Exploring the Construct Validity of the California Brief Multicultural Competence Scale

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Abstract

The construct validity of a relatively new measure of self-reported multicultural competence, the California Brief Multicultural Competence Scale (CBMCS; Gamst et al., 2004), was examined in a sample of counselor education students in programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP). Participants were 155 counselor education students in masters and doctoral programs across the U.S. Both convergent validity and discriminate validity were assessed. Convergent validity was examined using measures of theoretically similar constructs (i.e., measures of modern sexism and modern homonegativity toward lesbians). Discriminant validity was assessed using a measure of a theoretically distinct construct, social desirability. Additionally, convergent validity of the CBMCS subscale that assesses diversity issues was also examined through correlations with the measures of convergent validity. Finally, the factor structure of the CBMCS was examined to determine if the author’s factor structure was present in this sample.

Results provide some support for use of the CBMCS with counselor education students. Specifically, there was a significant relationship with the CBMCS and the measure of modern homonegativity toward lesbians when demographic and background variables were controlled. The CBMCS did not demonstrate a relationship with social desirability, thereby supporting the hypothesis related to discriminant validity. Additionally, the factor structure identified by the authors was generally supported in this sample. Hypotheses related to the measure of modern sexism were not supported. The hypotheses related to the subscale associated with diversity also were not supported. Implications of the research for the field of counseling are provided.
Exploring the Construct Validity of the California Brief Multicultural Competence Scale

As the U.S. population becomes increasingly diverse, the number of clients from cultural minorities in counseling relationships will likely grow. The importance of providing counseling services that are culturally sensitive has been increasingly recognized by the counseling profession. Over the past few decades, multiculturalism, the ‘fourth force’ in counseling (Pederson, 1990), has become a core feature of the professional identity of all counselors. In fact, the ACA Code of Ethics (2005) indicates that counselors should have the sensitivity, knowledge, awareness, and skills to work with diverse clients. Additionally, the Code states that counselor educators should infuse multicultural competency in their training practices. Related to this, the national accrediting body for counseling programs, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), mandated that programs with their accreditation must infuse issues of diversity throughout their counseling curricula (CACREP, 2001). As Hill (2003) stated, “the development of multiculturally competent counselors and counselor trainees is a standard that is championed by the professional organizations of counselors” (p. 41).

In response to this recognition of the importance of a multicultural perspective in counseling and counselor training, specific multicultural counseling competencies have been identified (see Sue et al., 1992). In addition, instruments have been developed to operationalize multicultural counseling competence for the purposes of counselor training, supervision, and research. Although each of the instruments was developed to measure multicultural competence derived from the competencies proffered by Sue and colleagues, there is a lack of uniformity among the measures. For example, each instrument was constructed using different methods and different versions of the multicultural counseling competencies (Gamst et al., 2004), and factor analysis on the instruments reveals various factor solutions, ranging from one to four factors (Gamst et al). Additionally, subscales of the same name on different measures do not demonstrate relationships with one another (Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995). Based on such findings, there is concern that the various instruments designed to measure multicultural competence may be measuring different constructs (Pope-Davis & Dings; Ponterotto, et al., 2000). In addition, research has indicated that all of the existing multicultural competence measures have relationships with socially desirable responding (Constantine & Ladany, 2000; Worthington, Mobley, Franks, & Tan, 2000). These problematic findings on the existing multicultural competence instruments have lead to a call for more valid multicultural competence measures (Atkinson & Israel, 2003).

Based on the need for a valid, accurate, and universal measure of multicultural counseling competence, Gamst and colleagues (2004) developed the California Brief Multicultural Competence Scale (CBMCS). Developed from existing multicultural competence instruments, the scale was derived through principal component analysis, expert panel content validation, and confirmatory factor analysis. In addition to being brief, developed from a theoretical foundation and empirical analysis, and using a sample of mental health professionals who provide direct service to clients, this
instrument appears to address many of the criticisms of the existing competency assessment instruments.

Although the CBMCS is promising, there is relatively little psychometric (i.e., reliability and validity) information available for this instrument. Therefore, the purpose of the current research was to further assess the psychometric properties of the CBMCS using a sample of counseling graduate students from CACREP accredited programs. Specifically, the construct validity of the CBMCS, both convergent and discriminant validity, was assessed, as well as the factor structure of the instrument.

Convergent validity was assessed via the relationship with scales representing other diversity constructs important for multicultural competence (i.e. measures of modern sexism and modern homonegativity toward lesbian women). Although there are many different constructs important for multicultural competence, these two constructs, modern sexism and modern homonegativity, were selected after a review of literature found that these constructs had instruments with relatively good psychometric properties. Other diversity constructs, such as socioeconomic status, disability, and age, were considered; however, they were not selected due to instrumentation issues.

Inverse relationships were hypothesized between these constructs and multicultural competence as assessed by the CBMCS. In addition, these diversity constructs were correlated with the specific subscale of the CBMCS related to diversity variables, the Sociocultural Diversity subscale. Again, inverse relationships were hypothesized between these constructs and the Sociocultural Diversities subscale of the CBMCS. Discriminant validity was assessed using a measure of social desirability. Finally, the factor structure of the CBMCS was assessed via confirmatory factor analysis.

**Method**

Participants in this study were 155 students enrolled in counseling classes in CACREP-accredited programs in the US. Research participation from professors at CACREP-accredited counseling programs was solicited through advertising this study on a Counseling listserv (CESNET) and through the researcher contacting professors known to the researcher or the researcher’s dissertation committee members. Participants in this study ranged in age from 22 to 54 years, with a mean age of 30.87 years (SD = 8.65). With regard to sex of the participants, 89% (n = 138) identified as female while 11.6% (n = 17) identified as male. Participants self-identified their race/ethnicity in the following manner: 83.2% (n = 129) identified as European American/ Caucasian, 10.32% (n = 16) identified as African American/ Black, 1.9% (n = 3) identified as Latino/ Hispanic, .6% (n = 1) identified as Asian American and 2.6% (n = 4) identified as ?other?. With regard to sexual orientation, 89.7% (n = 139) of the respondents self-identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual, 5.8% (n = 9) reported being gay or lesbian, and 3.2% (n = 5) indicated being bisexual. Two respondents, or 1.3%, identified their sexual orientation as other than heterosexual, gay/lesbian, or bisexual. Level of education, courses taken toward degree, and program in which participant was enrolled varied with this sample.
Results
To answer the research questions and test the research hypotheses in this study, statistical analyses, including regression analysis and factor analysis, were employed. Analyses revealed some support for the construct validity of the CBMCS. Specifically, there were relationships in the predicted directions with both the instrument measuring modern homonegativity toward lesbians and the instrument measuring social desirability and the CBMCS total score when demographic and background variables were controlled. The instrument measuring modern sexism, however, did not display a significant relationship with the CBMCS, which was contrary to the hypotheses. The analyses on the specific subscale of the CBMCS related to diversity issues, the Sociocultural Diversities subscale, produced similar results. While there was a relationship between modern homonegativity toward lesbians and the Sociocultural Diversities subscale, neither modern homonegativity nor modern sexism were significant predictors of the Sociocultural Diversities total score when demographic and background variables were controlled.

Finally, the factor analysis of the CBMCS provided support for the hypothesis related to the instrument’s factor structure. Consistent with the hypothesis, the results of the analysis revealed four factors. Although the factors were similar to those identified by the authors of the instrument, the items on the fourth factor in the analysis were not consistent with the fourth subscale identified by the authors and appeared to be a combination of items from the previously identified scales.

Implications for the Field of Counseling
Further research of the CBMCS may support its use as the standard measure of multicultural competence in counselor research and training. Having a standard instrument would be a significant advancement for the field because of the problems inherent in using various instruments of multicultural competence. Researchers (e.g., Ponterotto et al., 2000; Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995) concluded that the instruments that were developed prior to the CBMCS appear to be measuring different constructs. Clearly, this is problematic in assessing a construct as important as counselor multicultural competence. In addition, the CBMCS has benefits that older multicultural competence instruments do not, which include a theoretical foundation, brevity, and a large and diverse normative sample comprised of mental health professionals from which the measure was developed.

In addition, with further validation, this instrument could be used as the basis for designing counselor training programs. The authors of the CBMCS indicated that their instrument was not constructed to be “simply another multicultural competence assessment instrument” but could be used as a resource for staff training (Gamst et al., 2004, p. 180). Although Gamst et al. conceived of their instrument for use in training of clinicians in applied settings, the instrument could be used in a similar manner with counselor education and training. A review of the items indicates that the CBMCS assesses a vast array of issues important for training programs, including issues related to working with various populations (i.e. persons with disabilities, gay and lesbian individuals, persons from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, etc.) and issues related to
use of standardized assessment instruments with diverse populations. Similar to what the authors propose for use of the CBMCS in clinical settings, counselor training programs could use this measure to assess areas in which their students may be lacking in training and address the issues prior to the students entering the workforce. For example, counselor education programs could use this measure as a pre and post assessment of multicultural competence when students complete a multicultural counseling course. Performance on the measure could provide information regarding specific areas in which the individual student may need more education, training, and supervision, as well as information about the students’ performance as a whole. This information could be used to tailor future courses and the integration of diversity issues throughout the curriculum.

References


