Multicultural Counseling Competencies: Individual and Organizational Development

By D.W. Sue et al., Multicultural Aspects of Counseling Series, no. 11, series ed. Paul Anderson, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998, xiv + 161 pp.

In this thought-provoking and insightful book, ten psychologists, counselors, and educators have provided a ground-breaking study on multicultural counseling, a subject still fairly new to the field. Based on the work of Division 17 open meeting of the Committee of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity, 1982, the authors present guidelines for identifying monoculturalism and multiculturalism, proposing methods for achieving change at the individual, organizational, and professional levels.

The authors argue that European-American traditions and research often focus on the impact of intrapsychic factors on human development, ignoring influences of culture. They further argue that psychologists, who are aware of and sensitive to other worldviews, should not only emphasize the knowledge of such worldviews but should also incorporate them into the psychotherapeutic process. *Multicultural Counseling Competencies* is a timely book that could be used as a guide for mental health professionals.

Chapter 1 of the book presents a definition of "multiculturalism" and a working guideline upon which mental health professionals should base their knowledge, skills, and practice. Chapter 2 deals with "ethnocentric monoculturalism," providing historical background on the emergence and development of a Euro-American worldview and highlighting how mental health professionals subscribe to such a worldview without questioning its validity and applicability in a multicultural society.

The profession's response to multiculturalism is the subject of the third chapter. This chapter identifies the "Seven Deadly Resistances" that are often

demonstrated by professionals, once the issue of multiculturalism is discussed as well as the sociopolitical meaning of the professionals' resistance and its impact on providing services for culturally diverse clients.

Chapter four outlines the 1992 multicultural competencies, proposing several new criteria. It also covers issues that must be addressed in dealing with multicultural organizational competence. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are sequentially organized to discuss specific cultural competencies of the Euro-American worldview and the racial/ethnic minority worldview, and to consider appropriate cultural strategies for intervention. In addition to developing a conceptual framework for organizational multicultural competencies, chapters 8 and 9 review the social and historical factors that shape multicultural awareness in the mental health profession. These chapters also demonstrate how policies and practices could be implemented to enhance multicultural awareness. The book ends with specific suggestions and examples of programs to assist personal, professional, and organizational multicultural competencies.

The authors should be commended for discussing the following: the multicultural issues' sociopolitical and historical context and how counseling theories have neglected other cultural contexts of communication; "the invisible and hidden rules and regulations that play a vital role in the success" of people in organizations; a holistic outlook on life; the Seven Deadly Resistances of the profession of mental health; the White and minority identity models; the advocacy role for professional counselors; and culturally appropriate intervention strategies. There are, however, a few points that have been left out.

First, the dichotomy between "advocacy" and "professionalism." The two terms are often used as mutually exclusive by professionals both in mental health agencies as well as by people outside the field. For example, when counselors testify in court on behalf of their clients, their evidence may be weakened by the "advocacy" role and "lack of objectivity." We even read of counselors who have been isolated within their own organizations because of taking on such advocacy roles for their clients. I must emphasize that such strong objections do not come solely from Euro-American professionals but also among professionals from ethnic minority groups and even the counselors' own ethnic group.

Second, the authors' guidelines for transformation at the organizational level need to be expanded to other groups as well. The authors' strong focus on the Euro-American resistance to transformation as the only impediment toward change may divert our attention from other equally strong dynamics in the organizational process of development. One such dynamic is related to the imbalance of staff qualifications, often along generational lines: the old and less-educated, holding power and keeping the status quo, versus the young,

energetic counselors, with little or no power, but motivated advocates for change. Such a dynamic may in some cases impede the organizations transformation to multiculturalism more than the mere White versus non-White debate. In this case, the Euro-American camp's strong influence to prevent transformation to multiculturalism may be overshadowed by the war between supporters of the status quo versus the advocates of progress and change. We often see or hear about counselors who have paid a high price for "going the extra mile" with their clients or for ignoring the hidden policy and regulations of their organizations.

Third, even though the authors' recommendation to counselors for understanding the client's worldview is valid, to suggest that the counselors become involved in their clients' personal life "outside the counseling setting" may not be appropriate in all cultures. More specifically, the counselors are recommended to be actively involved with minority individuals in "community events, social and political functions, celebrations, friendships, neighborhood groups" to expand their understanding of the clients. While attending some community events may be beneficial to clients, outside office contacts must be very selective with certain cultures. For example in Middle East culture, or among Muslim groups in general, where casual mingling of men and women is not appreciated and is sometimes very restricted, the male counselors may run into serious trouble with female clients and their families once they socialize. Similarly, attending the clients' political gatherings may create problems for some counselors since some of these clients may be previous political activists or even former political prisoners who still distrust outsiders. The counselor's good intention to expand his/her knowledge of the client's culture by, for instance, attending political gatherings may very well be interpreted as spying and may jeopardize the counselor/client trust relationship.

Fourth, the authors should be complemented for addressing the issue of spirituality and for realizing the necessity for mental health professionals to learn from indigenous cultures and non-Western models of healing. However, the book lacks a broad coverage of the cultures and traditions in American society, a fact also acknowledged by the series editor. For example, one area that needs attention is when the authors present models of healing. They discuss Shamanism, a narrow example of healing practices. In my opinion, the reader also needs to know other important forms of spiritual healing (Cabala, Christian mysticism, and Islamic Sufism). These spiritual approaches are practiced among a large number of immigrants to the United States, who adhere to the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The language and writing style of the text is direct and lucid, free of jargons and unnecessary complications. The joint authorship, however, may create

ambiguity because readers do not know whom to criticize if they disagree with an opinion, or whom to credit when they find a new and interesting idea.

This book is a valuable publication for training counselors and psychotherapists, as well as a useful tool for those interested in developing a therapeutic model based on the teachings of Islam for working with Muslim clients. The guidelines presented in the book could serve the purpose, with some modifications.

The book discusses in detail the characteristics of multiculturalism and suggests models to bring change to the organizational level; it has the potential to encourage much-needed attention to Abrahamic traditions, and in particular to Islam, and it can provide a favorable background for Islamization efforts in psychology and counseling and for the treatment of Muslim clients. In this respect, the book's emphasis on the necessity of training multicultural trainers is the most important step. Exhaustive review of other sources and literature in the field adds more value to the content of each chapter, guiding interested readers toward new sources and helping them learn more about different organizational models.

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