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The need for quality standards for the delivery of career counseling services, and for the

articulation of competencies required for practitioners delivering these services, is gaining increasing attention in Canada and elsewhere (e.g., Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation, 1993; Conger, Hiebert, & Hong-Farrell, 1994; Splete & Hoppin, 1994; Riddle & Bezanson, 1994). Work has focused on generic standards and competencies and guidelines pertaining to specific populations.

One important contribution to these efforts in Canada is the guidelines for career counseling of girls and women developed by the Collaborative Action Working Group on Counselling (Ward & Bezanson, 1991). The guidelines which follow were based on the guidelines, policies, and standards in the professional literature (e.g., American Psychological Association, 1979; Fitzgerald & Nutt, 1986) and those provided by governments and counseling associations. The guidelines were a key component in a strategy to promote labour market equality that was endorsed by Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women and Ministers with Labour Market Responsibilities in all provinces.

THE GUIDELINES

Career counseling is understood to include services and programs designed to facilitate individuals' development and their ability to make optimal choices regarding their roles in occupational, familial and social structures.

Responsible professional practice requires counselors to be knowledgeable about the effects of gender in human development and to apply such knowledge in career counseling with girls and women.

In order to ensure responsible professional practice, jurisdictions must require all individuals involved in career counseling with girls and women to adhere to the following guidelines:



1. Counselors are aware of the assumptions underlying various theoretical approaches to the practice of career counseling and recognize that such theories may apply differently to women and men. Counselors continue to examine theoretical bases and assumptions underlying their practice to ensure that they utilize theories and models which are free of sex bias and sex role stereotypes and promote the realization of full potential by girls and women.



2. Counselors ascribe no preconceived limitations on the direction or nature of potential changes or goals in counseling with women. In particular, counselors ensure that career choice is an open process and that no individual is limited by gender-or by race, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion-from the exploration of any career

option.



3. Recognizing that the use of male terms as gender-neutral reflects bias against women, counselors use inclusive and gender-fair language in all oral and written communication and ensure that resources used to assist clients with decision-making are gender-fair. As an extension of this principle, counselors also avoid the use of generic adjectives to describe women with handicaps (e.g., blind, deaf, and so forth) in order to avoid excessive focus on the disability; descriptive phrases (e.g., women with visual handicaps) are used as a much-preferred alternative to the more generic adjectives.



4. Counselors are knowledgeable about support services available to women (e.g., child care, legal aid, health care, transportation, emergency services) and assist clients in accessing community resources which are suited to their needs. Where significant gaps are identified in support services available to women, counselors may initiate or act as catalysts for the development of such support systems in their communities.



5. Counselors continue throughout their professional careers to gain knowledge and awareness of social, biological and psychological influences on female development in general and their career development in particular. As part of their ongoing professional development, counselors continue to inform themselves about specific issues which may have an impact on the career decision-making of girls/women (e.g., balancing vocational and family roles, issues related to training and employment of women in non-traditional occupations, family violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault), as well as acquiring knowledge which is relevant to counseling particular sub-groups, such as women with disabilities, women who are culturally different, long-term welfare recipients, and female offenders.



6. Counselors understand that the source of client difficulties often rests not only in the woman herself but also in situational or cultural factors which limit her concept of self, her aspirations and the opportunities available to her. Counselors recognize and are sensitive to the impact of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination on the basis of gender--as well as race, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion--and work to counteract the negative effects of such attitudes and actions.



7. Counselors are aware of and continually review their own values and biases and the effects of these on their female clients. Counselors assess and monitor their own activities to ensure gender-fair practices, as well as participate in professional development programs, consultation and/or supervision to assist in identifying and working through personal biases and issues which have a limiting effect on their work with female clients.



8. Counselors support the elimination of sex bias within institutions and individuals, by promoting fair and equal treatment of all individuals through services, programs, theories, practices and treatment of colleagues and clients which recognize the full potential of each.



9. Recognizing that there are circumstances where clients will have a preference for a same- or opposite-sex counselor, whenever possible, clients will be given the opportunity to choose the counselor with whom they will work.

The Working Group felt a need to go beyond suggestions for counselors to include guidelines for jurisdictions employing counselors. Factors like access to training, supervision, and tools to assist delivering appropriate services for girls and women were seen as essential components in a strategy to promote labour market equality.

The following specific measures to be taken by federal and provincial jurisdictions were included in the report:



1. The jurisdiction is committed to providing or accessing the training and/or professional development that supervisors and counselors require to enable them to apply these principles effectively.



2. Each jurisdiction ensures that sex-fair language and balanced depictions of women appear in all publications and resource materials.



3. Counselors will be given an opportunity for supervision/consultation to occur on a regular basis to assist them in working through conflicts and issues which arise for them in their work with clients.



4. A process will be put in place to monitor the implementation/application of the guidelines.

The following recommendation was later endorsed by provincial Ministers:

It is recommended that each jurisdiction develop a policy and guidelines for the provision of career counseling to girls and women which reflect the principles and guidelines developed by the Collaborative Action Working Group on Counseling.

It was hoped that the guidelines would be reviewed by professional associations of counselors and adopted, or adapted to their particular contexts. The Feminist Network of the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association is intending to take leadership in this initiative.

CONCLUSION

The development of guidelines has been an excellent first step, but it is only a beginning. Further work is needed to develop training for counselors and supervisors to translate the guidelines into practice. The Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation, in partnership with other groups, is eager to pursue these next steps so that the guidelines and training can work together to advance the practice of career counseling for girls and women.

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