Article 2

Multicultural Counseling to Empower *All* Families

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An October 2004 article in my hometown newspaper indicated that the state of Arizona is "failing families." The assertions in this article were based on *Working Hard, Falling Short*, a national report prepared by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, and Rockefeller foundations on the state of American families. The sad state of affairs is that more than 9 million families in 2002 were earning incomes below the poverty line because their incomes for a family of four were less than $36,784. As cashiers, truck drivers, retail workers, and employees in the hospitality industry, the majority of these individuals are in positions with little to no room for advancement.

The figures from Arizona exemplify the acute distress of many families. "Nearly 41% of children are in low-income families"; "Nearly 40% of low-income families have a parent without health insurance"; and at the same time, "The poorest fifth of workers pay a higher percentage (12.5%) of their income in state and local taxes" (Crawford, 2004, pp. B1-B2). In 2003, median family income dropped for the fourth consecutive year to $43,318 (Samuelson, 2004). The issues and needs are more complex than they were 10 years ago.

Professional counselors are increasingly involved with families, not just individuals. According to a study titled *National Counseling Practices Project* (Sexton, Bradley, & Smith, 2004) by the Professional Research Network of the American Counseling Association (ACA), counselors reported that they are finding themselves more engaged in family and substance-abuse-related counseling work. Issues reported were not circumscribed to one family member but in fact were family issues.

There are multiple external forces that precipitate family distress including international migrations, the effects of natural disasters, warfare, and unpredictability because of worldwide threat of terror. The ideal images of families often portrayed via the media have become increasingly less idealized and more complex. For contemporary counselors, a contextual approach to insure cultural and issue-specific responsiveness requires a multicultural competencies framework supported by ACA advocacy competencies (www.counseling.org).

In this article, the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC) (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) and the Dimensions of Personal Identity (DPI) model (Arredondo et al.,1996) are used as paradigms for examining the opportunities and avenues for counseling with all families. These are multidimensional and interdependent paradigms, particularly suitable for discussing diverse family structures, for recognizing a myriad of historical, societal, and political forces that are currently affecting families, and for providing insights for counselors working with challenges introduced by unique families. Ultimately, the MCC (Figure 1) and PDI (Figure 2) will assist the counselor's facilitation of family empowerment.

To bolster the discussion, several areas of need specific to working with families are described. These derive from demographic census data and literature about changing family constellations. In the U.S., nuclear families—meaning heterosexual parents and children—have typically been the focus of attention. Other cultures have kinship systems in place that reflect their family structure. As a result of new demands on parents and other intervening factors in a family's life (e.g., death or incarceration of a parent), grandparents and other significant family members are assuming parenting roles. These are data about which counselors need to have knowledge as well as examine their own feelings about family constellations that may conflict with their personal experiences and perhaps values about what constitutes a family. Thus, the existing needs for families have direct effects on counselor competencies—cognitive, emotional, multicultural, and counseling.

The article concludes with specific recommendations for counselor interventions. These include the work of counselors promoting psychological education and being more community oriented, thereby connecting with culture-specific (ethnic, age) resources. In many ways, our paradigms about client-centered counseling are shifting to family-centered, contextual

counseling. We have the tools to make a difference from our own profession. It is a matter of accessing and applying them.

A Demographic Snapshot

Data from Census 2000 and updates to these data are giving counselors the dramatic facts about contemporary families. The opening paragraph highlighted conditions of poverty for families in the U.S., and in Arizona, one of the fastest growing states. Individual states' demographics are likely to be of particular interest only to different counselors; therefore, only national figures about children and families are reported here. New or perhaps not frequently used terminology appears in the Census report. Terms include *unmarried partner households, opposite-sex unmarried partner households*, and *coresident grandparents*. There are some clear patterns based on geographic regions of the country or size of a given state. Other notable data refer to the role of women as female heads of household, the increase of unmarried partner households, the increase of ethnic minority households, and the role of grandparents as coresident parents/grandparents. A few facts from the *2000 Census of Population*: *Special Reports, Marriage and Families* (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002):

- Since 1990, the number of households in the U.S. grew by over 13 million.
- Thirty-one percent of all households in 2000 were in four states: California (11.5 million), Texas (7.4 million), New York (7.1 million), and Florida (6.3 million).
- The highest proportion of married couple households was in Utah.
- One out of every four households was a one-person household.
- Tabulations of unmarried partner households were first presented in the 1990 census, which showed 3.2 million unmarried partner households. By Census 2000 the number of unmarried partner households had increased to 5.5 million, of which 4.9 million consisted of partners of the opposite sex.
- Female family households, no husbands present, with own children under 18 have increased both in number and proportion from 6.0 million in 1990 to 7.6 million in 2000.
- Nationally there were more than three times as many married couple households with children as female households with children. All 50 states had at least twice as many married couple households with children as female family households.
- Census 2000 enumerated 105.5 million households in the U.S., of which the majority (52%) were maintained by married couples.
- The majority of unmarried partner households had partners of the opposite sex, but about one in nine had partners of the same sex.
- Almost one half of married couple households include children under 18 years old.
- One third of female partner households and one fifth of female partner households contain children.
- Partners in opposite-sex unmarried partner households are 12 years younger on average than partners in married couple households.
- Four out of 10 opposite-sex unmarried partner households have children present.
- The South had the highest percentage of opposite-sex unmarried partner households with their own children.
- Unmarried partner households are least frequently found in the central states.
- California has one out of every eight unmarried partner households in the country.
- Asians had the lowest proportion separated or divorced.
- Interracial couples were most prevalent in the West.
- Black men and women had the lowest percentages now married. This differed by sex: 42% of Black men were married, and 31% of Black women were married—the lowest proportion for women of any race or national origin group.
- American Indians and Alaskan Natives had the highest percentage divorced.
- The Northeast had the lowest percentage now married and the highest percentage never married.
- In the United States, there were 86 unmarried men per 100 unmarried women
- Suburbs of larger cities tend to have the highest percentage of people now married.
- Married couple households are often found in rapidly growing suburban communities.
- From 1950 to 2000, the percentage of people ages 25 to 34 who were divorced increased from 2% to 6% for men and from 3% to 9% for women.

- More than half of American Indian and Alaska Native coresident grandparents and Black coresident grandparents were responsible for their grandchildren.
- Younger grandparents were more likely to be responsible for their children.
- The West had the highest percentage of coresident grandparents.
- For many grandparent caregivers, this responsibility is a long-term commitment:
  - * for grandparents 30 to 59 years, 16% of grandparents responsible 5 years or more; 8% responsible for 3 to 4 years; 13% for 1 to 2 years; and 13% for less than 1 year
  - * for grandparents 60 years and over, 17% responsible for 5 years or more.
- Counties in the Midwest had some of the lowest percentages of coresident grandparents.
- High percentages of coresident grand-parents were in the Southwest and the coastal areas of the West. These areas have large immigrant populations from Asia and Latin America, who may live in extended family situations.
- Some other counties with relatively high percentages are noted in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Arizona, and New Mexico, locations of many American Indian reservations.
- Census 2000 showed that, on average, 19% of grandparent caregivers had incomes below the poverty level in the U.S. in 1999.
- The proportion of grandparent caregivers living in poverty was highest in the South (21%).

Analysis of Census 2000 Data showed that families appear to be very influenced by cultural and religious influences, or at least an inference can be made from these types of statistics. The demographic patterns allude to common belief systems defined by specific territory, such as common states in the South or West. Patterns of migration and immigrant households play an important role in how families are defined and maintained. How counselors perceive these statistics is very important, as well as how they question why certain ethnic groups and family structures have particular profiles in different cities and geographic regions. These differences introduce questions for counselors now curious about the interaction between geography and perhaps ethnicity with family behaviors.

Looking at family structure is an important indicator of social issues and changes in society. Families reflect the state of a nation and how people define their household. It also is a reflection of values and integrity among different communities. American Indians have the highest rate of divorce and some of the highest rates of coresident grandparents. How can this be explained? Persons in Utah have the most married families and very low divorce rates. A counselor has to consider the historical presence of Mormons in Utah and how this may influence this profile of family. Are there gaps in or a change in family structure and why?

Grandparents are infrequently coresidents in the Midwest yet have higher percentage rates in the Southwest. Counselors in these geographical areas might wonder how the presence or lack of grandparents affects children and their perspectives on the involvement and availability of grandparents in their lives. These data provide considerable food for thought in the discussion of the MCC and the Dimensions of Personal Identity, valuable paradigms for working with *all* families.

Application of the MCC and DPI

Domain One of the MCC, " counselor awareness of own cultural values and biases" specifies three discrete areas of counselor competence: attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills. The competencies and explanatory statements (Arredondo et al., 1996) for this domain remind us that we are not value free. All counselors operate from a worldview that is initially informed by our own cultural conditioning from our families, communities, geographical location, religious affiliation, educational background, other personal experiences, and the historical era in which we were born. This framework provides us with a script about families that is reinforced by societal norms, the media, and other stimuli from institutions that promote messages about the "right" kinds of families. Thus, one of the explanatory statements reminds counselors to "recognize the impact of beliefs (derived from our cultural heritage) on our ability to respect others different from themselves" (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 57).

The Dimensions of Personal Identity model is a valuable tool when working with families. It provides a template for fixed and developmental dimensions (A and B dimensions) that make us the unique individuals we all are. The A dimensions are more visible demographic characteristics about which stereotypes are more easily formed, and as a result, most of the A dimensions (e.g., age, disabilities) are protected by laws.

Conversely, the B dimensions (e.g., relationships, education) tend to be less visible but, nevertheless, contribute to a family's circumstances. This contextual model of identity specifies that there are historical, political, and sociocultural forces, usually external, that affect individuals and families. These forces may be legacies from historical incidents such as the Holocaust, slavery, and anti-immigrant acts of recent years. The effects of these incidents may prevail for generations, suggesting the importance that these may play in families' contemporary distress. The DPI invites counselors to examine their own priority dimensions of identity because, at times, these priorities may be enablers or barriers to developing relationships to families with whom we work.

The MCC remind counselors that cognitive and emotional dissonance may occur if our mindset about client families does not align with our experiences or beliefs. Emotions are central to our work as counselors. How we feel about different types of families and our experiences with different types of families are factors in our work. For example, if I believe that only heterosexual married couples should be parents, I may have an emotional, negative judgment toward teenage mothers. We are all cultural beings influenced by the dominant White, male, heterosexual culture. Consequently, our norms about family size, the role of the extended family, and moving away or living on with family beyond high school, may cause confusion, anxiety, and even fear. Emotions are an important clue because they can alert counselors to possible countertransference issues as well as to concerns about ethical behavior. For example, it may be challenging to provide services to men who have engaged in domestic violence or incest in their families. Should this situation arise, the most professional strategy would be to refer. In this situation and others, another MCC explanatory statement is invoked that encourages counselors to "recognize and discuss their family's and culture's perspectives of acceptable (normal) codes of conduct and what are unacceptable (abnormal) and how they may or may not vary from those of other cultures and families" (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 59).

For Domain Two of the MCC, "counselor awareness of client's worldview" (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1992) there are important guidelines regarding counselors' understanding of differing sociocultural contexts for families in the United States and demographic data from Census 2000 relative to families. There is new knowledge that will assist counselors in understanding contextual and ecological factors that influence contemporary families.

An ecological systems model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1988) is particularly useful to understand clients' worldviews. These four systems are microsystems (the individual's world), mesosystems (linkages that surround the individual/family), exosystems (neighborhood organizations), and macrosystems (forces that shape and change society and, by extension, families and individuals). Migrations caused by economic downturns or immigration from another country introduce families to involvement with new systems and organizations. Some of the latter may provide resources while others become barriers. A family's ability to negotiate the use of systems will be essential to family well-being and other adjustment requirements when mobility occurs or when other family disruptions occur.

Counselors with an understanding of the ecological model will be able to assist clients in making the connections necessary to improve their situation. Advocacy is an important counseling strategy when applying a contextual or ecological approach. A relevant MCC to this discussion states that culturally responsive counselors "can identify implications of … internalized oppression, institutionalized racism, and the historical and current political climate regarding immigration, poverty, and welfare (public assistance)" (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 65).

The U.S. is a country of immigrants and continues to experience new immigration, particularly from Mexico and other Latin American countries. When working with immigrant families, counselors have to become knowledgeable about processes of immigration and their effects on individuals and families. Quite often, family disruption occurs because of different immigration patterns for different family members. Counselors need to become familiar with acculturative stress and how it affects families. Acculturative stress occurs because of changes introduced by immigration. These may be economic, social, cultural, language related, occupational, and educational. Another stressor for immigrant families is racism, an emotional assault to one's sense of identity. A recently released study on immigration (NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Immigration Survey, 2004) found that although the public views immigration less negatively than in the months following the September 11 terrorist attacks, negative attitudes persist.

Knowledge to work in culturally responsive and ethical ways with *all* families also needs to be nurtured by exposure and contact. It is often easier to refer clients that introduce unfamiliar issues to us such as immigration. However, we can also learn from our clients and do no harm. Guidelines and consultations for working with specific families based on an A dimension can be found in specific materials such as those for immigrants (Arredondo, 2002); for clients

receiving rehabilitation services (Middleton, et al. 2000); and for Latinos (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002).

The knowledge domain is perhaps the most comprehensive because of the landscape of issues, concerns, and diversity among families. Relationships between parents, parents and children, and others intimately part of a family system are informed by different bodies of research. *Emotional work* refers to the apprehensions, problems, and worries that exist for all families. However, in many families, the time is limited to attend, listen, give support, show appreciation, and otherwise lend one another emotional support. Researchers have indicated that the imbalance for women in emotional work, role responsibilities, and more contributes to health disadvantages (Strazdins & Broom, 2004). Women are socialized to nurture and care for the family, leaving little room to negotiate for self when the expectations are to be there for others.

Another concern that counselors must consider includes the family environment as it affects adolescent adjustment. Although not a new phenomenon, these researchers found that mothers in one-person, post divorce households often believe they must compensate for the absence of the father. They also report that daughters are more likely to feel torn or caught between parents, more so than the sons (Vandervalk, Sprujit, De Goede, Meeus, & Maas, 2004).

Domain Three of the MCC proposes "culturally appropriate intervention strategies." Assessments may be used as one form of an intervention. However, the MCC caution that assessment instruments must be used carefully with clients with limited English skills. Further, counselors must also "understand the limitations of translating assessment instruments as well as the importance of using language that includes culturally relevant connotations and idioms" (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 69). It has been reported that children are often used to interpret for their parents. In addition to introducing an imbalance in the family's power structure, the use of children may compromise family trust and the intimacy of parents. Resourceful counselors will find other means to provide respectful interventions with *all families*.

When working with families, no one type of intervention or counseling model will work for everyone. Biracial families, families with persons with disabilities, military families, and so forth, are likely to require that counselors "are familiar with and use organizations that provide support and services" (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 70) and that are culturally congruent. An example comes from the involvement of counselors with families affected by substance abuse use. For many years, the literature about adult children of alcoholics has described the detrimental effects of alcohol and chemical dependency on an entire household. It is a stressor that may require in-home counseling as well as community support (Gruber & Fleetwood, 2004). In the ACA *National Counseling Practices Project* (Sexton et al., 2004), counselors reported that they are working with more families where substance abuse is a primary issue. Again, this finding behooves counselor educators to guide trainees to consider approaching family counseling from a ecological approach, similar to the systems model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1988). Further, because of the uniqueness of each family and each family's definition of family, counselors are encouraged to refer to the MCC and the DPI model.

Summary

The last 20 years in the United States have witnessed new and distinctive family profiles. Step or blended families became popular in the late 1970s as parents divorced and remarried parents with children to create blended families. Lesbian and gay couples empowered themselves to be parents as well, either through reproductive means or by adoption. Families with same sex parents are no longer uncommon. Another new profile is the mulatto or biracial family, in which adults from different racial backgrounds have children with a bi- or multiracial identity. There are also parents (same sex, single parent, and heterosexual) with adopted children from international countries, a phenomenon that now illustrates another kind of biracial family.

In order to empower *all* families, it is proposed that the MCC be used as a tool to guide practitioners, researchers, and professors.

Application of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies

The three domains of the MCC and Dimensions of Personal Identity model provide a practical framework for counselors working with different types of families, as the following specific competency statements suggest.

Counselor Awareness of Values, Assumptions, and Biases

To be culturally responsive with *all* families, culturally skilled counselors will be able to

- evaluate their personal family of origin experiences and how these may influence biases about what constitutes a family;

- understand the values from their cultural heritage and expectations about the roles and responsibilities of family members (e.g., mothers, daughters);
- recognize assumptions about kinship systems that may not have been part of their family upbringing;
- recognize and understand their biases about families in poverty;
- be aware of their attitudes about coresident parenting, and other practices that involve parenting by nonbiological parents; and
- recognize their biases about teenage mothers and teenage fathers.

Counselor Awareness of Client's Worldview

To be culturally responsive with *all* families, culturally skilled counselors will be knowledgeable about

- the rationale for different family profiles based on the A Dimensions of Personal Identity;
- the interaction of different Dimensions of Personal Identity on family patterns and makeup;
- the sociocultural forces that are prejudicial toward same-sex parents;
- legislation that is restrictive to same-sex marriages;
- decrease in earning power for parents and the impact on families;
- economic forces that prevent parents from being actively involved in their children's educational and social lives;
- the effects of immigration on potential generational family pressures and conflicts;
- the role of acculturation on different family members and family cohesion; and
- culture-specific family norms, particularly for families with whom they have limited educational and practical experiences.

Counselor Application of Culturally Appropriate Intervention Strategies

To be culturally responsive with *all* families, culturally skilled counselors will

- be willing to learn new approaches to working with diverse family structures;
- invite speakers of English as a second language to speak in their primary language to express themselves as needed and then translate for the counselor what they have said;
- advocate for families as needed, utilizing the ACA Advocacy Competencies (2003);
- identify community resources of relevance and support to specific families (e.g., biracial, immigrant); and
- consult with cultural brokers who are reliable informants about culture-specific family concerns, norms, and so forth.

Final Thoughts

Families and multiculturalism are facts of life. As counselors, we have the privilege to facilitate change and growth for others. This is an enormous responsibility, one that is not learned from a textbook alone or from research with college age students. The challenge for counselors, regardless of our role and career path, is to be willing to expand our horizons educationally. We have to be willing to listen and learn from others, engage in peer supervision and consultation, and find creative ways to have experiences that even make us uncomfortable in our own continuing education processes. Multicultural counseling to empower a*ll* families is a lifelong opportunity for all of us.

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Table 1

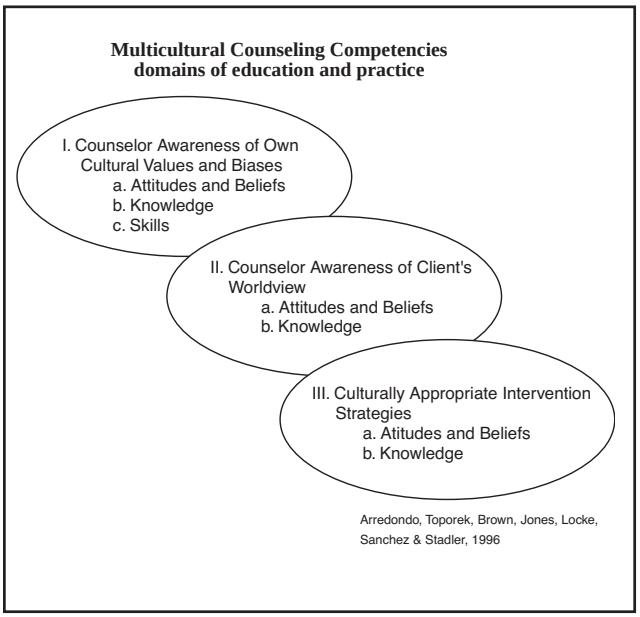

Table 2