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ABSTRACT

Student demographics on campuses increasingly reflect diversity. A counselor's ability to help this emerging campus population requires the use of multicultural interventions that affect the student and the system. Counselors must redefine the process of clinical assessment and intervention to include ethnocultural factors and they must intervene at the systemic level. Attention to ethnocultural factors requires familiarity with a non-Western value system that reflects group harmony, deference to the needs of the family, and interdependence rather than a traditional western value system. Students of color generally respond well to culturally appropriate interventions, yet relevant assessment and intervention strategies vary for each group of students. Several suggestions are given on how counselors can develop and refine cultural assessment and intervention skills. Some suggestions include: (1) understand how a person's ethnocultural factors may affect others; (2) seek training opportunities that broaden understanding of how social, political, and global realities affect students' perception and response to their environment; and (3) develop supervision skills that value and stress a student's ethnocultural factors. Collectively, all helping professionals must commit to systemic interventions that strengthen the multicultural and human relations skills on campus to make the whole campus receptive to student diversity. (JDM)

Counselors, Students of Color, and College: Student-Centered and Systemic Multicultural

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Interventions

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Student demographics on the average American campus increasingly reflect diversity (i.e., race/ethnicity, religion, social class). College students encounter normal developmental concerns and adjustment/transition challenges in a new environment. Yet, students of color face the additional issue of their ethnocultural factors (i.e., social-cultural-political background). Ethnocultural factors reflect the impact of cultural, familial, social, and historical influences on students. Their learned experiences and support systems are often rooted in their cultural background and ethnocultural factors (Jenkins, 1999). Addressing these factors in counseling with students of color may contribute to their retention and may explain why some students of color excel in college while others, who are equally prepared, fail. Counselors' ability to help this emerging campus population requires counselors to think outside of the box of traditional counseling and to use multicultural interventions that affect the student *and* the system (i.e., college campus). Thus, counselors must redefine the process of clinical assessment and intervention to include ethnocultural factors (Jenkins, 1999) *and* must intervene at the systemic level.

Ethnocultural messages learned early in life influence a student's style of communication, response to stressors and degree of reliance on a close and specific

support system. Interaction with an incompatible dominant culture and its expectations can create feelings of alienation, rejection, and/or powerlessness. These feelings may result in a sense of “double consciousness” (a dual personality as an American *and* as a person of color) (DuBois, 1903). Counselors’ attention to these issues can facilitate their ability to engage the student in a healthy, therapeutic relationship. Such attention to ethnocultural factors requires familiarity with a non-western value system that reflects group harmony, deference to the needs of the family, and interdependence rather than a traditional western value system that reflects individuality, self-expression, and competition (Shom & Spooner, 1991).

COUNSELORS AND ETHNOCULTURAL FACTORS

Culturally competent counselors have articulated the need for counselors’ attention to ethnocultural factors in the past (for example Sue, 1981). Now, what must occur on campus is the “marriage” of culturally competent counseling for students of color that integrates ethnocultural factors *and* normal developmental issues experienced by all college students (Jenkins, 1999). Some examples of developmental issues include individuation, career preparation (including choice of an academic major), independence, self/ethnic identity, and mate selection. Culturally competent counselors must assess how these issues are viewed and handled within the cultures and families of students of color. For example, in some cultural groups, a student must select a career/academic major that the parents and extended family select or approve (i.e., deference to the needs of the family).

When some students of color seek counseling, they can be and are being misdiagnosed when their responses to stressors are misunderstood without knowledge of their specific ethnocultural perspective (Vogel, 1999). Specifically, some students of color are being misdiagnosed with depressive or anxiety disorders (and inappropriately medicated) when counselors use a traditional counseling perspective rather than a perspective that incorporates ethnocultural and life adjustment issues (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Counselors must search beyond the overt behaviors that may initially manifest as anxiety or depression, and understand each student's ethnocultural value system and worldview. Using this perspective, a student's symptoms that were initially assessed as a psychiatric disorder, typically emerge as a different set of issues, unrelated to anxiety and depressive disorders, which may include the following:

- ◆ Cultural or family pressures rooted in values of group harmony or interdependence;
- ◆ Guilt and stress from being the first person in the family to attend college while relatives are financially overburdened;
- ◆ “Dual minority” (or multi-minority) consciousness concerns experienced by biracial, female and/or gay/lesbian students who may feel invisible and discounted within their racial/ethnic group;
- ◆ Migration, acculturation, assimilation, or adaptation stressors;
- ◆ “Culture shock” connected to functioning on a campus that may be dystonic to one's ethnocultural worldview; and
- ◆ Lack of awareness that support services *are* available on campus. But how, when, or why to access these services competes with internalized ethnocultural messages such as “*keep your problems and dirty linen within the family*”.

Students of color generally respond well to culturally appropriate interventions, yet relevant assessment and intervention strategies vary for each group of students of color and vary for each student. Some examples of culturally competent counseling includes the following:

- ◆ Listen for cultural issues that students may be unable to articulate fully. Be aware of current events worldwide because these events may affect students' academic success by distracting their attention and/or increasing their anxiety about the welfare of relatives;
- ◆ Incorporate flexibility and creativity into one's counseling style;
- ◆ Address adjustment issues associated with race, racism, prejudice, and discrimination;
- ◆ Identify strengths and convey positive expectations of achievement;
- ◆ Collaborate with members of a student's traditional or natural ethnocultural support system (e.g., spiritual/religious institutions, ethnocentric student organizations, and family elders), with consent, of course;
- ◆ Facilitate ethnocultural support groups (e.g., Talking Circles used by Native Americans) and culturally homogeneous group services, including support groups in students' native languages;
- ◆ Realize that the appearance of total assimilation for some groups of students of color, even those with several generations rooted in America, may not represent complete internalization of dominant American values; and
- ◆ Treat each student as an unique individual.

Those students whose counselors address a student's ethnocultural factors in counseling may have higher retention and graduation rates than those students whose counselors rely on traditional counseling techniques. So, how can a college counselor develop or refine culturally competent assessment and intervention skills that are effective with students of color? Several authors have advocated multicultural counseling skills but an extensive review is beyond the scope of this thesis. Briefly, they advocate the following:

- ◆ Understand and embrace your own ethnocultural factors and know how they may affect others;
- ◆ Seek training opportunities that broaden your understanding of how social, political, and global realities affect how students perceive and respond to their environment and to stressors;
- ◆ Increase staff visibility that demonstrates cultural sensitivity and makes students of color feel welcomed and safe on campus;
- ◆ Train and supervise advanced graduate students and new counselors in culturally competent assessment and intervention skills;
- ◆ Develop supervision skills that value, incorporate, and stress a student's ethnocultural factors; and
- ◆ Encourage culturally competent and articulate counselors to educate the profession through professional writing and research.

COUNSELORS AND THE CAMPUS CLIMATE

Counselors' multicultural assessment and intervention must also occur at the *systemic level*. In addition to addressing ethnocultural issues in counseling, counselors must evaluate the campus climate to identify actual and perceived barriers that thwart academic success for students of color (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Shom & Spooner, 1991). Issues that may affect the campus climate include intra- and inter-group conflict, absence of social networks and supports, overt prejudice and discrimination, physical violence (e.g. attacks), and emotional abuse (e.g., derogatory name calling). Once the barriers are identified, counselors can collaborate with administrators and other campus helping professionals to eliminate or reduce the barriers by implementing systemic interventions and strategies such as the following:

- ◆ Advocate for student needs, accommodations and emotional/physical safety if the campus climate is hostile;
- ◆ Develop an orientation and mentoring program for students of color that incorporates ethnocultural support systems;
- ◆ Coordinate cultural competence training for other helping professionals to improve the campus climate. Other helpers include supervisors of the residence halls; coordinators of TRIO, international, disabled, and non-traditional student support programs; career counselors; and health care providers; and
- ◆ Encourage professors to reattribute students' learning and/or communication styles to ethnocultural variables rather than to perceptions of students' individual deficits of intelligence or motivation, for example. Reattribution can contribute to an inclusive and positive reception in classrooms.

CONCLUSION

College counselors must be prepared to offer culturally competent counseling services to a diverse student body. This includes attention to ethnocultural factors along with normal developmental issues. But culturally competent counselors offer limited and temporary relief for students in distress during 50-minute counseling sessions. They must commit to systemic interventions that strengthen the multicultural and human relations skills of other helping professionals on campus who might also provide pockets of safe havens on campus. Collectively, *all* helping professionals, professors, and administrators must embrace systemic interventions that make the whole campus receptive to genuine student diversity.

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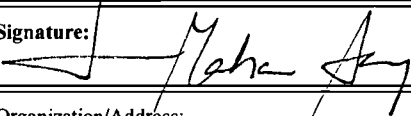
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