Multiculturalism and the Paradigm Shift in Counselling: Controversies and Alternative Futures

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ABSTRACT

The fields of psychology and particularly of counselling are in the process of a paradigm shift. While there is some confusion and disagreement about the direction of that paradigm shift, there is almost universal agreement that profound changes are taking place in the field of psychology. This article suggests that these changes are being mediated by multicultural perspectives and controversies. This article also suggests that a culture-centred perspective for the future will emerge from the present confusion as a "fourth force" to complement and strengthen the three conventional theories of psychodynamism, humanism, and behaviourism.

RÉSUMÉ

Les paradigmes des divers domaines de la psychologie et en particulier celui du counseling sont en cours de transition. Alors qu'une certaine confusion et un désaccord subsistent au sujet de la direction de ce changement, il n'en existe pas moins une unanimité presque universelle sur le fait que de profonds changements sont en cours dans le domaine de la psychologie. Cet article suggère que ces changements sont médiatisés par des perspectives et des controverses multiculturelles. Il est également suggéré qu'une perspective de l'avenir centrée sur la culture émergera de la confusion actuelle, en tant que « quatrième force », pour compléter et renforcer les trois théories conventionnelles, soit le psychodynamisme, l'humanisme et le comportement.

Psychology is at a "pivotal period" in which the rules are being changed in ways that we are only beginning to appreciate (Mahoney & Patterson, 1992). One clear indication that multiculturalism is introducing a permanent paradigm shift and not merely a passing fad in counselling is the strength of the multicultural controversies in the field of counselling. By "paradigm shift" I refer to changes in the underlying assumptions about psychology moving from a monocultural to a multicultural basis with profound implications for how psychology is applied in direct service. All change is painful and the more profound the change the more the pain. As the counselling profession responds to the requests and demands of many culturally different special interest groups, the rules have begun to change, causing controversy and confusion. Even when we recognize that the old rules are not working, it is not easy to replace them with new culturally different rules. The old rules of psychology focused on dissonance reduction. The new rules focus on tolerance of ambiguity.

Psychology, and counselling in particular, are moving toward becoming a culture-inclusive science that will routinely include cultural variables just as contemporary psychology routinely disregards them. We will be asking questions

like: Which psychological theory works best in each cultural context? What are the cultural boundaries of each psychological theory? Which psychological phenomena are more likely to occur in most cultures? (Gielen, 1994). We will no longer speak of cross-cultural psychology but rather understand all human behaviour in the cultural context where that behaviour was learned and is displayed (Segall, Dasan, Berry, & Poortinga, 1990).

Smith, Harre, and Van Langenhove (1995) contrast the new with the old paradigms. The new paradigms emphasize the following qualities: (a) understanding and description more than just measuring, (b) predicting consequences more than causation, (c) social significance more than statistical significance, (d) language and discourse more than numerical reductionism, (e) holistic perspectives more than atomistic trivia, (f) complex interacting particulars more than simplistic universals, and (g) subjectively derived meaning more than objectively imposed meaning.

The implications of these changes for counselling are very important. The following article will review the controversies of a culture-centred perspective in counselling. These controversies include the problems of cultural encapsulation, the definition of culture as a construct, the likely impact of multiculturalism on the psychodynamic, behavioural and humanistic perspectives of psychology, the potentially positive contribution of a culture-centred perspective, the emergence of culture-centred competencies for counsellors and other related issues. The future direction of counselling is still unclear but the importance of culture-centred perspectives seems very relevant to adapting to that future direction.

CULTURE-CENTRED CONTROVERSIES

Increased recognition of culturally different perspectives has led to a controversial re-examination of counselling. Sue, Ivey, and Pedersen (1996) have attempted to develop a multicultural theory for counselling to more effectively manage these controversies through six basic propositions. First, each Western or non-Western theory already represents a different worldview, implicitly or explicitly. Second, the comprehensive context of each client-counsellor relationship must be the focus of treatment. Third, the counsellor and client's own cultural identity will influence how problems are defined and direct the goals of the counselling process. Fourth, the goal of culture-centred counselling is to expand the repertoire of helping responses available to counsellors. Fifth, there are many alternative helping roles for counselling from other cultural context to supplement conventional counselling. Sixth, the individual, family, group, and organization can only be accurately understood in their cultural context. These propositions raise several specific controversies in counselling.

Is Counselling Culturally Encapsulated?

Wrenn (1962) first introduced the concept of cultural encapsulation where reality is defined according to one set of assumptions, culturally encapsulated counsellors disregard cultural variations and impose their owns self-reference

criteria, implicit assumptions disregarding reasonable proof and/or rational consistency, simplistic technique-oriented solutions are applied to complex problems, and the dominant culture values as universals. George Albee (1994) describes how the early leaders of psychology displayed such encapsulation.

Most of the early leaders in psychology embraced ideological views that stressed the natural superiority of a white male patriarchy, the acceptance of Social Darwinism, the inferiority of women and of the brunette races. Calvinism stressed economic success as the hallmark of salvation and psychology concurred. Anti-semitism and homophobia were standard. Eugenics spokesmen urged the elimination of the unfit and inferior and opposed welfare programs, decent wages and safe working conditions (p. 22).

The Basic Behavioral Science Task Force of the National Advisory Mental Health Council (1996) in their national plan for behavioural science research identified areas where cultural encapsulation continues to be evident in mental health services. First, anthropological and cross- cultural research has demonstrated that cultural beliefs influence diagnosis and treatment. Second, diagnosis of mental illness differs across cultures. Third, individuals express symptoms differently in each cultural context. Fourth, culturally biased variations in diagnosis follow the diagnostic categories relevant to the majority population. Fifth, most providers come from majority cultures while most clients come from minority cultures.

Normal behaviour is typically described according to the norms of an individualistic perspective where dependency is pathologized and support systems disregarded. The individual adjusts to fit the system, whether that system is right or wrong (Pedersen, 1997a), raising the possibility of protecting an unjust system against a justified client in a consistent cultural bias. These cultural biases further impact the research by which counsellors are educated (Lonner & Ibrahim, 1996; Paniagua, 1994; Ponterotto, 1988). These culturally encapsulated assumptions are even reflected in the ethical standards which guide the counselling profession (LaFromboise & Foster, 1996; Pedersen, 1995). Even when the encapsulation is unintentional (Ridley, 1995) as in color-blindness, thinking of the client's culture as a deficit or disadvantage, positive and/or negative cultural transference or countertransference or pseudotransference, the appropriateness of counselling services are directly affected.

Should Culture be Broadly or Narrowly Defined?

Inclusive and broadly defined definitions of culture, including ethnographic, demographic, status and affiliation, have been controversial. There is a concern that the broad definition would diffuse the focus on narrowly defined interests of nationality and ethnicity. There has also been some confusion between the broad versus narrow distinctions and universal versus particular perspectives. The broad definition of culture takes an orthogonal approach (Oetting & Beauvais, 1991) whereby identification with one culture does not decrease identification with other cultures and where the simultaneous multiplicity of co-existing identities in each of us is acknowledged (Thompson, Ellis, & Wildavsky, 1990).

Alternative theories such as the dominant majority model, the transitional model, alienation model, multidimensional model and bicultural model all presume cultural exclusion rather than inclusion (Sue et al., 1996). We can actually belong to many different cultures at the same time. Sometimes within-group cultural differences actually seem to exceed between-group differences as we identify the complex and dynamic salience of culture moving from one situation to another (Cross 1995). From this broadly defined perspective, all counselling and, in fact, all communications are inherently and unavoidably multicultural.

From this perspective both the universal and the particular perspective are valid at the same time. No matter how similar we are, there will be differences. No matter how different we are, there will be similarities. By defining culture orthogonally, cultures can co-exist without isolation or competition and minorities are neither eliminated nor absorbed. There is no need for a cultural melting pot. Conflicts are regarded as potentially constructive to a realistic pluralism and conflicts are managed through common-ground shared values. Thus, there is less need for militancy toward other cultures because multicultural interaction is less destructive and economic resources are re-directed toward constructive activities.

While there have been various controversies raised resulting from making culture central rather than trivial to counselling, most of them are derived from these two primary areas of controversy. The paradigm shift in psychology resulting from these controversies has positioned multiculturalism as a "fourth force" or dimension of psychology and counselling in a historically unique perspective (Pedersen, 1997a, 1997b).

Multiculturalism as a "Fourth Force:"

A culture-centred perspective gives added meaning to the three prevailing psychological theories of psychodynamism, behaviourism, and humanism much as the fourth dimension of time gives meaning to three-dimensional space. That is, a culture-centred perspective is central to the psychodynamic definitions of the unconscious, the reinforcing contingencies of behaviourism, and the personal/meaningful comprehension of humanism. These conventional theories are strengthened, not weakened, by making culture central to their expression.

Transpersonal psychology (Tart, 1975) was the first to claim a fourth force status based on the spiritual revolution in modern society. Many of the principles of transpersonal psychology have been subsumed into the larger and more diffuse multicultural movement. Others (Mahoney & Patterson, 1992) have described the fourth force as a cognitive revolution with an interdisciplinary perspective in which human behaviour is described as reciprocal and interactive rather than linear and unidirectional. Wrightsman (1992) describes the fourth alternative as beginning with George Kelly's personal construct theory based on collectivistic and non-Western indigenous psychologies. The new perspective of psychology advocates tolerance of ambiguity rather than dissonance reduction, multidimensional reality rather than unidimensionalism, the validity of subjective as well as objective evidence of proof and the recognition of cultural bias by the dominant

culture in the applications of psychology (Smith, Harre, & Van Langenhove, 1995).

The social sciences have favored less complicated perspectives because of the problems presented by ambiguity as an empirical phenomenon, which is difficult to measure in objective terms. "The toleration of ambiguity can be productive if it is taken not as a warrant for sloppy thinking but as an invitation to deal responsibly with ideas of great complexity" (Levine, 1985, p.17). The newly popular methods of Chaos Theory and Complexity Theory in the hard and more recently in the soft science have been more adequate as alternatives to the "linear, reductionistic thinking that has dominated science since the time of Newton— and that has now gone about as far as it can go in addressing the problems of our modern world " (Waldrop, 1992, p.13).

Butz (1997) borrows from Chaos Theory to explain how the self organizes complex experiences into coherent thought. Self is viewed as the coherence or integrity of each individual's complex experiences. Culture provides us with transitory models of our self-identity, part of which is always changing and part of which remains steady. The self is dynamic like other self-organizing, nonlinear and steady states where stability becomes a stage of the system's developmental process. Culture becomes the perfect metaphor for understanding this new concept of self and modern applications of counselling.

There are at least a dozen positive advantages (Pedersen, 1997a) of making culture central to this "fourth force" paradigm shift in psychology, as follows:

1. Recognizing that all behaviour is learned and displayed in a cultural context makes possible accurate assessment, meaningful understanding and appropriate interventions relative to that cultural context. Interpreting behaviour out of context is likely to result in misattribution.

2. People who express similar positive expectations or values through different culturally learned behaviours share the "common ground" that allows them to disagree in their behaviours while sharing the same ultimate positive goal. Not everyone who smiles at you is your friend and not everyone who shouts at you is your enemy.

3. Recognizing the thousands of "culture teachers," each of us has internalized from the friends, enemies, relatives, heroes, heroines and fantasies helps us understand and identify the sources of our individual identity. As we encounter problems we are likely to imagine how one or another influential figure we knew might act in a similar situation.

4. Just as a healthy eco-system requires a diversity in the gene pool so a healthy society requires a diversity of cultural perspectives for its psychological health. By considering many different perspectives in problem solving we are less likely to overlook the right answer.

5. Recognizing our natural tendency to encapsulate ourselves, cultural diversity protects us from imposing our self-reference criteria inappropriately by challenging our assumptions. We have been taught to "do unto others as

you would have them do unto you," imposing our own wants and needs on others.

6. Contact with different cultures provides opportunities to rehearse adaptive functioning skills that will help us survive in the diversified global village of the future. By learning to work with those different from ourselves we already know we can develop the facility for working with future cultures that we do not yet know.

7. Social justice and moral development require the contrasting cultural perspectives of multiculturalism to prevent any one dominant group from holding the standards of justice hostage. Every social system that has imposed the exclusive will of the dominant culture as the measure of just and moral behaviour, has ended up being condemned by history.

8. By looking at both similarities and differences at the same time according to the "quantum metaphor," it becomes possible to identify nonlinear alternatives to rigidly absolutist thinking. It is not just the content of our thinking but the very process of thinking itself which can become culturally encapsulated.

9. We are able to continue our learning curve to match the rapid social changes around us by understanding all education as examples of culture shock. We know we have learned something new when we experience a sense of surprise, making education metaphorically similar to a journey.

10. Spiritual completeness requires that we complement our own understanding of Ultimate Reality with the different understandings others have to increase our spiritual completeness. The well known metaphor that all trails lead to the top of the mountain may indeed apply to our sense of spiritual understanding.

11. The untried political alternative of cultural pluralism provides the only alternative to absolutism on the one hand and anarchy on the other. Our survival in the future will depend on our ability to work with persons who are different from ourselves without sacrificing integrity while at the same time finding common ground.

12. A culture-centred perspective will strengthen the relevance and applicability of psychology by more adequately reflecting the complex and dynamic reality in which we all live. The multicultural perspective resembles the fourth dimension of time as it complements our understanding of three-dimensional space.

Because a culture-centred perspective is complicated, it makes research, teaching, and direct service more inconvenient, which has caused cultural differences to be overlooked or viewed negatively. However, the previous twelve examples demonstrate that there are also important positive consequences of a culture-centred perspective. Culture is perhaps the most important and most misunderstood construct that has emerged from the social sciences in this century. It is important

that we mobilize the positive potential of the cultural metaphor for strengthening psychological services in our increasingly multicultural environment.

The Cultural Context of Counselling Competence

The foundation of competence is cultural self-awareness of his or her biases, stereotypes and beliefs by each counselling professional. Increased awareness requires challenging our assumptions about ourselves and about other groups and worldviews to discover those basic underlying assumptions which we each assume to be so obviously true that no proof or evidence is required. The tendency otherwise is to assume that others see the world the same way as ourselves. We have been taught to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" whether they want it done unto them or not!

Culture is the context in which all behaviours are learned and displayed. Imagine yourself surrounded by thousands of people whom you have met, learned from, and come to appreciate in your lifetime. Each of these "culture teachers" has taught you something that you have incorporated into your identity. You do not have just one cultural identity; rather, there are thousands of different potentially salient identities in each of us. Imagine the thousands of culture teachers sitting in your seat with you, talking with you and talking among themselves about you as you interact actively or listen passively. These voices comprise the "hidden messages" in culture-centred counselling (Pedersen, 2000b).These voices are not an episode of schizophrenia but the healthy and normal behaviour of most thinking people. These are the voices on which we depend for advice in our thinking and decision making. The search for competence is the search for salience in our multidimensional, complicated, ever-changing cultural context (Spengler, Strohmer, Dixon, & Shivy, 1995).

Sue et al. (1998) have defined multicultural competence in the developmental progression from "cultural awareness" of basic underlying assumptions to "cultural knowledge" about the relevant facts and information toward "cultural skill" or the ability to intervene appropriately. This three-stage developmental sequence was developed as an alternative to the overlapping affective, cognitive, and behavioural categories, and became the basis of evaluation in the 1978-1981 NIMH project "Developing interculturally skilled counsellors" at the University of Hawaii (Pedersen, 1981). The NIMH team examined programs that had failed. Some programs failed because they overemphasized awareness, and participants were "repelled" by the overemphasis on awareness because they did not know what to do with it. Other programs failed because they overemphasized knowledge, and participants, who lacked awareness, did not understand why these facts and information were important or what to do with them. Still other programs jumped directly to skills , and participants were able to make changes but were uncertain about whether they were making things better or worse because they lacked awareness and knowledge. The model was first published by Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis (1992) and later elaborated by Arredondo et al. (1996). Competencies are organized into a three-stage developmental sequence from awareness to knowledge and skill. Pedersen (2000a) provides a personal-

cultural orientation needs assessment in the awareness, knowledge, and skill competencies.

Awareness is the ability to accurately judge a cultural situation from both one's own and the other person's cultural viewpoint. Some of the awareness competencies include the ability to recognize direct and indirect communication styles; sensitivity to nonverbal cues; awareness of cultural and linguistic differences; interest in culture; sensitivity to the myths and stereotypes of each culture; concern for the welfare of persons from another culture; ability to articulate elements of his or her own culture; appreciation of the importance of multicultural teaching; awareness of the relationships between cultural groups; and accurate criteria for objectively judging goodness and badness in the other culture (Pedersen, 1994).

Once the foundational competencies of cultural awareness are in place the next step is gathering meaningful facts to increase knowledge and comprehension of one's own and other cultures. The same facts may have different meaning and different facts may have the same meaning to reflect different cultural contexts. What are the salient social customs in a culture which define protocol and appropriateness of interacting both for insiders and outsiders?

What is the family like and how do family members relate to one another in a variety of different situations? What is the housing, clothing and food like? Is there a class and/or status structure? What political patterns are used? What is their religion and folk beliefs? How are economic institutions used? How do they express their art? What are their value systems? (Pedersen, 1997b). Knowing the history, life experiences, values, hopes, fears and aspirations of a culture are crucial to competent interventions. These questions are important to a culture-centred perspective because they contribute to an accurate and meaningful comprehension of the cultural context.

If awareness helps the counsellor ask the right questions then knowledge is the search for right answers to those questions. Increased knowledge or comprehension clarifies the appropriate alternatives available to the counsellor. These facts may describe historical events, personality styles, the role of education, the measures of status, the preferred style of learning and where all this and other contextually relevant information can be found. While the counsellor obviously cannot know about each and every culture around them, it is important to recognize lack of knowledge as a deficit in each counsellor's competence. Furthermore, it is important to fill in the knowledge gaps with culturally different clients as quickly and efficiently as possible before attempting to make an intervention.

The third developmental level of skill building is based on accurate awareness and meaningful knowledge as prerequisites to prevention and remediation. Skill is often described as synonymous with competence and therefore becomes the most important stage of all. Skill requires the competence to do the right thing at the right time in the right way. Skills are difficult to evaluate because sometimes an intervention that would be exactly right in one group would be exactly wrong in another group. Skill requires the ability to present a solution in the other culture's language and cultural framework. Skill requires us to test our stereotypes against a client's real and personal presence, and to modify them appropriately.

If we begin with the assumption that all tests and theories reflect the values of the cultural context in which those tests and theories were developed, we realize that all tests and/or theories are to some extent biased. The skilled counsellor needs to be able to make appropriate applications of these culturally biased tests and theories so that the culturally different client will be helped. These skills involve learning appropriate teaching/learning styles for each intervention; examining one's own teaching/learning style for examples of cultural bias; knowing how to establish empathic rapport with persons from the other culture; receiving and accurately analyzing feedback from persons of the other culture; and developing new methods for working in the other culture appropriately.

The awareness objectives of culture-centred counselling competence focus on changing the attitudes, opinions, and personal perspectives about one's self and other cultures so that these elements are in harmony with one another. The knowledge component of competence focuses on increasing the amount of accurate facts and information available. Having developed accurate awareness assumptions we are now able to test those assumptions against the facts. Our level of awareness is certain to increase in direct proportion to the extent of our knowledge about other cultures. Skill competencies focus on action. If one's awareness or knowledge is inadequate it will be necessary to recycle and fix the problem so that right and appropriate action can be taken.

CONCLUSION

The monocultural perspective of psychology has historically served the purposes of a dominant culture in specific ways (Gielen, 1994). Counselling in particular has often been guilty of protecting the status quo system against change even when we know the system is ageist, sexist, racist or otherwise biased. We still assist our clients to "adjust" to that unjust system. With the increase in political activism, affirmative action, and articulate special interest groups, the cultural biases of conventional psychology have been illuminated. This will ultimately increase the accurate, meaningful, and appropriate competence of psychologists, but this will occur only after the painful process of re-examining our underlying psychological assumptions.

Unless psychology in general and counselling in particular can overcome its own ethnocentric bias, its usefulness for dealing with culturally defined social issues will be minimal. During the last 20 years, multiculturalism has gradually become a fourth force in psychology. Multiculturalism has been gaining the status of a general theory of psychology (Jackson, 1995) rather than merely a method for comparing one cultural group with another. At present, American psychology routinely neglects perspectives and findings developed in other countries, even when those contributions are published in English. One hopes that the multicultural emphasis will help psychology become less ethnocentric in the future. There are several trends that give one optimism for the following five reasons. First, Rosensweig (1992) has pointed out that psychology and psychological publications are growing much more rapidly outside the U.S. than within

the U.S. Second, all fields are becoming more global in their focus as a result of technology. Third, there is a multicultural movement in the social sciences which has increased attention to cultural issues. Fourth, the topic of cultural and multicultural issues has become more widely accepted in psychological meetings and publications. Fifth, there is a re-examination of cultural bias in psychological services.

Pedersen (1999) has pointed out that there is a considerable resistance to making culture central rather than marginal to counselling. Others have opposed multiculturalism in the fear that it would heighten ethnic conflict, divisions and tensions, although there is no supporting evidence for those fears. However, wherever there has been a history of violent ethnic hostility and conflict, reconciliation will be problematic. Multicultural training needs to be reframed as a primary prevention strategy rather than a secondary or tertiary add-on feature. No matter how smart, skilled or powerful you are, if you are making culturally inappropriate assumptions you will fail. The paradigm shift in counselling is changing the rules by which competent counsellors do counselling. If the old rules valued dissonance reduction the new rules value tolerance of ambiguity. As counselling becomes more readily available to different cultures on a global scale it will be important to learn how to meet the needs of others quite different from ourselves. A culture-centred perspective allows the counsellor to escape cultural encapsulation and achieve competence through increased awareness of culturally learned assumptions, knowledge about others and the skill to accomplish appropriate change.

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