CD 702 Working with People
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Triad Paper

This semester I participated in eight counseling triads as part of this course. The members of my triad were Jacqueline ("Jacqui") Coleman and Joshua Kim. Each of us took turns being the speaker, listener and observer. We completed the in-course sessions over Zoom and held two additional 1-hour sessions in February.

In session two, we introduced ourselves and shared name and any story behind our name, our life story, birthplace, and about our parents. During Triad Session One, Jacqui spoke about how her parents met and she shared that her father asked her mother to marry him on their first date – she said yes and they are still married today. When Jacqui shared, I was the listener and Joshua was the observer. As I listened, I was intrigued by her unique upbringing and I tried to convey my interest by leaning forward, nodding, and asking clarifying questions. After Jacqui spoke Joshua gave me feedback on what was done well and I appreciated honest feedback. Next, I was the speaker I described my childhood and cultural experience growing up in the Bahamas and moving to the U.S. for college. Joshua was the listener and he asked me to give examples of how my parents' controlling behavior had a good impact on me. I think that his question forced me to consider a negative experience in a positive light. I appreciate what he was trying to do but I felt that he wanted me to tailor my story to fit his paradigm in which parents are always right. I responded by saying that controlling parents helped me continue taking piano lessons. But I felt internal dissonance about saying that because I felt pressured to say what I thought Joshua wanted to hear, even though it wasn't my perspective. Joshua's question did not convey empathy. Nonetheless, his question helped me to acknowledge that in some ways there were

some benefits to having controlling parents. In addition, Joshua's question revealed something about him and it showed me that he believes that having controlling parents instills discipline and can be beneficial to children.

Joshua was the third speaker and he described his childhood as a second-generation Korean-American, with language guilt because he does not speak Korean. I observed as Jacqui listened and she gave verbal and non-verbal cues that conveyed her interest in what Joshua was saying. When it was time for me to give feedback to the listener it was a little challenging for me because I didn't want to be too critical of the listener since our sessions are a learning process.

In session two, out triad discussed hot button topics. Jacqui was the first speaker and she spoke about her experience accommodating trans children at her church's summer camp. I was the observer and I felt myself being overly critical of how she handled it because her actions did not align with the way that I would have handled it. Nonetheless, I recognized that she probably made the right decision because children were involved and her decision was appropriate for the setting. I gave specific feedback to Joshua regarding his effective use of body language and clarifying questions. When I was the speaker I spoke about the dilemma of being compassionate toward people experiencing homelessness, without enabling them to take drugs and alcohol. I felt heard and listened to by Jacqui. When Joshua was the speaker, I listened to him talk about a troubled friend he invited to church who is living a promiscuous lifestyle and Joshua wants to help but doesn't know how. As I listened, I really wanted to suggest that he pray for his friend. Instead, I asked him about what he could do to help his friend. And then he replied that he could pray. This interaction underscored for me that it is better to help someone discover the answer to a question rather than telling them the answer.

After our initial session together our triad members were very comfortable with one another and we shared more freely. I was a listener when Jacqui spoke about her childhood and I asked open ended questions and clarifying questions, which convey my interest. She shared that her parents were attachment style parents. Jacqui raised her children the same way. Her family values taking ownership of your own actions. I admire the way that her parents raised Jacqui and her siblings and I wondered how different I would be as an adult if I had Jacqui's parents when I was a child.

During another session we discussed loss. I shared about the loss of my maternal grandmother seven years ago, she was the only grandmother that I ever knew. I also talked about the loss of my last living uncle who died several months ago. The triad was a safe place for me to express my feelings and sentiments. Both Jacqui and Joshua were very supportive. When Joshua spoke, he talked about the loss of closeness with his cousins who are his age. As he spoke, I wondered whether there was a deeper story behind the loss of those relationships.

Loss is a topic that was raised again at a later session. Jacqui spoke about her mission trip to Cambodia and described the severe loss of families that survived the genocide by the Khmer Rouge communist regime. When I spoke about loss, I discussed the role of denial as a coping mechanism that I used initially to process the death of my grandmother. Joshua spoke about coping mechanisms that center around soul food. He said "everyone has their own soul food to relieve stress." We generally agreed with him. At our last session, we updated each other on what was happening in our lives. We also reviewed our experience in Working With People and discussed plans to continue meeting after the course concludes.

Through the triad sessions, I developed my counseling style further. As I reflect on those sessions, I realize that I won't have all the answers and that is okay. Most people just want someone who will be present with them. To see and hear them. The triads definitely helped me to learn how to be with someone in their moment of sharing. I am learning how to sit with others in the midst of what they are sharing, without offering a solution or advice. I learned that it is sometimes more valuable to simply empathize and be present.