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Article 3

White Male Identity Development and the World of Work, Using the Key Model

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The current economic conditions, along with the constant strain to live up to the masculine stereotype (e.g., no emotions, family provider), continue to be ripe for ongoing oppression and racism by White men in the workplace. As unemployment rises, White men are losing jobs, continuing to be asked to collaborate with people of color and women on projects, and finding it harder to secure employment. These conditions can lead to frustration and anger by White men who are becoming disillusioned by the American dream. There are several questions that can be asked to help support the need for a discussion about the world of work and White male identity development: (a) Is there racism and oppression in the workplace? (b) Are White men being asked to work with people of color and women? (c) Can productivity and the “bottom line” be hurt by racist and oppressive behaviors? The issue of racism and oppression becomes very relevant to company administrators when a discussion of how the profit margin can be affected by these behaviors.

Many times much of a person’s identity is associated with their occupation. Roe and Lunneborg (1990) state that, “In our

society, no single situation is potentially so capable of giving some satisfaction, at all levels of basic needs, as the occupation” (p. 6). We also know that high levels of unemployment are associated with increased rates of chemical dependency, interpersonal violence, suicide, criminal activity, and admissions to psychiatric facilities (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004). The Key model (Scott & Robinson, 2001) was developed as a tool that counselors (including career counselors) could use to help them understand their clients. The Key model can help career counselors by exploring, with the client, their issues of oppression, and by understanding the possible type of identity development attitudes a White male may be experiencing at the time. The Key model can be used during diversity training to assist the counselor in having open dialogue discussions needed for possible changes in thinking and a reduction in oppressive behaviors in the workplace.

History of Theories

Most of the popular work on racial identity models has focused on people of color. The majority of Black and White racial identity development models have been developed over the past 30 years. The most notable White racial identity development models are works by Helms (1990, 1995) and Sue and Sue (1990). These models delineate a difference between one’s race, socially constructed attitudes about race, and racial identity development. They also aid in the understanding of how people move from relatively low levels of awareness regarding their racial selves to a more sophisticated understanding of themselves and others as racial beings (Helms, 1984). Racial identities can be unlearned and replaced with more functional belief systems.

The critique of White racial identity development (WRID) models has been mostly focused around several main issues. Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) contend that some WRID models assume that racial identity develops in response to an oppressive dominant society as do identity models for people of color. Many of

these WRID models are framed exclusively in Black and White terms, explaining how White people develop an appreciation of other racial groups. Little is communicated about White identity itself. Myers et al. (1991) contend that most models are linear and do not account for the forward, backward, and stalled moments that characterize normal human development. Issues of possible class, age, and gender are not addressed in some models.

The Key Model

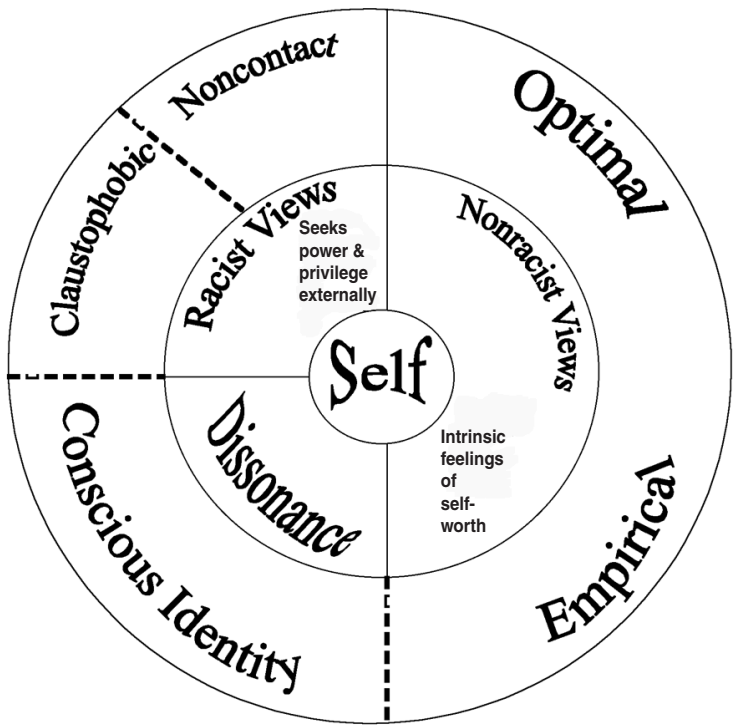
Although not a linear model, the Key model reflects the notion that the early phases of development involve minimal self-interrogation, whereas the higher levels of development typically involve a personal dilemma (dissonance with existing belief system) and its resolution, which leads to greater understanding of the self. The main goal, through discussion, counseling, and experience, is for White men to challenge the debilitating socialized notion that they are superior to others.

The use of types and phrases rather than stages is used to describe a set of attitudes that can be modified by real-life experiences. The Key model (Figure 1) is circular in nature (instead of linear) and suggests that movement can occur in multiple directions. Men may actually exhibit the characteristics of several stages, and it is thought that one stage may be more prominent than the others.

The Key model addresses the types of attitudes described by the basic levels of Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of needs, which includes shelter and food. These basic needs can create a false drive to oppress others for security and personal career advancement. Traditionally, White men, as well as other men, are socialized to equate self-worth with economic terms. They are taught to function at all costs and to be in control. These power issues are linked to the salience of their race and gender. In American culture people are ranked on their proximity to the normal referents of society: White, male, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual, and able-bodied persons (Robinson, 1999).

Figure 1

The Key model as a circular model. The “Self” can rotate between types and exhibit different attitudes toward different populations (race, religion, physical, socioeconomic).



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Type 1: Noncontact Type

Attitudes in this phase include little or no knowledge of other races or of their own race. The White male is functioning at work as he is stereotypically expected to function. He is fine with operating under the status quo and will ignore, deny, or minimize the issues dealing with race and oppression. He maintains very traditional attitudes concerning gender. Low level encounters with women or people of color will not trigger enough dissonance to create change in his thinking. His hiring practices typically include hiring only white males for management or supervisory roles. He also exhibits little effort to collaborate with people of color or women on projects at work.

Implications for career counselors.

Career counselors can assist by first helping administrators identify White males that may be engaging in behaviors associated with this type. Having discussions with administrators about their concerns over the attitudes and behaviors of these men can help open the dialogue between management and staff. When working with the client, it is important to provide a safe environment that will enable the White male to begin to discuss issues related to oppression and racism. Using accusatory statements in the beginning sessions will only lead to the client shutting down emotionally and restricting comments to only what is required. A healthy exploration of the meaning of manhood may be beneficial during the counseling sessions. Career counselors need to also be aware of their own feelings toward White males who exhibit attitudes and behaviors of this type.

Type 2: The Claustrophobic Type

Just as the name implies, White men may feel very “closed in” by the shifting of workers from White to diverse new workers. He may begin to blame people of color and women for the loss of his job or his friend’s job. The oppressive and racist behaviors become very evident as they struggle with issues related to power and control. This type is many times characterized by an increase in oppressive and racist behaviors in an attempt to control others and secure his place

at work. Because of the possibility of never experiencing true dissonance and/or the inability to become aware of one's privilege, many White men may never leave Type 1 or Type 2.

Implications for career counselors.

Even though the client is exhibiting oppressive behaviors, his feelings of a possible job loss are real. As stated earlier, job loss can lead to mental health problems at home and work. Career counselors can have open discussions about the client's feelings of loss, anger, and hostility towards the misconception of the American dream, people of color, and women. These early discussions can also lead to the development of healthy and collaborative career aspirations. Providing the client with current facts (e.g., unemployment rate for minorities is double that of whites) and realistic reasons for the company's downsizing may be beneficial.

Type 3: Conscious Identity Type

This phase is typically started by a real-life precipitating event that creates dissonance between the client's belief system and reality. An example of the event could be that a person of color does better on a job project than his White co-workers. Events similar to this will require the White male to reevaluate his belief system and the importance of collaboration at work. This is a very critical time in that he is finally realizing that oppression and racism do play a role in his attitudes and behaviors at work. It is important for career counselors to be aware that the level of dissonance required will differ for each individual.

Implications for career counselors.

This is a crucial time for the client. They can return to, and continue to exhibit behaviors of, the Claustrophobic type or may move to the Empirical type. The career counselor can work with the client on these feelings of confusion and guilt. Counseling techniques that encourage the client to begin the introspection of his belief system are beneficial at this point. Providing emotional support is also critical at

this time. Many of the client's White friends may still be operating in the Noncontact or Claustrophobic type and pressure the client to "stick together" instead of working with women or people of color.

Type 4: Empirical Type

The realization of the role of oppression and racism in the client's life are now evident. He sees that his attitudes and behaviors at work are considered oppressive and discriminatory. His old concept of the American dream is no longer valid. The White male begins to understand how his unearned privileges (white skin) have been used to his advantage and to the disadvantage of others. He understands that people of color and women are not responsible for his job difficulties or job loss. White males in this type may step aside on a project and let a person of color or a woman take the lead role.

Implications for career counselors.

Discussions about the definitions of manhood, being White, and working with people of color and women are valuable at this time. Career counselors can help the client appreciate the value of collaboration at work. Administrators could potentially see an increase in profits and productivity through having staff work together on projects. Human Resources could also see a drop in discriminatory behaviors by these clients. The career counselor can facilitate group discussions about reducing oppressive behaviors and the importance of collaboration. Career counselors will need to have resources available (various readings on identity development and diversity at work) to provide to the clients during their self-exploration.

Type 5: Optimal Type

The positive change in the White male's worldview will be evident at both work and home. Collaboration and diversity will be a top career priority at this point. The client understands that the struggle for power and control over others is no longer a viable or healthy option. They acknowledge that working with all people is truly advantageous for success at work and in life.

Implications for career counselors.

Career counselors can continue to help the client have insight in how to be an agent of change at work. Encourage the client to work at ending oppressive and racist behaviors in the workplace. The client understands the true meaning of valuing each person and listening to other's ideas and solutions to issues and projects at work. Career counselors can also encourage administrators to recognize the change in attitudes and collaboration of these White males. Career counselors can also help collect data on changes in productivity and work success by these White men who are working with people of color and women on various projects.

Conclusion

One of the main goals of the Key model in career counseling is to facilitate growth in White males by seeing them as whole beings (Scott & Robinson, 2001). Career counselors of all races and backgrounds will be called upon to assist clients who possess different worldviews. Successful career counseling will require an in-depth understanding of the client's experiences and perceptions which have contributed to his oppressive behaviors. It is critical that career counselors recognize and understand the types of attitudes White males struggle with at work. For most of their lives they have been taught to equate productivity and control with success and manhood at both work and home. These White men could face ridicule and be ostracized at work for going against society's stereotyped definition of manhood. Career counselors need to be mindful of how these dynamics will affect the direction of counseling. Thus the Key model can be one tool that career counselors use to help understand the multiple facets of identity development in White men. The Key model may also be useful when developing diversity training in the workplace.

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