

MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON COUNSELLING AND CAREER CHOICE

ELIZABETH A. McDOWELL & GLEN A. ESKEDAL, *Suffolk University*

ABSTRACT. One of the tasks confronting professional counsellors is understanding the complex role of culture in the counselling relationship. Both counsellor and client operate from a set of values, beliefs, and behaviors that affects the helping relationship. The definition of cultural diversity is not limited to race, ethnicity or nationality. To meet the needs of culturally diverse clients, counselling assessment and determination of career services must be understood in a context which presupposes self-awareness, knowledge of others, acceptance, adaptation of helping and treatment models, and the appreciation of difference.

RÉSUMÉ. Les conseillers professionnels sont confrontés à la nécessité de comprendre le rôle complexe de la culture dans la relation qu'ils établissent avec leurs clients. Conseillers et clients ont chacun leurs propres valeurs, croyances et comportements qui influent sur la relation d'aide. La définition de la diversité culturelle ne se limite pas à la race, à l'ethnicité ou à la nationalité. Pour répondre aux besoins des clients d'origines culturelles diverses, l'évaluation et l'identification des services d'orientation professionnelle doivent être appréhendées dans un contexte qui présuppose la connaissance de soi, la connaissance des autres, l'acceptation, l'adaptation des modèles d'aide et de traitement et l'aptitude à reconnaître la différence.

There is a growing recognition that the counselling needs of the many segments of American society are not being met through traditional counselling theories and techniques. It is generally acknowledged that the values based on Western European ideals have formed the basis upon which counselling theory has been developed and implemented. This perspective has fostered cultural neutrality and assimilation rather than the appreciation of diversity. Most societies are made up of a varied populace, reflecting many beliefs, religions, nations of origin, and cultural histories. Human services providers must acknowledge the significance of culture in shaping thinking and behaviour.

The makeup of American society is becoming ever more diverse. The United States Census Bureau projects a population of over 280 million by the year 2000, consisting of 200 million Whites, 37 million Blacks, 31 million Latinos, and 12 million Asian and other racial/ethnic minority groups (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). Non-whites are underrepresented among the more highly educated and skilled, and overrepresented among high school dropouts, the impoverished, and low growth occupational areas. Given this stratification, career counselling in the future will be increasingly complex and require greater levels of skill and education (Hawks & Muha, 1991). If career counselling is to be effective for all individuals, it must recognize and incorporate the values of different cultures in the career counselling process.

MULTICULTURAL ISSUES AND PERSONAL COUNSELLING

It is evident that ignoring the perspectives of non-dominant cultural groups may seriously hinder the usefulness of the personal counselling relationship for individuals of these groups. For example, researchers have found that the utilization of community mental health services by African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino Americans is much lower than utilization by white Americans, despite a perceived greater need for those services by these minority groups. Additionally, the rate of return after an initial counselling contact for minorities is much lower than the rate of return for Whites (Atkinson, Casas, & Abreu, 1992; Gim, Atkinson, & Kim, 1991).

Strupp (1990), in a study analyzing therapy failure, found that the absence of a developing working alliance early in the therapy process resulted in early termination as a consequence of clients' feeling misunderstood and unsupported. The interpersonal relationship becomes more confounded when multicultural variables are introduced. Non-white groups continue to be underrepresented in counselling training programs in both the professorial and student ranks. It is speculated that this underrepresentation contributes greatly to the underutilization of mental health services by non-white individuals (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991). This combination of underutilization and underrepresentation works to exacerbate the potential ineffectiveness of personal counselling for ethnically diverse groups. Additionally, most counsellor training programs, focusing on the understanding and ability to use theories based on European ideas, have not mandated curriculum experiences for the study of the values of other cultures. Professional counsellors

generally are not equipped to counter the perceptions that minority groups might have of personal counselling and may be trained to encourage problem remediations that run counter to their values.

From the available research (Atkinson, Casas, & Abreu, 1991; Bennett & BigFoot-Snipes, 1991; Gim, Atkinson, & Kim, 1991) it appears that the less an individual is acculturated, the less that individual will find traditionally practiced psychological counselling to be helpful. Acculturation also seems to be a factor influencing the degree to which an individual may desire an ethnically or culturally similar counsellor. There is a direct relationship between acculturation and the level of commitment an individual feels to his/her cultural origins. Within this context, counsellors must assess the acculturation of clients in order to understand their identity development and the degree to which they hold the values of their own cultural group.

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Identity is based on one's view of place and self within one's culture. Individual realities arise out of the experiences of one's group and a shared sense of purpose, as well as one's singular experiences. At the same time, identity tends to foster the preferring of one's own group and its values over those of others. This is a central reason why it is so difficult to exercise a non-prejudiced perspective, and why a homogeneous or universal view of identity is unlikely to be established (Hoare, 1991). Much work must be undertaken to understand the origins of another culture and the validation of personal identity in order to counsel effectively with those with whom a cultural identity is not shared.

The literature is replete with examples of why psychological counselling derived from the values of the dominant culture can be ineffective for those who do not share them. The following selected groups demonstrate this point. Issues for African Americans may include such concerns as the perception of ceding control to a White person, the tendency of counselling theory to focus on the intrapsychic origins of problems and not the very real external and contextual or historical sources of problems that may result from oppression or discrimination, and the White view that one can triumph over nature or circumstance, which may be perceived by the African Americans that they are somehow blamed for not being able to overcome the forces of oppression (Priest, 1991).

Issues for Asian Americans may include the discomfort felt in disclosing private thoughts to another, the view of self as interdependent with others and therefore a reluctance to assign priority to addressing individual problems, the view that physical and mental well-being are interconnected, the tendency to regard addressing one's intrapsychic nature solely with suspicion, and the belief in the authority of the expert which discourages confidence in solutions centered in self (Carter, 1991).

Finally, some specific issues that may interfere with the effectiveness of traditional psychological counselling for Latinos include a belief in the prominence of the group over the individual, the desire to value the Spanish language and patterns of communication, the feeling that Spanish is not valued in the dominant culture, and a strong valuing of tradition and family which may make individuals reluctant to step outside of those norms in problem solving.

EFFECTS OF CULTURE ON CAREER CHOICE AND ASPIRATION

In the United States, recent studies have been undertaken on the career aspirations of Black, Mexican American, and White college freshmen (Arbona & Novy, 1991); American Indian, White and Latino rural high school students (Lauver & Jones, 1991); and Latino high school and college students (Arbona, 1990). While these studies confirm that gender exerts a greater influence on career aspiration than cultural group, there are some interesting findings to consider regarding the relationship between culture and aspirations. Arbona's (1990) study found that Latinos tend to have high occupational aspirations and that Holland's (1973) model of measuring career interests through six personality types is a valid tool for career exploration. Likewise, Lauver and Jones found that Latino high school students expressed high occupational aspirations. Interestingly, both studies noted that Latinos did not express high occupational expectations, and it is speculated that structural factors (socioeconomic status, discrimination, opportunities for educational attainment, and lack of mobility), and awareness of those structural factors, may limit expectations. Arbona and Novy's (1991) study found an association between ethnicity and career expectations. Again, this seems to point to the strong impact structural factors must have on persons from minority cultures.

Cheatham (1990) points out that career aspirations are shaped early and through a person's contextual experiences. These experiences may include such things as discrimination, the meaning of work for the

culture, and the availability of career information and guidance. Thus, one's experience within the culture would greatly influence one's career choices and aspirations.

Self-concept is associated with career aspirations and expectations. Cook (1991), in reviewing career counselling research and practice, points out that self-efficacy reflects how individuals see themselves in the world of work. Societal discrimination definitely has the potential to negatively affect self-efficacy through its wearing down of the person's self-esteem. Cook also points out that career issues seem to be linked to how an individual functions as a whole psychic being; work cannot be compartmentalized from the rest of life. If someone has experienced discrimination in a realm outside of work, the effects of that discrimination will probably carry over into one's work life.

CAREER COUNSELLING AND NON-DOMINANT CULTURES

The goals of traditional career development theory are based on autonomous decision-making and attention to one's personal interests, values, and skills. A fit is sought between individuals and occupations (Cook, 1991). Career education stresses self-efficacy and self-reliance. Independence in skill development and job hunting activity is encouraged. The process stresses that career development influences are located within the individual (Cheatham, 1990). Not only does this ignore the importance of collective decision-making and collateral relations valued by most cultural groups, but it also stresses the intrapsychic aspect of the career process while ignoring the considerable impact of external forces that are unquestionably present in all aspects of the lives of persons of nondominant groups. The most potent of these forces is discrimination, but other forces include limited educational access, socioeconomic status, parental influence, and lack of networks and role models.

The research provides many examples of things to consider, both internal and external, when dealing with the career development of persons from specific cultural groups. Brown, Minor, and Jepsen (1991) found that African Americans have a high level of awareness of their need for career planning and for access to improved occupational information. Luzzo (1992) found that the slower rates of vocational development of African Americans can be traced in part to lack of positive work-related experience, low expectations for achieving occupational goals, lower levels of career satisfaction, and some restrictions on the diversity of

occupational aspirations. Perhaps these factors are the impetus for African Americans' awareness of their need for better career planning and information.

Other studies focus on specific cultural groups and the career development issues they face. Leong (1991) found that Asian Americans have a greater preference for dependent decision making and for assigning greater worth to extrinsic goals (e.g., money, status) and employment security work values. Asian Americans were found to have a lower tolerance for ambiguity in the career development process, preferring the structure that is not often emphasized in traditional, self-discovery-based career counselling. Leong concludes that there is less of a view by Asian Americans that career choice is a process of implementing self-concept. They see the process as external, outside of self.

Latinos' perceptions of career planning, the nature of their work environments, and use of occupational information is similar to that of Whites, except they seem to experience more stress on the job than Whites (Brown et al. 1991).

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The makeup of American society is becoming ever more diverse. The United States Census Bureau projects a population of over 280 million by the year 2000, consisting of 200 million Whites, 37 million Blacks, 31 million Latinos, and 12 million Asian and other racial/ethnic minority groups (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). Non-whites are underrepresented among the more highly educated and skilled and overrepresented among high school dropouts, the impoverished, and low growth occupational areas. Given this stratification, career counselling in the future will be increasingly complex and require greater levels of skill and education (Hawks & Muha, 1991). If career counsel-

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MULTICULTURAL ISSUES: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

It is evident that Latinos have the same career aspirations as Whites, but lower career expectations. Latinos also indicate that occupational status is more important to them than pay or income (Arbona, 1990). It is important to note that Latinos are not viewed by any of the researchers, cited in this paragraph, as a homogeneous group, and that all feel that further study is needed to understand within-group differences.

Another consideration for career counselling relates to the potential implications of the power dynamic in the counselling relationship. Many non-white students feel a lack of empowerment, and perhaps even experience internalized oppression, as a result of discrimination. The career counselling relationship may be rendered counterproductive if an individual client feels disabled and not in control of the process (Hawks & Muha, 1991).

Burn (1992) notes that the ethical standards of counselling require the provision of competent services which will consider the welfare and self-determination of the client a high priority. More information on cultural differences within groups is needed. Such variables as class, education, generation, and country of origin can create differences in perspective within the cultural group. Awareness of the subtleties of within-group differences is fairly complex, since assumptions are made based on such external qualities as language or skin color. The applicability of all career assessment instruments must be scrutinized across cultures.

Professional journals and publications must continue to encourage research on the perspectives of working with clients of diverse origins. Specifically, counsellors must approach clients from different cultural perspectives by trying to understand the meaning of race or ethnicity in their lives, then the nature of any discrimination that they may have experienced, and, finally, how these two variables have affected the quality of their life, their view of work, and their career aspirations (Cook, 1991; Carter, 1991). If counsellors begin to consider the import of cultural issues, even before they feel entirely comfortable with them, they prevent the potential for discomfort to serve as an excuse for delayed action (Hawks & Muha, 1991).

Once a culturally-based assessment has been completed, the appropriate degree of structure for the counselling process can be determined. Some clients (Asian Americans) may respond best to a high degree of structure and direction. Others (African Americans) may find a directive structured approach to be threatening because it involves handing over more control to the counsellor. The balance of power in a counselling relationship is an extremely important evaluation to make with a client (Atkinson, Casas, & Abreu, 1992; Hawks & Muha, 1991; Leong, 1991). Another example of a specific counselling technique that can be used to facilitate counselling includes using group approaches for those for whom collateral relations are more important (Arbona, 1990; Hawks & Muha, 1991).

The challenge of finding effective methods of counselling those of different cultures may mean that counsellors will have to assume roles that typically have been considered outside the norm, and in some cases even inappropriate, based on the current standard of care. Cook (1991) believes that career counsellors must somehow be involved in activities which provide advocacy in the workplace, reduce racial and ethnic barriers, and raise educational aspirations for all cultural groups. Likewise, Atkinson, Thompson, and Grant (1993) feel that there may be times when it is legitimate for the personal counsellor to take on such nontraditional roles as advisor, advocate, facilitator of indigenous support mechanisms (e.g., religious institutions), consultant, and finally, change agent. These same roles, especially those of advisor, advocate, consultant, and change agent, will also work well for career counsellors. There may be times when a combination of these roles will be most effective.

One of the ways to generate creative problem-solving is to involve specific communities in the process through mentoring, program development, informational interviewing sources, and the involvement of local businesses. A collaborative approach affirming the value of collateral relations must be used to find solutions and methods that will work.

SUMMARY

In order to meet the challenge of an ethnically diverse population, the counselling strategies and career development needs of minority persons and appropriate multicultural counselling strategies must be integrated into all facets of counsellor training. Competencies in assessing a client's level of acculturation or the degree to which problems stem from structural or intrapsychic problems require extensive practical training. Educating future counsellors regarding the specific perspec-

tives of different ethnic, racial, and cultural groups is vital to developing counselling competence and for recommending interventions relevant to the needs of the client. Actively employing the values of other cultures in specific counselling strategies is a significant means of integrating multicultural issues into practice.

New definitions of cultural diversity must include customs, skills, values, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, geographic location, gender, age, education, religion, and ideas. The notion of cultural competence must be understood from the perspective of effective services for everyone. It would follow that human service providers must celebrate diversity and minimize the negative stereotypes, faulty expectations, and inadequate services that result from myopic models of human development and behavior. Counselling assessment and determination of career services must be understood in context which presupposes self-awareness, knowledge of others, acceptance, adaptation of helping and treatment models, and the appreciation of difference.

A willingness to heed the implications of culture on an individual's work perspective will move the profession forward in meeting the needs of an increasing diverse population in an increasingly demanding economic environment.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Glen A. Eskedal, Education and Human Services Department, Suffolk University, Beacon Hill, Boston, MA 02114.

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ELIZABETH A. McDOWELL is the Assistant Director of Career Services at Suffolk University.

GLEN A. ESKEDAL is the Chair and Professor of Education and Human Services and a Professor of Psychology at Suffolk University.

ELIZABETH A. McDOWELL est directrice adjointe des services d'orientation professionnelle de l'Université Suffolk.

GLEN A. ESKEDAL est professeur et directeur du département des sciences de l'éducation et professeur de psychologie à l'Université de Suffolk.