Navigating the self, life, and career:

Revisiting the theories of multicultural career competences

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the multicultural career competences of counselors who work for racial and ethnic minority clients. First, the author argues the demographic changes toward a diverse society in the US and multicultural counseling competences in general; second, the author examines the models of multicultural career counseling competences and its practical interventions.

Key words: career counseling, counselor's multicultural competence, racial and ethnic minority, culture-general model.

Introduction

In this paper, the author examines the multicultural competences that career counselors can employ in today's globalizing society by exploring the change of the US demographics and the theoretical background of multicultural counseling competences and by discussing the models of multicultural career counseling competences and their possible guidelines for practical interventions.

Change of US demographics

The US is undergoing rapid changes in racial and ethnic demographics. For instance, the two fastest growing ethnic groups in the US are Latin and Asian Americans, and it is projected that the Latin American population will reach 62 million (approximately 24% of the U.S. population), with African Americans comprising 15.7% and Asian Americans 8.7% of the total U.S. population by 2050 (Bemak & Chung, 2004). More generally, in the globalizing society, the impact of culture and diversity on interpersonal relationships is coming to the foreground (Baca & Koss-

Chioino, 1997). Accordingly, career counseling must be prepared to offer culturally sensitive intervention.

Multicultural competence

According to Sue and Torino (2005), multicultural competence (MC) typically refers to the clinician's awareness, knowledge, and skills to engage in a course of action or to set in motion conditions that maximize the optimal development of the client and client systems. MC has been widely recognized by the counseling and psychology professions and embraced in graduate-level training programs (Ponterotto, Fuertes, & Chen, 2000). For instance, Fouad, Arredondo, D'Andrea, and Ivey (2001) built the "Guidelines for Culturally Competent Psychological Practice (and Some Related Behavioral Objectives)" for counselors working in multicultural or cross-cultural settings. The following list (Table 1) contains the three guidelines.

Table 1.

Guideline #1: Awareness—Psychologists recognize

that it is necessary to make a life-long commitment to developing cultural expertise and culture-centered practice.

- Aware of the relationship between mental health and oppression and discrimination.
- Aware of self as a cultural being.
- Understands the client in her/his context.

Guideline #2: Knowledge—Psychologists strive to make a lifelong commitment to increased learning concerning the multicultural bases of psychological practice.

- Learns about racial/cultural identity development theories.
- Learns about non-Western practices.
- Knows about cultural groups' history and how this history may be associated to different worldviews.

Guideline #3: Skills—Psychologists strive to utilize culturally proficient awareness and knowledge in effective multicultural practice.

- Works as agent of social change.
- Receives on-going feedback pertaining to cultural competencies.
- Critiques traditional interventions and theories with regard to cultural applicability.

(Fouad, Arredondo, D'Andrea, & Ivey, 2001)

Definition of culture

To work effectively in multicultural settings, it is critical for counselors to consider how culture also impacts clients and counseling relationships/interventions. Chen, Kakkad, and Balzano (2008) examined how culture influences clients' worldviews and behaviors, defining culture as "a network of domain-specific knowledge structures shared by members of a visible or invisible sociocultural group." Moreover, "culture is internalized into each individual's self-concept and functions as a set of templates that guide

and govern interpresonal expectations, perceptions, and interpretations across social situations" (Chen, Kakkad, & Balzano, 2008). Anchored by the guideline, partaking clients' worldviews is critical for the effective counseling relationship and process.

Multicultural career competences in general

Historically, the focus on multicultural counseling is the newest stage of career counseling history. As Pope (2000) summarized, since 1990, the school-to-job transition, internalization of career counseling, increasing sophistication in the use of technology, and multicultural career counseling have been hallmarks in the career counseling field. As Hargrove, Creagh, and Kelly (2003) indicate, this emphasis can be based on reflections from the long use of traditional development theories, career interventions, and career counseling training models for promoting the worldviews of able-bodied, heterosexual, middle-class, and English-speaking, White, American males. Hence, having a minority perspective is essential to deal with clients with diverse backgrounds.

Multicultural career competencies model:
Understanding-focused approach

According to Heppner and Heppner (2003), the nature of a career counselor's competence is based on theoretical underpinnings that conceptually summarize the career development behavior of racial/ethnic minority individuals. Accordingly, thus far, insufficient research has empirically investigated the efficacy of intervention with these diverse populations. Therefore, this paper aims to classify and compare existing models, and future research is expected to empirically examine the clinical intervention of such multicultural counseling competences.

Ward and Bingham (1993) proposed concepts to understand and utilize clients' cultural contexts, worldviews, and identities in career interventions with racial and ethnic minority women. Later, they

formulated a more formal intervention model by adding components of efficacy variables to cultural variables in general (such as worldviews, structure of opportunity); gender variables (such as gender role socialization, salience of work/family domains); and traditional career assessment (Bingham & Ward, 1997).

Fouad and Bingham (1995), based on the foundation of Bingham and Ward (1994), postulated the Culturally Appropriate Career Counseling Model (CACCM), which includes seven steps: (1) establishing rapport/culturally appropriate relationships; (2) identifying career issues; (3) assessing the impact of cultural variables on career issues; (4) setting culturally appropriate counseling process and goals; (5) conducting culturally appropriate intervention; (6) decision making; and (7) reclarifying issues and implementing career plans and follow-up. Those processes delineate how successful counseling should proceed; counselors take cultural variables into account, offering an iterative process for identifying clients' career concerns and goals.

Similarly, Leong and Hartung (1997) offer an integrative-sequential model to cross-cultural career counseling that includes (a) the emergence of career and vocational problems, (b) help-seeking and career services utilization, (c) evaluation of career and vocational problems, (d) career counseling interventions, and (e) intervention outcomes. They emphasize the influence of the clients' ecological systems in determining the whole process—namely the emergence, recognition, and acceptance of vocational problems.

Interestingly, these models share the common assumption that career counselors must be trained to recognize their own experiences and be aware of their own cultural contexts. This self-notion is indeed vital for counselors' professional development because that self-understanding ultimately helps them acknowledge how contexts actually shape career opportunities, values, and beliefs (Bingham & Ward, 1994, 1997).

In this sense, as Fouad and Bingham (1995) argue, culturally effective career counselors monitor their own personal worldviews and assumptions in relation to their cross-cultural knowledge, awareness, and clinical skills.

Being aware of acculturation

In addition, the model of acculturation provides a helpful template for understanding the roles of cultural heritage in the client's life (Berry, 1980). Berry (1980) describes the four ways of acculturation that constitute the acculturation framework (see Figure 1). This model explains how people maintain their own culture and contact with different cultures.

Integration is a type of acculturation in which each group or member maintains their own culture and also the contact with a different culture. Assimilation
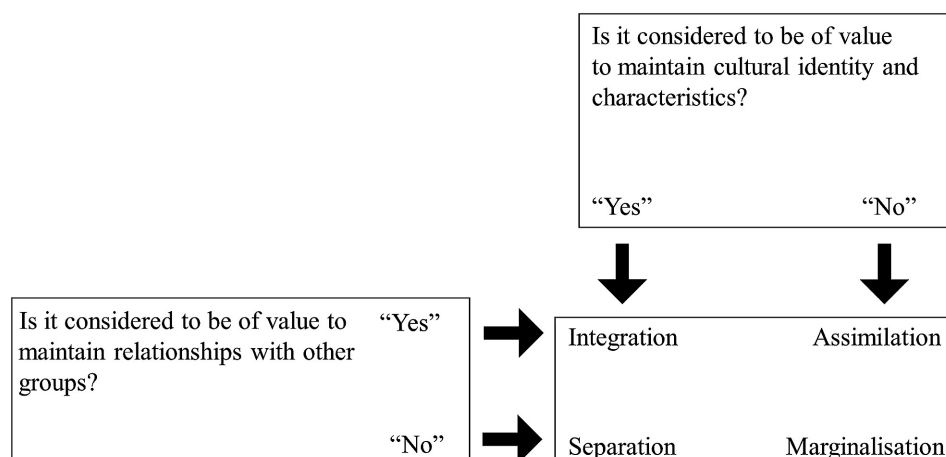

Figure 1   Berry's (1980) acculturation framework

occurs when a group does not maintain its culture but maintains contact with a different culture, while separation happens when a group maintains its culture but does not maintain contact with a different culture. As for marginalization, neither the group's own culture nor contact with different culture is maintained. A successful counseling process can elucidate the development of the psychological history related to acculturation and the most current stage at which a client is.

Multicultural career competencies model: Relationship-focused approach

As opposed to the understanding-focused approach, Leong (1993) and Leong and Brown (1995) propose the relationship-focused approach, arguing that culturally effective counseling—especially as the counseling relationship develops—would highlight the new perspective in terms of the effect of counseling relationships. Leong and Huang (2008) mention that comprehending the other's culture and different value system fully is almost impossible; thus, they recommend that career counselors build relationships so as to encourage the client to solve their problems.

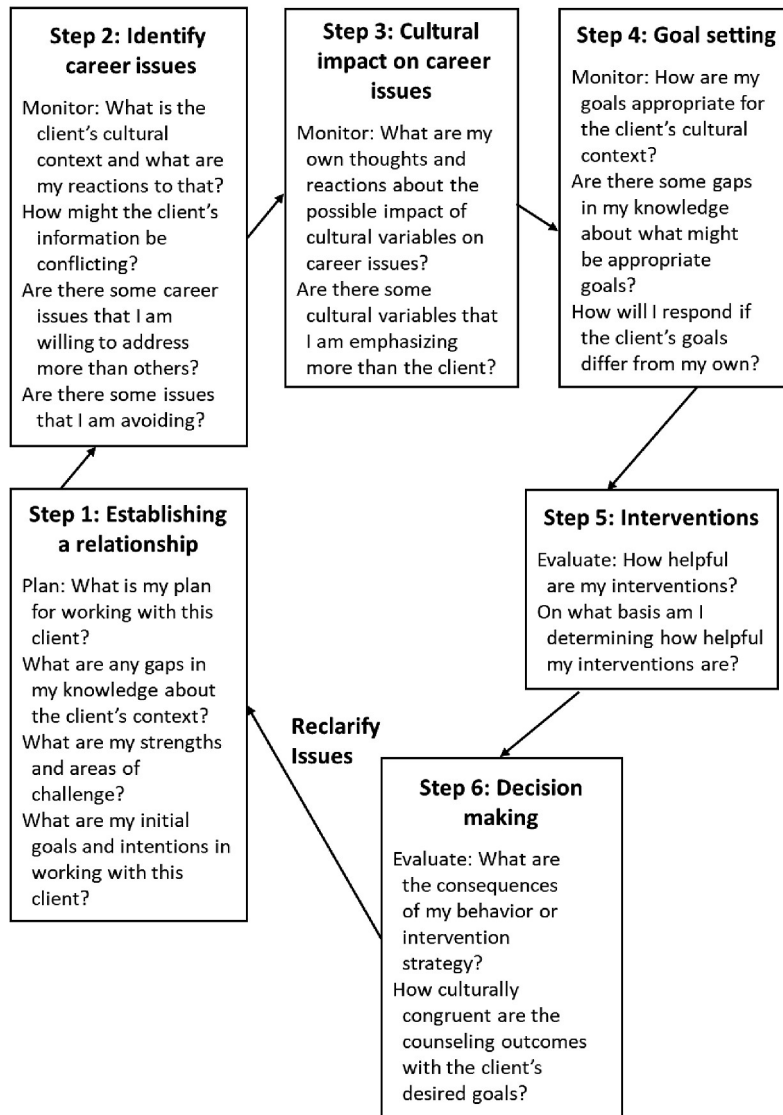**Counselor Metacognitive Awareness in Expanding the CACCM**

Figure 2 Expanded Culturally Appropriate Career Counseling Model (CACCM) Incorporating Counselor Metacognitive Process Questions (Byars-Winston & Fouad, 2006)

These models are relationship-oriented and shift away from working with a client from the standpoint of understanding the other's culture.

Possible guideline for practical interventions of multicultural career counseling

Taking the social-constructionist point of view assuming that career issues emerge from a transaction between the counselor's and client's cultural contexts, Byars-Winston and Fouad (2006) formulated the expanded Culturally Appropriate Career Counseling Model (CACCM). It comprises three stages: plan, monitor, and evaluate. In the plan stage, counselors self-reflect on a counseling plan to work with the client, on their own strength, knowledge, and premise about a client, and on setting counseling goals and intentions. In the monitor stage, a counselor has self-awareness, checks the cultural impact on career issues, and sets goals. In the evaluation stage, a counselor has self-critical reflections on how helpful the session was for the client, what basis the session was held on, and what the consequences were.

Assessment in multicultural career counseling

Especially in the monitor stage of career counseling, to utilize the practical intervention model of Byars-Winston and Fouad (2006), counselors can implement the Career-in-Culture (CiCl) interview (Ponterotto, Rivera, & Sueyoshi, 2000) to gather information, including the cultural assumptions of the client. Therefore, counselors can use the CACCM (Byars-Winston & Fouad, 2006) and CiCl (Ponterotto, Rivera, & Sueyoshi, 2000) models to describe the client's worldviews. Additionally, as Flores and Heppner (2002) suggest, conceptual, linguistic, and translational equivalence should be carefully examined to assess whether the client understands the meaning of the assessment. Counselors should be clinically sensitive with such culturally universal and specific perspectives (etic and emic approach; Pike, 1966).

Clinical skills

As Leong (1993), Leong and Brown (1995), and Leong and Huang (2008) argue the importance of building a therapeutic relationship with the client, a key aspect in establishing such relationship is a shared worldview between the counselor and client (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2010). As Rogers (1957) mentions, counselors should have empathic understanding, which he defines as "trying to experience the client's world as if it were your own without losing the 'as if' quality." Basic counseling skills are mandatory for culturally appropriate career counseling.

Ethical considerations

As outlined by the ACA Code of Ethics (2005), cultural diversity and commitment should be valued (item F.11). In terms of the educators' perspective, faculties and students' diversity and cultural training should be more pronounced. Moreover, counselors must maintain awareness and sensitivity as to the cultural meanings of confidentiality and privacy (item B.1.a). Counselors should consider cultural differences when disclosing information and privacy.

Conclusion

This paper examined the multicultural competences of career counselors in today's globalizing society. The demographic change in the US and the significant theoretical background of multicultural counseling competences were discussed. Similarly, the two models (i.e., understanding-focused and relationship-focused model) of multicultural career counseling competences were highlighted, and possible guidelines for practical interventions were pro-

posed. Including clinical and ethical considerations, future research should further investigate the multicultural career counseling process.

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