceived as incompatible or intrusive when applied to counselees from markedly different cultural backgrounds (Yıldırım & Gazioğlu, 2024). The difficulty stems from a mismatch between the methods employed and the value systems held by counselees, many of whom may resonate more with approaches that affirm existing cultural frameworks rather than challenge them. Practitioners also report uncertainty about how far transformative interventions can be applied without risking cultural insensitivity or ethical concerns (Mertens, 2021). These findings highlight the need for counseling approaches that are flexible, contextually grounded, and culturally adaptive rather than rigidly standardized.

Despite these challenges, counselees who receive counseling that integrates multicultural and transformative approaches report meaningful improvements in their self-understanding, identity, and emotional resilience (Bezard & Shaw, 2017). This combined approach helps them view themselves from a broader and more reflective perspective, including recognition of the cultural values, social expectations, and personal beliefs that shape their identity. Such awareness often leads to greater self-acceptance and empowerment, enabling counselees to navigate cultural or personal conflicts with increased confidence (Samaei et al., 2025). These outcomes demonstrate that integrating both approaches can support substantial emotional and psychological growth by fostering coherent and resilient identities. Nonetheless, the long-term sustainability of these changes requires ongoing monitoring to ensure that the transformation remains stable over time.

The success of the counseling process is strongly influenced by practitioners' sensitivity to cultural diversity (Karaman & Özbek, 2024). Practitioners with greater cultural sensitivity are better able to create safe, open, and inclusive counseling environments for individuals from diverse backgrounds, allowing differences to be acknowledged rather than overlooked. Such environments encourage counselees to express their feelings, concerns, and cultural experiences freely without fear of judgment or misunderstanding. This openness is particularly critical in transformative counseling, where deep personal reflection depends on trust and psychological safety. Cultural sensitivity, therefore, serves not merely as an auxiliary skill but as a core competency that shapes the effectiveness of the counseling relationship (Hernandez & Kose, 2012).

The study also emphasizes the central role of critical reflection in enhancing counseling effectiveness (Williams & Wright, 2021). Practitioners who consistently engage in reflective practice are more adept at evaluating their assumptions, adjusting their techniques, and tailoring their approaches to the cultural and emotional needs of counselees. Through reflection, practitioners can identify potential biases, limitations in their methods, or instances where interventions may not align with the counselee's cultural background (Benuto et al., 2018). This awareness enables them to make meaningful adjustments that improve the relevance and impact of counseling. Thus, critical reflection functions not only as an evaluative mechanism but also as a strategy for ongoing professional development and the cultivation of culturally informed transformative practices.

Social and cultural factors were found to significantly influence the acceptance and effectiveness of counseling techniques, underscoring the importance of situating the counseling process within a broader sociocultural context (Sari et al., 2023). Cultural norms, social stigma, hierarchical expectations, and the degree of collectivism or individualism all shape how counselees engage with counselling (Choi & Miller, 2014). For example, counselees from collectivistic cultures may resist deep individual introspection or challenges to cultural norms, both of which are common in transformative approaches. Similarly, stigma surrounding counseling in certain communities may limit openness or engagement. These findings highlight the need for practitioners to consider not only individual psychological characteristics but also the broader cultural and structural forces that shape the counselee's worldview.

The results also show that many practitioners feel a strong need to enhance their competencies in integrating multicultural and transformative approaches (Bezard & Shaw, 2017). This includes strengthening theoretical understanding, developing culturally responsive technical skills, and improving the ability to analyze the interplay between cultural identity and transformative change. Practitioners express interest in structured training programs, supervision models, and professional development initiatives that explicitly address the integration of these paradigms (Myran & Masterson, 2021). Such training is essential to expand practitioners' capacities, reduce uncertainty, and improve intervention effectiveness. With enhanced competence, counseling practice can become more responsive, equitable, and aligned with the diverse needs of counselees.

This study concludes that long-term transformation among counselees is more sustainable when counseling is conducted through an integrative approach that values cultural differences while fostering positive personal change. By weaving together multicultural sensitivity and transformative depth, this approach supports intrapersonal growth and helps counselees reconstruct their identities within their sociocultural realities. Sustainable change occurs when counselees feel culturally affirmed and empowered to transcend limiting beliefs or circumstances. Therefore, the consistent and long-term application of an integrative multicultural-transformative counseling model is crucial for achieving meaningful and lasting positive outcomes. This model has significant implications for future counseling practice, emphasizing that transformative change is embedded not only within individuals but also within their cultural and social contexts.

## CONCLUSION

The integration of multicultural and transformative counseling holds great potential to create profound and lasting changes in counselee. However, the application of these two approaches is not without challenges. Counseling practitioners frequently encounter challenges in integrating various techniques to meet the diverse needs of counselee from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, practitioners need to have a deep understanding of cultural differences and the flexibility to apply techniques that are suitable for the client's context.

This study also demonstrates that the positive impact of integrating these two approaches can only be achieved if counseling practitioners are sensitive to cultural diversity and actively engage in critical reflection on the methods they use. Practitioners who can adapt counseling techniques by considering the cultural and social factors that influence their counselee are more likely to create a safe counseling environment and support counselee' personal growth and transformation. Critical reflection on the techniques and approaches used is crucial to ensure that counseling remains relevant and practical in every situation.

Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of ongoing training for counseling practitioners, enabling them to develop the necessary skills to integrate multicultural and transformative counseling effectively. Such training should include a deeper understanding of both approaches and how to tailor them to the cultural values of counselee. By doing so, the integration of these two approaches can be more effective in supporting positive changes in counselee' lives and helping them face life's challenges more successfully.

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