

## The Impact of Counselor Bias in Assessment: A Comprehensive Review and Best Practices

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This review article aims to comprehensively explore the impact of counselor bias on assessment processes within the counseling profession. It seeks to identify the types and manifestations of biases, assess their implications on counseling outcomes, and recommend best practices for mitigating these biases to promote more equitable counseling practices.

**Methods and Materials:** A systematic literature review was conducted, examining peer-reviewed articles, books, and conference proceedings published between 1997 and 2023. Databases such as PsycINFO, PubMed, ERIC, and Google Scholar were searched using keywords related to counselor bias, psychological assessment, and best practices in bias mitigation. The selection criteria focused on studies that explicitly addressed counselor biases in the context of assessment practices. Theoretical frameworks relevant to understanding and addressing counselor bias, such as Implicit Association Theory, Social Cognition Theory, and the Multicultural Counseling Competency Framework, were also reviewed to provide a conceptual backdrop for the analysis.

**Findings:** The review reveals that counselor bias—spanning from pre-assessment and in-assessment to post-assessment phases—significantly undermines the objectivity and fairness of psychological assessments. These biases, deeply rooted in societal stereotypes and personal prejudices, manifest in various forms, including racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic biases. Theoretical frameworks highlight the complexity of counselor biases and underscore the importance of self-awareness, reflective practice, and

multicultural competencies in mitigating their impact. Best practices identified include enhancing counselor self-awareness, integrating comprehensive bias-awareness training in counselor education, and implementing systemic changes to support equity in counseling practices.

**Conclusion:** Counselor bias presents a pervasive challenge within the counseling profession, impacting the validity and efficacy of psychological assessments. Addressing this issue requires a concerted effort that encompasses individual, educational, and systemic interventions. By adopting best practices focused on bias mitigation and promoting cultural sensitivity, the counseling profession can move towards more equitable and effective practices. Future research should aim to explore the effectiveness of specific interventions and expand the understanding of biases beyond the traditionally examined dimensions.

**Keywords:** *Counselor bias, Psychological assessment, Bias mitigation, Multicultural competencies, Equity in counseling, Implicit Association Theory, Social Cognition Theory.*

## 1. Introduction

The integration of bias-awareness and anti-bias strategies in the counseling profession has increasingly become a focal point of scholarly and practical discourse, reflecting a broader societal push towards equity and inclusivity. The assessment processes within counseling, pivotal to the therapeutic journey, are not immune to the influence of counselor biases. These biases, whether implicit or explicit, can significantly affect the assessment outcomes, client-counselor relationships, and ultimately, the efficacy of therapeutic interventions. This paper aims to comprehensively review the impact of counselor bias in assessment, drawing from seminal works and recent studies in the field, to underscore the imperative for best practices that mitigate these biases.

The nuanced understanding of bias, particularly within the context of counselor-client interactions, is crucial. Boysen (2009) offers an insightful review of experimental studies exploring both explicit and implicit biases among counselors, laying a foundational understanding of how biases manifest and affect counseling outcomes. These biases, often rooted in societal stereotypes and personal prejudices, can inadvertently influence counselors' perceptions and judgments, leading to disparities in assessment and treatment recommendations (Boysen, 2009). Implicit biases, as elucidated by Dovidio et al. (1997), operate unconsciously, affecting decisions and actions beyond an individual's direct control, thereby

complicating the mitigation process within counseling practices (Dovidio et al., 1997).

Acknowledging the pervasiveness of implicit biases, Boysen (2010) further delves into the integration of bias-awareness in counselor education, advocating for training modalities that explicitly address these unconscious biases (Boysen, 2010). This perspective is complemented by Boysen and Vogel (2008), who explore the relationship between the level of training, implicit bias, and multicultural competency among counselor trainees, suggesting that enhanced training can reduce biases and improve competency (Boysen & Vogel, 2008).

The importance of actively combating racism and bias in counseling is highlighted by Better-Bubon et al. (2022), who argue for the necessity of antiracism initiatives within school counseling frameworks (Better-Bubon et al., 2022). This call to action is not only a moral and ethical mandate but also a clinical imperative to ensure that counseling assessments are equitable and free from the distortions of bias.

Moreover, the intersectionality of bias with various client demographics, including race, gender, and disability, necessitates a multifaceted approach to bias mitigation. Christopher and Lord (2022) discuss best practice assessments for autism spectrum disorders in schools, pointing to the specific challenges and biases that can arise in assessing neurodivergent populations (Christopher & Lord, 2022). Similarly, Constantine (2007) addresses racial microaggressions in cross-racial counseling relationships, offering a lens through which to view the subtle and often

overlooked forms of bias that can permeate counseling assessments (Constantine, 2007).

The literature also reflects a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive training and education strategies that equip counselors with the tools to recognize and counteract their biases. Ivers et al. (2020) examine the association between mindfulness and implicit racial bias among mental health practitioners, suggesting that mindfulness training could serve as one avenue for reducing biases (Ivers et al., 2020). This aligns with the broader discourse on developing and implementing anti-bias training programs, as seen in the work of Guardia and Vereen (2023), who advocate for antiracist pedagogy in counselor education and supervision (Guardia & Vereen, 2023).

In synthesizing these perspectives, it becomes evident that the impact of counselor bias in assessment is a complex and multifaceted issue, requiring a concerted effort from the counseling community to address. The following sections will delve deeper into the types of biases present in counseling assessments, their impacts on assessment outcomes, and the best practices emerging from the literature to mitigate these biases effectively. Through this comprehensive review, we aim to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on enhancing the fairness, accuracy, and inclusivity of counseling assessments, thereby fostering a more equitable therapeutic environment for all clients.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design

The methodology underpinning this comprehensive review is designed to systematically evaluate and synthesize the existing literature on counselor bias in assessment practices, its impact, and the best practices to mitigate these biases. Our approach encompasses several steps: literature search and selection, data extraction, and analysis. The focus on descriptive and critical analysis enables us to delineate the current state of research, identify gaps, and propose actionable recommendations.

### 2.2. Literature Search and Selection

The literature search was conducted across multiple databases, including PsycINFO, PubMed, ERIC, and Google Scholar, to ensure a comprehensive collection of relevant academic articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings. Keywords and phrases used in the search included "counselor bias", "assessment bias", "implicit bias in counseling", "anti-bias strategies in counseling", and "multicultural competency in assessment", among others. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to refine the search results.

Inclusion criteria were established to select studies pertinent to the review's objectives. These criteria included publications in peer-reviewed journals, articles published in English from 1997 to 2023, and studies that directly addressed counselor biases in the context of assessment practices. Both empirical and theoretical works were considered to capture a broad spectrum of insights. Exclusion criteria were non-peer-reviewed articles, publications outside the specified date range, and studies not directly related to counselor bias in assessments.

### 2.3. Data Extraction

Following the literature search, selected studies were subjected to a data extraction process, where relevant information was categorized for further analysis. The extracted data included authors, publication year, study objectives, methodology (if applicable), key findings, and recommendations. This process was performed by two independent reviewers to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness, with any discrepancies resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

The analysis of the extracted data employed a descriptive and critical approach. Descriptive analysis involved summarizing the study findings to highlight trends, common themes, and notable divergences in the literature. This included categorizing studies based on the types of biases explored (e.g., implicit, explicit, cognitive,

cultural), assessment contexts (e.g., educational, clinical, organizational), and affected populations (e.g., racial/ethnic minorities, neurodivergent individuals).

Critical analysis extended beyond summarization to evaluate the quality of the research, the applicability of findings, and the strength of recommendations made by authors. This involved assessing the methodologies of empirical studies for robustness, the coherence of theoretical arguments, and the relevance of recommendations to current counseling practices. Special attention was given to identifying gaps in the literature, such as under-researched areas of bias, overlooked populations, and emerging challenges in counselor assessment practices.

Together, the descriptive and critical analyses facilitated a nuanced understanding of the landscape of counselor bias in assessments, shedding light on the complexities of mitigating bias and promoting equity in counseling practices. This methodology provides a foundation for the ensuing review, enabling a thorough exploration of the subject matter and the formulation of evidence-based best practices.

### 3. Background and Context

#### 3.1. Overview of Counselor Bias: Definitions and Types

Counselor bias, a multifaceted phenomenon impacting the counseling profession, encompasses the preconceived notions, stereotypes, and unconscious beliefs that counselors bring into their practice. These biases can significantly affect the therapeutic relationship, assessment processes, and treatment outcomes, making it a critical area of study within the field of psychology and counseling. Understanding the types and definitions of counselor bias is essential for identifying and addressing its presence in clinical settings.

##### 3.1.1. Definitions of Counselor Bias

Counselor bias refers to a deviation from objectivity in the counseling process due to personal beliefs, values,

experiences, and societal influences. These biases can be explicit, where the counselor is consciously aware of their prejudices and may or may not choose to act on them, or implicit, where biases operate below the level of conscious awareness, influencing decisions and interactions in subtle and often unnoticed ways (Dovidio et al., 1997). Implicit biases are particularly insidious because they can affect a counselor's judgment and behavior towards clients without the counselor's conscious knowledge, leading to discriminatory practices and unequal treatment outcomes.

##### 3.1.2. Types of Counselor Bias

Counselor biases can manifest in various forms, influenced by multiple factors including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability, and more. Key types of bias within counseling include:

**Racial and Ethnic Bias:** This involves holding prejudiced attitudes or stereotypes about clients based on their racial or ethnic background. Studies such as those by Hagiwara et al. (2022) have explored the prevalence of implicit and explicit racial biases among counselors, emphasizing the critical impact these biases have on counseling outcomes for racial and ethnic minority clients (Hagiwara et al., 2022).

**Gender Bias:** This refers to the predisposition to treat clients differently based on their gender, often rooted in societal stereotypes about gender roles and behaviors. Gender bias can affect the assessment and treatment of clients, with potential for both overt discrimination and subtler forms of bias in therapeutic engagement and decision-making (Pollock et al., 2022).

**Socioeconomic Bias:** Counselors may also exhibit biases based on a client's socioeconomic status, leading to assumptions about their capabilities, behaviors, or needs. These biases can influence the counselor's approach to assessment, treatment planning, and the therapeutic relationship itself (Boysen, 2010; Boysen & Vogel, 2008).

**Disability Bias:** Bias against individuals with disabilities can manifest in underestimating their abilities, overemphasizing the disability, or failing to provide

appropriate accommodations during the assessment and treatment processes (Boysen, 2009, 2010; Pollock et al., 2022).

Each of these biases, among others, can critically influence the counselor-client interaction, potentially leading to misdiagnosis, inappropriate treatment recommendations, and a breach in the therapeutic alliance. The literature underscores the pervasive nature of these biases and the imperative for awareness and intervention to ensure equitable treatment outcomes (Bettters-Bubon et al., 2022; Constantine, 2007).

In addressing counselor bias, it's crucial to recognize that these biases are not isolated to individual counselors but are reflective of broader societal attitudes and prejudices. This understanding points to the need for systemic approaches to bias mitigation, encompassing education, training, and organizational policies, to foster an inclusive and equitable counseling practice. The next section will delve deeper into the relevance and impact of counselor bias on assessment processes and outcomes, further illuminating the complexities of this issue within the counseling profession.

### 3.2. *Relevance and Impact of Counselor Bias on Assessment Processes and Outcomes*

Counselor bias, by its nature, can significantly distort the assessment process and outcomes within the therapeutic context. The relevance of understanding and addressing these biases is underscored by their potential to influence every phase of the counseling interaction, from initial assessment and diagnosis to treatment planning and implementation. This section explores how counselor biases can impact the validity and reliability of assessments, client-counselor relationships, and ultimately, the effectiveness of the therapeutic intervention.

#### 3.2.1. *Impact on Assessment Validity and Reliability*

The cornerstone of effective counseling lies in the accurate and unbiased assessment of clients' needs, strengths, and challenges. However, counselor biases can undermine this foundational process, leading to

misinterpretation of assessment data, over-reliance on diagnostic stereotypes, and misdiagnosis. Boysen (2009) highlights the role of both explicit and implicit biases in skewing the assessment process, where counselors might unconsciously interpret clients' behaviors or self-reports through the lens of their preconceived notions (Boysen, 2009). For example, racial and ethnic biases may lead to differential diagnosis rates for disorders like ADHD or depression, influenced by stereotypes rather than objective clinical evidence (Hagiwara et al., 2022).

#### 3.2.2. *Impact on Client-Counselor Relationship*

The therapeutic alliance, defined by trust, respect, and mutual understanding between the counselor and client, is vital for effective therapy. Bias, particularly when unrecognized or unaddressed, can erode this alliance, leading to feelings of misunderstanding, marginalization, or outright discrimination from the client's perspective. Constantine (2007) discusses how racial microaggressions, subtle expressions of racial bias, can significantly damage the therapeutic relationship, making clients feel devalued and less likely to engage fully in the therapeutic process. This breakdown in communication and trust can hinder clients' progress and diminish the overall effectiveness of counseling (Constantine, 2007).

#### 3.2.3. *Impact on Treatment Recommendations and Outcomes*

The culmination of the assessment process is the development of a treatment plan tailored to the client's unique needs. However, counselor biases can lead to treatment recommendations that either overlook critical aspects of the client's identity and experience or, conversely, overemphasize certain characteristics based on stereotypes. For instance, gender bias may influence the counselor's recommendations for coping strategies, support systems, or treatment goals, potentially aligning more with traditional gender roles than with the client's actual preferences or needs (Boysen, 2010). Such biased treatment plans are less likely to be effective and can result in poorer outcomes for clients.

### 3.2.4. *Addressing the Impact*

Mitigating the impact of counselor bias requires a multi-pronged approach, integrating individual self-awareness and reflexivity, comprehensive training in cultural competency and bias mitigation, and systemic changes within counseling practices and organizations. Embedding these strategies into the fabric of the counseling profession is essential for enhancing the assessment process's fairness, accuracy, and efficacy. Furthermore, fostering an environment of continuous learning and adaptation can help counselors stay attuned to the nuances of bias and its effects on their work, promoting a more inclusive and equitable practice.

In summary, the relevance and impact of counselor bias on assessment processes and outcomes are profound, affecting the core of therapeutic practice. Recognizing and addressing these biases is not merely an ethical imperative but a clinical one, essential for ensuring that all clients receive high-quality, equitable care. The next section will explore the theoretical frameworks that underpin the study of bias in psychological assessment, providing a deeper understanding of how biases are conceptualized and addressed within the field.

### 3.3. *Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning the Study of Bias in Psychological Assessment*

Understanding the impact of counselor bias on assessment processes necessitates an exploration of the theoretical frameworks that underpin the study of bias within psychological assessments. These frameworks provide a foundation for identifying, analyzing, and mitigating biases, contributing to the development of more equitable counseling practices. Key theories that have significantly influenced the understanding and addressing of bias in counseling include the Implicit Association Theory, Social Cognition Theory, and Multicultural Counseling Competency Framework.

#### 3.3.1. *Implicit Association Theory*

Implicit Association Theory (IAT) posits that people have automatic associations that affect their perceptions, attitudes, and actions toward others, often outside their conscious awareness. Dovidio et al. (1997) explore the nature of prejudice through the lens of IAT, illustrating how automatic processes and controlled processes contribute to the formation and manifestation of biases. This theory is particularly relevant to understanding implicit biases in counseling, as it explains how counselors might unknowingly allow their unconscious associations to influence their assessment and treatment of clients. The application of IAT in counselor education emphasizes the importance of awareness and interventions aimed at uncovering and modifying these automatic associations (Dovidio et al., 1997).

#### 3.3.2. *Social Cognition Theory*

Social Cognition Theory focuses on how individuals process, store, and apply information about others and social situations, highlighting the role of cognitive schemas in shaping perceptions and interactions. This theory underlines the influence of societal stereotypes and personal experiences in forming these schemas, which can lead to biased assessments and interactions within the counseling context. Boysen (2009) underscores the impact of social cognition in counseling, suggesting that biases can arise from counselors' reliance on cognitive shortcuts or schemas that categorize clients based on superficial or stereotypical attributes. Training programs that challenge and expand these cognitive schemas are essential for reducing bias in counseling assessments (Boysen, 2009).

#### 3.3.3. *Multicultural Counseling Competency Framework*

The Multicultural Counseling Competency Framework emphasizes the necessity for counselors to possess knowledge, awareness, and skills in working effectively with clients from diverse backgrounds. This framework addresses the importance of understanding one's own

cultural identity and biases, as well as the cultural contexts of clients, in providing competent and unbiased counseling services. Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) introduced this framework, advocating for its integration into counselor education and practice to enhance cultural competence and minimize biases in assessments. By focusing on the development of specific competencies, this framework provides a structured approach to addressing biases and ensuring equitable treatment for all clients (Boysen & Vogel, 2008; Ivers et al., 2016).

### 3.3.4. *Integrating Theoretical Perspectives*

Integrating these theoretical perspectives into the study and practice of counseling can facilitate a more nuanced understanding of bias and its impact on psychological assessment. Implicit Association Theory provides insight into the unconscious nature of biases, Social Cognition Theory offers a lens through which to examine the cognitive processes underlying bias, and the Multicultural Counseling Competency Framework outlines a path toward competence and equity in counseling practice. Together, these frameworks underscore the complexity of bias in psychological assessments and highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to address it.

Through continuous research, education, and reflective practice informed by these theoretical frameworks, the counseling profession can make strides toward mitigating the effects of counselor bias. This endeavor not only enhances the accuracy and fairness of psychological assessments but also contributes to the broader goal of promoting social justice and equity in mental health care.

## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1. *Pre-assessment Biases*

Pre-assessment biases refer to the preconceived notions, stereotypes, and implicit biases that counselors may bring into the assessment process, even before interacting with clients. These biases can significantly affect the objectivity and fairness of psychological assessments, leading to misdiagnosis, inappropriate treatment plans, and

disparities in the therapeutic outcomes for diverse client populations (Christopher & Lord, 2022; Moura et al., 2022). The literature provides valuable insights into the nature, origins, and impacts of these pre-assessment biases, shedding light on the crucial need for awareness and intervention strategies within the counseling profession.

Boysen (2009) offers a foundational perspective on the prevalence of explicit and implicit biases among counselors, emphasizing the pervasive influence of societal stereotypes on professional judgment. Boysen's review elucidates how implicit biases, which operate unconsciously, can lead counselors to form instant judgments about clients based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, or disability, thereby compromising the assessment's neutrality from the outset. This finding underscores the argument that biases are not merely personal issues but are deeply ingrained in societal structures and norms, necessitating comprehensive strategies for awareness and mitigation (Boysen, 2009).

Adding to the discourse on racial biases, Hagiwara et al. (2022) explore the implicit and explicit racial prejudices among genetic counselors, highlighting a significant variance in attitudes towards Black versus White Americans. This study is particularly relevant to understanding how deeply rooted societal prejudices can influence professional practices, even in specialized areas of counseling like genetics. The prevalence of such biases among professionals, who are pivotal in making life-altering genetic assessments, amplifies the critical need for interventions aimed at both recognizing and addressing these biases at the pre-assessment phase (Hagiwara et al., 2022).

Constantine (2007) delves into the nuanced realm of racial microaggressions within cross-racial counseling relationships, offering a lens through which to examine the subtle yet profound ways in which pre-assessment biases manifest. By illustrating how African American clients often perceive and experience these microaggressions from their counselors, Constantine's work points to the delicate balance required in counselor-client interactions and the profound impact of seemingly minor biases on the

therapeutic alliance and assessment outcomes (Constantine, 2007).

The implications of pre-assessment biases are not limited to adult counseling contexts. Betters-Bubon et al. (2022) argue for the integration of antiracism initiatives within school counseling frameworks, recognizing that biases in educational settings can have lasting effects on students' academic and psychological well-being. This perspective is crucial in understanding how pre-assessment biases in educational contexts can lead to tracking, discipline disparities, and misidentification for special services, which disproportionately affect students of color (Betters-Bubon et al., 2022).

In addressing the origins and mitigation of pre-assessment biases, Boysen and Vogel (2008) emphasize the role of training and education in developing multicultural competency among counselor trainees. Their study suggests that an increased level of training, particularly training that integrates knowledge of implicit biases and their impact, can significantly reduce these biases. This finding highlights the importance of incorporating comprehensive bias-awareness programs into counselor education curricula to prepare future counselors to recognize and counteract their preconceived notions before entering the assessment process (Boysen & Vogel, 2008).

Through these studies, it becomes evident that pre-assessment biases are not isolated phenomena but are interwoven with the fabric of societal prejudices and professional practices. The critical analysis of these biases, as presented in the literature, underscores the necessity for ongoing education, reflection, and systemic change to mitigate the impact of these biases on assessment processes. The next section will delve into the complexities of in-assessment biases, examining how biases manifest during the assessment process and their implications for validity and reliability.

#### 4.2. *In-assessment Biases*

In-assessment biases occur during the interaction between the counselor and the client, encompassing biases in interpretation, questioning, and the evaluation process

itself. These biases can significantly distort the assessment outcome, leading to inaccurate diagnoses, misinterpretation of client information, and inappropriate treatment recommendations (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015; Granello, 2010). The literature on in-assessment biases provides insight into how these biases manifest and their implications for counseling practice.

Boysen (2010) addresses the critical need for integrating awareness of implicit biases into counselor education, highlighting the subtle yet profound ways in which these biases can infiltrate the assessment process. Through a review of counselor education practices, Boysen suggests that even well-intentioned counselors can unknowingly allow their unconscious biases to influence their judgment, questioning techniques, and interpretation of client responses. This highlights the necessity for explicit training on recognizing and managing implicit biases as a core component of counselor training programs (Boysen, 2010).

Building on the understanding of implicit biases, Dovidio et al. (1997) explore the automatic and controlled processes underlying prejudice, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding how biases can influence assessment decisions. This research underscores the dual nature of bias, with automatic, unconscious biases impacting first impressions and interpretations, and controlled processes enabling counselors to counteract these biases with effortful reflection. The study suggests that enhancing counselors' ability to engage in reflective practices during assessments can mitigate the impact of automatic biases (Dovidio et al., 1997).

The work of Constantine (2007) further illuminates the impact of racial microaggressions on the counseling relationship, emphasizing how these subtle biases can affect the assessment process. Constantine's study illustrates how microaggressions can lead to mistrust and communication breakdowns between counselors and clients, particularly in cross-racial counseling relationships. This breakdown can significantly affect the accuracy of the assessment, as clients may withhold information or disengage from the process entirely (Christopher & Lord, 2022).



Hagiwara et al. (2022) provide evidence of the specific impact of racial biases within the genetic counseling context, demonstrating how implicit biases can lead to differential treatment and communication strategies with clients based on race. This study highlights the need for targeted interventions to address racial biases within specialized areas of counseling, where the stakes of biased assessments can have profound implications for clients' health and well-being (Hagiwara et al., 2022).

Addressing the broader implications of in-assessment biases, Boysen and Vogel (2008) discuss the relationship between the level of training, implicit bias, and multicultural competency among counselor trainees. Their findings suggest that increased exposure to multicultural training and experiences can reduce in-assessment biases by enhancing trainees' awareness of their own biases and their impact on the counseling process. This points to the importance of experiential learning and reflective practices in counselor education as strategies for mitigating in-assessment biases (Boysen & Vogel, 2008).

Through these studies, the literature reveals that in-assessment biases are a pervasive challenge within the counseling profession, requiring deliberate and sustained efforts to address. The critical analysis of in-assessment biases underscores the importance of comprehensive bias-awareness training, reflective practice, and the development of multicultural competencies as essential components of effective counseling practice. The next section will explore post-assessment biases, examining how biases can influence the interpretation of assessment results, reporting, and subsequent decision-making processes.

#### 4.3. *Post-assessment Biases*

Post-assessment biases encompass the influence of counselors' biases on the interpretation of assessment results, decision-making regarding client care, and the communication of findings to clients or other professionals. These biases can skew the objectivity of conclusions drawn from assessments, potentially leading to inappropriate recommendations or interventions (Granello,

2010; Ivers et al., 2020; Levitt et al., 2015). The literature provides critical insights into how post-assessment biases manifest and the implications for counseling outcomes and client well-being.

Granello (2010) emphasizes the evolution of cognitive complexity among practicing counselors, suggesting that as counselors gain experience, their ability to recognize and manage their biases in the interpretation of assessment data improves. However, this development is not automatic; it requires intentional reflection and engagement with diverse perspectives to challenge and refine one's interpretive frameworks. Granello's work underscores the importance of ongoing professional development and supervision in enhancing counselors' ability to navigate their biases post-assessment (Granello, 2010).

Foley-Nicpon and Assouline (2015) address the specific context of counseling the twice-exceptional client, highlighting the complexity of assessing individuals who possess both high abilities and significant learning or behavioral difficulties. The nuanced understanding required to accurately interpret assessment results in such contexts can be compromised by post-assessment biases, leading to either the overemphasis of deficits or the overlooking of exceptional talents. This example illustrates the critical need for counselors to be aware of and actively counteract their biases in the post-assessment phase to ensure accurate and holistic understanding of clients' needs (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline, 2015).

In the realm of school counseling, Betters-Bubon et al. (2022) advocate for the incorporation of antiracism initiatives within a multitiered support framework, recognizing the role of biases in shaping the interpretation and application of assessment results in educational settings. Their work suggests that without a critical reflection on how racial biases may influence post-assessment decisions, counselors and educators may inadvertently reinforce systemic inequities through tracking, discipline, or referral practices. This emphasizes the need for systemic interventions to address biases at the structural level within educational institutions (Betters-Bubon et al., 2022).

The work of Boysen (2009) on experimental studies of bias among counselors further contributes to understanding the impact of both explicit and implicit biases on the post-assessment phase. Boysen highlights the potential for biases to influence not only the interpretation of data but also the communication of findings to clients, which can affect clients' perceptions of their conditions and the therapeutic alliance itself. This points to the necessity for training in communication strategies that are mindful of and seek to mitigate potential biases (Boysen, 2009).

Constantine's (2007) exploration of racial microaggressions extends into the post-assessment phase, illustrating how biases in the communication of assessment results can perpetuate feelings of marginalization or misunderstanding among clients, particularly in cross-racial counseling relationships. Constantine's findings advocate for a heightened awareness and sensitivity to the cultural and individual context of clients when discussing assessment outcomes, to foster trust and collaboration in the therapeutic relationship (Constantine, 2007).

Collectively, the literature on post-assessment biases illuminates the multifaceted ways in which counselors' biases can impact the final stages of the assessment process. The critical analysis presented highlights the necessity for ongoing education, reflective practice, and systemic changes to mitigate the influence of biases on the interpretation, decision-making, and communication of assessment results. Ensuring accuracy and fairness in these processes is paramount to upholding the ethical standards of the counseling profession and promoting the well-being of all clients. This comprehensive review underscores the ongoing challenge of addressing biases throughout the assessment process and the importance of concerted efforts at individual, educational, and systemic levels to foster equity and justice in counseling practices.

## 5. Bridging Insights to Action: Towards Mitigating Counselor Biases

The literature review on pre-assessment, in-assessment, and post-assessment biases not only highlights the pervasive nature of biases in counseling but also

underscores the multifaceted impact these biases have on the assessment process and client outcomes. This understanding necessitates a strategic approach to mitigate biases, calling for actions at the individual counselor level, within counselor education and training programs, and at the systemic or institutional level. The following outlines potential pathways and strategies informed by the reviewed literature.

The critical first step in mitigating biases is fostering an environment where counselors continuously engage in self-reflection and reflexivity regarding their own potential biases. Integrating reflective practices, such as journaling or peer discussion forums focused on bias awareness, can help counselors recognize and address their preconceived notions and stereotypes (Boysen, 2010; Granello, 2010). Encouraging mindfulness practices could also support counselors in becoming more aware of their implicit attitudes and biases, promoting a more intentional and unbiased approach to client assessment (Ivers et al., 2020).

Counselor education programs play a pivotal role in preparing future counselors to recognize and manage their biases effectively. Curriculum designs that incorporate comprehensive bias-awareness training, including modules on implicit bias, racial microaggressions, and cultural competency, are crucial (Boysen & Vogel, 2008). This training should extend beyond theoretical knowledge to include experiential learning opportunities, such as role-playing and case study analyses, that allow trainees to practice navigating and mitigating biases in controlled environments.

Institutional policies and practices must reflect a commitment to minimizing biases in counseling assessments. This could involve regular bias-awareness workshops, the establishment of multicultural counseling competencies as a standard part of professional development, and the creation of diverse supervisory boards to review assessment practices and decisions (Better-Bubon et al., 2022; Constantine, 2007). Schools, healthcare institutions, and private practices should aim to cultivate an organizational culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusivity, actively working to dismantle systemic barriers that perpetuate biases.

Adopting standardized assessment tools that have been validated across diverse populations can help reduce the influence of individual counselor biases. Moreover, technology-based assessments, when carefully designed to account for cultural and linguistic diversity, can provide an additional layer of objectivity to the assessment process (Christopher & Lord, 2022). However, it's crucial to ensure that these tools and technologies are used as complements to, rather than substitutes for, the nuanced clinical judgment of skilled counselors.

Finally, the counseling profession must commit to ongoing research into the mechanisms of bias and the effectiveness of bias mitigation strategies. Establishing forums for dialogue and knowledge exchange on these topics, such as conferences, professional association newsletters, and peer-reviewed journals, can help disseminate best practices and foster a community of practice dedicated to equity in counseling (Guardia & Vereen, 2023).

In conclusion, the challenge of mitigating counselor biases in assessments is complex and requires a multifaceted approach. By integrating individual, educational, and systemic strategies informed by the rich body of literature on counselor biases, the counseling profession can make significant strides towards more equitable and effective assessment practices. This endeavor is not only critical for enhancing the validity and reliability of assessments but is also fundamental to the ethical commitment to do no harm, ensuring that all clients receive fair, respectful, and culturally sensitive care.

## 6. Discussion

The comprehensive review of literature on counselor bias in assessment processes highlights the pervasive and multifaceted nature of biases within the counseling profession. From the nuanced understandings of pre-assessment biases, through the intricacies of in-assessment biases, to the profound effects of post-assessment biases, it is evident that biases can significantly undermine the counseling process. These biases not only challenge the validity and reliability of assessments but also jeopardize

the therapeutic alliance and compromise treatment outcomes.

The Implicit Association Theory, Social Cognition Theory, and the Multicultural Counseling Competency Framework offer valuable insights into the underpinnings of these biases. Implicit biases, deeply rooted in societal stereotypes and reinforced by personal experiences, operate beneath the level of conscious awareness, influencing counselors' perceptions and judgments in subtle yet profound ways (Dovidio et al., 1997). Social cognition theory further elucidates how cognitive schemas, formed and shaped by societal norms and individual experiences, predispose counselors to categorize clients based on superficial attributes, leading to stereotyped perceptions and interactions.

The Multicultural Counseling Competency Framework underscores the necessity for awareness, knowledge, and skills in addressing the cultural dimensions of counseling, including the recognition and mitigation of biases. The integration of these theoretical perspectives into counselor education and ongoing professional development is crucial for fostering a deeper understanding of bias and its implications for counseling practice.

The literature unequivocally demonstrates the critical need for interventions at the individual, educational, and systemic levels to mitigate the impact of counselor biases. These interventions range from enhancing self-awareness and reflexivity among counselors to embedding comprehensive bias-awareness training in counselor education programs and implementing systemic changes to foster an inclusive and equitable counseling environment.

## 7. Best Practices

### 7.1. *Enhancing Counselor Self-awareness and Reflective Practice*

One of the foundational steps in mitigating counselor bias involves fostering a heightened sense of self-awareness and engaging in reflective practice. Self-awareness refers to the counselor's ability to recognize their own biases, beliefs, and values that might influence their

professional judgment and interactions with clients. Reflective practice involves the process of continuously examining one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in professional encounters to identify and address potential biases.

### 7.1.1. *Strategies for Enhancing Self-awareness*

**Personal Bias Assessments:** Encourage counselors to use tools such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT) to uncover unconscious biases. Regular engagement with these assessments can help counselors become more aware of their predispositions and work towards addressing them.

**Reflective Journals:** Maintain reflective journals where counselors can document their thoughts, feelings, and observations about their interactions with clients, particularly noting instances where biases may have influenced their perceptions or decisions.

**Supervision and Peer Consultation:** Utilize supervision and peer consultation sessions to discuss potential bias-related issues in a safe and supportive environment. These sessions can provide opportunities for counselors to receive feedback and alternative perspectives on their practice.

### 7.1.2. *Incorporating Reflective Practice*

**Training Workshops:** Organize workshops focused on developing reflective practice skills, including mindfulness techniques and critical reflection exercises, to help counselors engage more deeply with their own internal processes and biases.

**Case Study Discussions:** Incorporate case studies that highlight bias-related challenges in counseling into continuing education programs. These discussions can facilitate deeper understanding and exploration of how biases might manifest in various counseling scenarios.

## 7.2. *Cultivating Multicultural Competence in Counselor Education*

Multicultural competence is essential for effective counseling in a diverse society. It encompasses counselors'

awareness of their own cultural identities and biases, knowledge of clients' cultural backgrounds, and skills in integrating cultural knowledge into counseling practices.

### 7.2.1. *Developing Awareness and Knowledge*

**Cultural Immersion Experiences:** Encourage or require participation in cultural immersion experiences, such as community service projects, cultural workshops, or study abroad programs, to enhance counselors' understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures.

**Comprehensive Curriculum:** Ensure that counselor education programs include comprehensive coursework on multicultural counseling theories, cultural identity models, and the impact of social injustice and discrimination on mental health.

### 7.2.2. *Enhancing Skills*

**Role-playing and Simulation Exercises:** Use role-playing and simulation exercises to practice culturally sensitive assessment techniques, communication skills, and intervention strategies. These exercises can help counselors develop the ability to navigate cross-cultural counseling situations effectively.

**Multicultural Supervision:** Provide supervision that specifically focuses on developing multicultural competence, offering feedback and guidance on how counselors can incorporate cultural considerations into their assessment and treatment plans.

## 7.3. *Implementing Systemic Changes to Support Equity in Counseling*

Addressing counselor bias requires not only individual and educational interventions but also systemic changes within counseling organizations and institutions. These changes can create an environment that supports equity and inclusiveness at all levels of counseling practice.

### 7.3.1. *Policy Development and Implementation*

**Bias-awareness Policies:** Develop and implement policies that explicitly address the need for bias awareness

and mitigation in counseling practices. These policies can outline expectations for counselors' conduct, continuous education requirements, and the use of culturally sensitive assessment tools.

**Regular Training Requirements:** Establish requirements for regular training on bias awareness, cultural competence, and ethical practice, ensuring that counselors are continuously updating their knowledge and skills.

### 7.3.2. *Fostering an Inclusive Counseling Environment*

**Diverse Hiring Practices:** Adopt hiring practices that prioritize diversity among counseling staff, reflecting the broad range of cultural backgrounds and experiences of the client population.

**Community Engagement:** Engage with local communities to understand their needs and perspectives better, and to inform the development of services and programs that are responsive and relevant to those communities.

By integrating these best practices into counseling education, supervision, and organizational policies, the counseling profession can make significant strides toward mitigating counselor bias and promoting equity in psychological assessment and treatment. These efforts require commitment and ongoing reflection from counselors, educators, and organizational leaders alike, aiming to foster a counseling environment that is inclusive, respectful, and effective for all individuals.

## 8. Conclusion

The exploration of counselor bias in psychological assessment processes reveals a complex landscape where biases—both implicit and explicit—significantly influence the counseling profession. These biases manifest across various phases of the assessment process, from initial client engagement through the interpretation of assessment data to the formulation of treatment plans, ultimately impacting the therapeutic relationship and the effectiveness of counseling interventions. The review has underscored the multifaceted nature of counselor bias, delineating its manifestations as pre-assessment, in-assessment, and post-

assessment biases, each carrying distinct implications for counseling practice.

Theoretical frameworks such as Implicit Association Theory, Social Cognition Theory, and the Multicultural Counseling Competency Framework offer invaluable insights into the underpinnings of counselor biases. They not only elucidate the mechanisms through which biases operate but also provide guidance on addressing these biases to foster more equitable counseling practices. These theories highlight the importance of self-awareness, reflective practice, and the development of multicultural competencies in mitigating the impact of biases on assessment processes and outcomes.

In terms of best practices, the literature suggests a tripartite approach focusing on enhancing counselor self-awareness and reflective practice, cultivating multicultural competence within counselor education, and implementing systemic changes to support equity in counseling. These strategies emphasize the need for ongoing education and training, the adoption of reflective practices, and the establishment of policies and practices that prioritize bias mitigation and cultural sensitivity. Moreover, they call for a commitment to continuous personal and professional development, underscoring the importance of creating an inclusive and equitable counseling environment.

However, addressing counselor bias is not solely the responsibility of individual counselors or counselor educators. It requires a concerted effort at all levels of the profession, including organizational and systemic changes within counseling institutions and broader societal efforts to challenge and dismantle the structural inequities that perpetuate biases. This comprehensive approach is essential for ensuring that all clients receive fair, respectful, and effective counseling services, regardless of their cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Future research should aim to fill the existing gaps in the literature, particularly in exploring the effectiveness of specific interventions and strategies for bias mitigation. Moreover, there is a need for studies that investigate biases beyond the commonly examined dimensions of race, ethnicity, and gender, to include considerations of

socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation, and other identity dimensions. Such research will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how biases operate within the counseling process and how they can be effectively addressed.

In conclusion, the impact of counselor bias in assessment is a pervasive issue that challenges the ethical and professional foundations of the counseling profession. Mitigating these biases requires a multifaceted approach, incorporating individual, educational, and systemic interventions. By committing to ongoing education, reflective practice, and the development of multicultural competencies, counselors can work towards minimizing the influence of biases in their practice. Additionally, counseling organizations and institutions must play a critical role in supporting these efforts through policy development, training requirements, and the fostering of an inclusive counseling environment. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that counseling services are equitable, respectful, and effective for all clients, contributing to the broader aim of promoting social justice and inclusivity within society.

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