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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on two interrelated themes concerning the problems arising from counseling at-risk youth in the push for world-class education and the unique cultural, social, and political conditions of each country and community. The first theme concerns guidelines for building relationships with at-risk youth. The critical assessment of differing cultural perspectives and social and political conditions can be very useful in development of indigenous helping models that are responsive to emerging global problems. Details are given of ten guidelines that provide direction for the training of counselors and youth workers, guidelines that can be translated into policies and practices for schools and residential youth treatment facilities. These guidelines protect the dignity of even the most troubled youth, and promote the responsible involvement of alienated youth in the creation of just and caring communities. The second theme stresses the importance of transnational caring in the development of work with alienated youth. It reports that there is a critical need for incorporating culturally sensitive caring into modern counseling practices because people around the world increasingly experience technologized and dehumanized services in which real care is lacking. The lack of caring and cohesive communities increases the likelihood that youth will engage in destructive behavior. Therefore, it is especially important that this care be built into relationships with at-risk youth. (JDM)

Title: Relationship Technology and Caring: Comparative/Cross-Cultural Perspective on Counseling At-Risk Youth

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Biographical Information: Lonnie L. Rowell, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Counselin Program at the University of San Diego. Dr. Rowell has over 20 years experience in educatior as a teacher, administrator, counselor, organizer, and counselor educator. He helped create, and then directed, the San Diego State University Experimental College from 1967 to 1969, an from 1970-1979, he was director of San Diego's first alternative school. He received his Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the University of Southern California (1992) and a Master of Science in Counseling from San Diego State University (1983). While at USC he also earned a Graduate Certificate from The Program For The Study of Women and Men in Society. Dr. Rowell is an Associate Trainer in the Community Circle of Caring Program with National Educational Service, Inc. of Bloomington, Indiana, and a Certified Group Facilitator in the National Training Project, Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota.

Dr. Rowell's major interests include organizing, advocacy, and evaluation in school counseling, group counseling in schools, alternative education and counseling with at-risk youth, men's issues in counseling and therapy, and international collaboration and cooperatic in educational reform efforts and in the training of counselors. Currently, he is working on a training manual for group counseling in schools, is helping to organize a men's issues group within the American Counseling Association and is doing research on educational reform in The People's Republic of China. Dr. Rowell's academic specialization is gender issues in counseling and therapy. His publications have addressed school counselor interventions in sexual harassment and gender, social constructionism, and psychotherapy.

His life experience includes 22 years of communal living in Southern California, instruction ir martial arts and Tai Chi Chuan, and travel throughout the U.S. and in Asia, Europe and Sout America. He has two children and lives in La Mesa, California.

The theme for this conference is caring in an age of technology. this theme suggests a challenge, if not a contradiction, in that the infusion of modern technology into a nation's economic and socio-cultural infrastructure has proven to be both pragmatically beneficial and profoundly alienating. Although caring is often marginalized in the process of technological advance, the perceived, and also quite real, benefits of modernization, progress and development lead countries to adopt solutions to the problems of late 20th century nationhood that are highly dependent on technology. This paper addresses the complex issue of technology, modernization and caring in the context of counseling what we refer to in the U.S. as "at-risk" youth, that is, those young people who are deemed most likely not to be successful in finding a socially productive, law-abiding niche in a modern, highly industrialized nation. My contention is that one of the most pressing challenges for formal helping professions in advanced industrialized nations is coming to terms with the system's impact on individual psychology and social relations. This challenge is particularly difficult in regards to what social commentator Paul Goodman referred to as "disaffected youth," that is those who do not fit in, and most often do not want to fit in, to the dominant socio-political, economic systems that have come to define the post-World War II period. By extension, the challenge for counselors in developing countries may be to prepare in advance for the effects of what Theodore Roszak described as the technocracy. In my view, counselors and youth workers in developed and developing nations alike face a long-term struggle against the marginalization of caring, and this struggle, as I see it, is an intrinsic element of the competitive, market-driven global economic system now being promoted as the answer to the world's problems.

I am particularly interested in the roles and functions of counselors in what is referred to as world-class educational systems. The basic thrust of educational resources and policies in such a system is to keep the society competitive in the emerging global economic structure by making sure that education serves the dictates of advanced industrial productivity and global market forces. In a world-class educational system, the social, emotional and psychological needs of those who are "at-risk" of not being successful in the competitive environment required on this path to modernization are secondary to the need to motivate "successful" students to find their proper niche in the process of development and modernization. Hence, in relationship to at-risk youth, the push for world-class educational systems poses some common problems for counselors and youth workers across cultures, and the sharing of ideas in international forums may be a critical step in the development of creative solutions to these problems. Yet, every idea, no matter how good, must be adapted to the unique cultural, social, and political conditions of each country and community, and the mechanical transplant of foreign models of counseling is to be avoided. The critical assessment of differing cultural perspectives and social and political conditions can be very useful, however, in the development of indigenous helping models that are responsive to emerging global problems.

This paper is based on two interrelated themes concerning the scenario just presented. The first concerns guidelines for building relationships with at-risk youth. In a 1989 article in the journal Child and Youth Quarterly, George Thomas asserts that in the United States a major part of the difficulty in developing positive relationships with disaffected youth can be found in the nation's tendency to want simple answers to

complex problems. In contrast to the desire for "quick fixes" such as "just say no" to drugs" or individualistic self-esteem for massive disaffection and alienation, Thomas called for paying close and systematic attention to the development of relationship skills. To respond effectively, Thomas concludes, requires the revival of "relationship technology." Acknowledging the challenge, Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern drew on the literature of developmental and counseling psychology, the writings of gifted, and visionary, youth workers as well as their own many years of experience working with troubled, defiant youth to identify guidelines for the revival of relationship technology. The ten guidelines include: 1.) Focus on the actions involved in positive relationships rather than on feelings. In other words, to love another is not simply to have a feeling but it is to act towards that person in ways that reflect care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge; 2.) Recognize that crisis is an opportunity. This guideline is often described in relationship to the Chinese character for "crisis" in which danger is combined with opportunity. As Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern describe it, the behavioral crises of difficult youth are opportunities to strengthen the bond between these youth and caring adults, and it is through such bonds that the youth learn how to better manage their problem behavior; 3.) Practice advanced empathy. "Love the unlovable" is the way the authors put it. As Gerard Egan (1994) asserts, "advanced empathy focuses not just on problems, but also on unused or partially used resources" (p. 180). The challenge for the counselor working with particularly defiant and troubled youth is to learn how to help these young people become more "attractive candidates for friendship;" 4.) Disengage from the conflict cycle. This guideline addresses the phenomenon in which hostile youth provoke aggression in adults and withdrawn youth often inspire adult feelings of giving up. Youth counselors need to be skilled in pulling back from this conflict cycle; 5.) Earn the trust of youth. This essential building block of an effective helping relationship is put in place through the provision of support, understanding and appropriate affection. With defiant youth, building trust is a long, exhaustive process, and to earn the trust of such youth counselors need a keen awareness of the process and a healthy respect for how much unlearning, as well as learning, needs to take place. Guidelines six through ten continue the combination of practical skills and philosophical insights. The sixth guideline is to be prepared for an endurance event. Helping at-risk youth does not lead to quick fixes and counselors need preparation that will enable them to endure for the long haul. The seventh guideline calls on counselors to practice straight-forward, practical approaches to communication and problem-solving. With this guideline, the authors emphasize finding an alternative to overly directive, authoritarian approaches which preach to youth about their "bad" behavior and to totally non directive counseling in which the counselor merely reflects back to the counselee what she or he has said. Here, counselors are challenged to go beyond techniques to engagement with youth in the context of genuine receptivity to their life experiences and points of view and supportive work that challenges their blind spots and supports their efforts to make important decisions. Guideline Eight is to remember that respect begets respect. Here, the practice of respect is contrasted with approaches that patronize and dehumanize youth. This guideline suggests that a respectful relationship, so essential for the work of counseling, is created through a reciprocal process which begins with the counselor viewing the counselee as a unique individual, treating him or her as a person of value,

appreciating the diversity of counselees and counselee problems, and committing oneself to work with, and be available to, counselees. The ninth guideline is to teach joy. Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern assert that an important part of helping troubled youth is to work to bring joy into their lives on a daily basis. The last guideline is to make the invitation to belong. This guideline relates to creating institutional environments that foster a sense of belonging and community.

In addition to providing direction for the training of counselors and youth workers, these guidelines can be translated into policies and practices for schools and residential youth treatment facilities. The guidelines protect the dignity of even the most troubled youth and they promote the responsible involvement of alienated youth in the creation of just and caring communities. Here, we come full circle in a critical assessment of world-class educational systems and at-risk youth. As Herbert Marcuse (1964) saw it, advanced industrial nations become one dimensional societies in which social controls "exact the overwhelming need for the production and consumption of waste"(p. 7). Theodore Roszak (1969) decried the social engineering inherent in "the technocracy" and warned that "in the technocracy everything aspires to become purely technical, the subject of professional attention. The technocracy is . . . the regime of experts—or of those who can employ the experts" (p. 7). As Roszak and others have observed, the experience of youth in social ecologies such as this is quite often framed by futility, learned irresponsibility, and loss of purpose. As non-expert, non-productive beings, children and youth seem to exist to consume and although they are objects of professional attention (teachers, administrators, marketing analysts, sociologists, psychologists, etc.) they are not well equipped to become subjects of their own histories. Paul Goodman (1960) was a particularly insightful commentator on these dynamics. Writing from the post-World War II period to the early 1960s on the plight of youth in America, he concluded that Americans had lost the capacity to imagine genuine alternatives to the technocratic system as well as the genius "for inventing changes to satisfy crying needs" (p. x). Yet, similar to Roszak's praise for the potential of youth culture, Goodman acknowledged that the "crazy young allies," as he referred to disaffected youth, made quite good sense and that paying attention to what they had to say and to what their behavior represented as a response to the prevailing mores and contradictions of the society was an important source of both reasonable self-criticism and social criticism and of right action for reclaiming the future. Ultimately, Goodman and Brendtro et al are in agreement that at-risk youth reflect the failures of adult society to provide the necessary quantities and qualities of nurturance, loving guidance and direction to the society's young. For Brendtro et al, the importance of counseling at-risk youth lies in the potential for reclaiming these young people and nurturing them towards engagement in productive social relations.

The second theme I wish to mention is the importance of transnational caring in the development of our work with alienated youth. According to Madeleine Leininger (1981), who has explored care and caring practices in a variety of cultures for over two decades, transcultural caring involves understanding the explicit "cultural-care beliefs, values, and lifeways and using such knowledge in culturally specific ways to help people" (p. 107). As she sees it, knowledge and skills based on specific cultural-care concepts are essential in a multicultural world. Leininger asserts that, around the world, most people seeking counseling are seeking care and not treatments or cures

based on technical regimens. In her words, "caring has healing, humanizing, and enabling power to one's self-esteem, growth and actualization abilities" (p. 114). She further states there is now a critical need for incorporating culturally sensitive caring into modern counseling practices because people around the world increasingly experience technologized and dehumanized services in which real care is lacking. I would add that given our knowledge that the disappearance of caring and cohesive communities significantly increases the likelihood that youth will engage in destructive behavior, the need in relationship to at-risk youth is particularly strong. Although she has not articulated specific care constructs for China, her postulates and assumptions can serve as a foundation for the identification and prioritization of Chinese concepts of care, and for research concerning the incorporation of these concepts into modern counseling in China. Indeed, there may be some urgency to this prospect as, although school and community counseling as it is known in the west hardly exists in PRC, there are indications both that counseling is becoming an area of interest for those concerned about China's youth and that counseling psychology soon may be incorporated into the training of china's teachers.

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