

**COUNSELLING ADULTS IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING**

**BY**

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**A Practicum**

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
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LORRAINE WALKER

Practicum 69.703

Counselling Adults In A University Centre

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## INTRODUCTION

From May 5, 1997, until July 11, 1997, I did a practicum in lieu of thesis (69.703) at the University of Winnipeg, in the Student Counselling Department. My placement consisted of counselling all drop-in students for four days a week. One day a week I did literature review, preparation, and writing, ( i.e. 40 hrs/wk. for 10 wks. = 400 hrs.). My faculty advisor from the Education Department at the University of Manitoba was Dr. Bill Schulz. My supervisors at the U. of W. were Dr. Randy Kroeker and Ms. Leslie Kepron, M.Ed., counsellors at the U. of W.

Rationale: I had been an instructor in the Child Studies Centre at the University of Winnipeg for 22 years, until July 1995, when the centre was closed. At that time I was relocated into the counselling area. I was accepted into the Educational Psychology Program in the fall of 1996 and I am expected to attain my Masters degree in counselling by June 1998 so I can return to the U.of W. This practicum allowed me to complete my program within these time constraints.

The purpose of the practicum was to give me more supervised experience and literary research on the clientele I will be counselling on completion of my program. Previously I had done a practicum with high school students at Miles Macdonell Collegiate. This helped me to understand the developmental level which students had gone through just before entering university. To help prepare for my new career in counselling, my advisor and I felt that supervised practical experience with adult clients would be most beneficial. Seeing clients on this continuum from adolescents, to adults, to mature students, helped me to better understand their developmental issues, from establishing their independence through intimacy issues and on to generativity. The literature review helped me to understand the characteristics of adult students as well as some of the major

issues for which they seek assistance such as career decision-making, stress and depression. It also helped me to clarify my counselling style. Since my clients were not seen on a long term basis, the literature review expanded and enhanced my learning experiences. I was given the opportunity to meet with most of the clients who came to the counselling office, except those who were previous clients of Dr. Kroeker or Ms. Kepron. Also, I conducted 11 Mature Student Orientation sessions to assist these students as they reenter the academic environment.

### **DEFINING ADULT STUDENTS AND THEIR NEEDS**

Since my previous practicum had been with adolescents, I felt it would be helpful to do a section of the literature review on the characteristics of adult students and their needs in order to better understand this population.

Two or three decades ago the population on university campuses was much more homogeneous than today. Now there are several different types of students in higher education - traditional, adult, mature, full-time, part-time, occasional, or visiting. "Traditional" students are those coming straight from high school, mostly between the ages of 18-21 years. "Adult" learners are those students over 21 who are returning to school after being out of the academic environment for a while. This gap in their education can range from a few years to several years, and leads to feelings of insecurity and inadequacy in many students. Some people who are over 21 but lack the academic qualifications to register as "regular" students are admitted on a probationary status called "mature". They are given credit for having gained maturity through their life experiences and are granted a second chance at pursuing their education. This paper will consider "adult" students to be all those over 21 years of age who are

returning after a break in their education, regardless of their academic background. Full-time students are those students who are enrolled in three or more full-course equivalents.

Two decades ago it was easier to get a clear distinction between the traditional and adult student groups. The traditional student was 18-21, living at home, single, and studying full-time, which at that time meant 5 full courses. The older student was enrolled in evening courses, working, married perhaps with a family. Now the two groups are much more blended. More of the students who were formerly thought of as regular students are likely to spread their courses over a longer period for various reasons. They are more likely to be taking courses on a part-time basis and have some in the evenings. Fisher (1995) pointed out that by the 90's many younger students are working while attending school as well. "The challenge of juggling the demands of school and work is no longer exclusive to the older, part-time student." (p. 41). Curricular adjustments that helped to accommodate older students who wanted to return to school on a part-time basis, have been taken advantage of by younger regular students also.

Adults not only have different issues and concerns than younger students, they also have a different way of approaching learning. Their knowledge is based on personal experiences. Bushy (1992) outlined four basic assumptions of adult learning theory as described by Knowles (1985).

1. Self concept changes over time. As people mature they become more self-directed. Traditional teaching methods, such as lecturing, will be less effective as they do not recognize the independent learning style of adults.

2. With maturation, people define themselves more by their experiences.

Young people think of experiences as events that happen *to* them, whereas adults' self-concept and experiences become intertwined. "Consequently, any



learning situation that devalues life experiences is viewed by an adult as a devaluation or a rejection of self." (Bushy, 1992, p.8).

3. Social roles, rather than biological development, are more influential on adults' readiness to learn. Also, the optimal time to offer a class is just before an event is expected to happen. For example, a workshop on stress management would be received more readily before exam time.

4. Adults are more motivated to learn when the information can be used for problem-solving, rather than learning content that *may* be useful at some later undetermined date. Adults may be resistant if required to learn material which they feel is not relevant or if they are not allowed to take a self-directed approach to their learning. "In other words, children learn because they 'ought to' and adults learn because they 'need to'." (Bushy, 1992, p.9). Selman and Dampier (1991) concurred, stating "Unlike children, they expect whatever they learn to have quite direct and immediate application to their lives." (p.33).

Counsellors working with adults in an educational setting can assist them in their problem-solving by taking on the roles of helper, resource person, consultant and co-learner. Adults will be more receptive to interactive learning situations in which they have some input into the content and direction. For example, small group discussions are more facilitative than lectures, so that participants can learn from each other and offer support. By keeping these adult learning assumptions in mind counsellors are better able to assist students.

### **Psychological characteristics**

According to a Canadian study done in the province of British Columbia on nontraditional students presented to the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services Conference (C.A.C.U.S.S. 1984), when adult students begin university, they may exhibit a lack of self-esteem. They may lack

confidence in their academic abilities and their capability to keep up with the younger students because they have been away from the school atmosphere for a while. Older students may have a fear of failing or appearing incompetent. These feelings of inadequacy may be disguised by behaviors such as withdrawing, not speaking, or inappropriately challenging the counsellor or instructor. Usually these students are highly motivated to do well in their courses. This external motivation may be due to the fact that they have been out in the work force for a while and view a university education as a way to move their career forward. Or, they may have dependents relying on them, so they want to accomplish as much as they can in as short a time as possible. With increased demands on their time and energy they may have less to give to their family and friends. Support may be needed for the resulting feelings of stress and guilt.

Compared to the younger students, adults are very goal-oriented. Most mature students are very interested in the material they are studying; they are very stimulated by it, and are eager to learn as much as they can about it. In general, mature students are more willing to seek out support services which may be available. They are less intimidated to ask for assistance from services such as counselling, or to seek academic advice, or to locate peer supports. Logsdon & Sibbald, (1981) noted that these students may become disillusioned more quickly with professors' performance when teaching is not up to the standard that students feel is demanded in the world of work.

Students' response to counsellors may be influenced by previous encounters with authority figures. Some people may be quite compliant and seek a lot of direction, while others may be more cautious or resistant initially. Bushy (1992) noted that "negative attitudes often are transferred in the form of reactions to information presented in a program, despite the approach of the

counsellor/educator." (p.11). However, these initial responses can be modified in a positive environment. Some other behaviors may be consistent over time as well. Schlossberg et al (1986) found that people who are able to cope well in their early life are better able to deal with stresses effectively in their later life. Achievement needs, such as a need to attain good grades, also carry over from adolescence to adulthood.

During the Mature Students Orientation Sessions I tried to keep these characteristics in mind. It was hoped that by offering mature students their own orientation session, they would not feel intimidated by their feelings of inadequacy, and would feel more comfortable asking questions. I described the support services and the help they can provide. I explained that the Counselling office can assist with personal problems, as well as career decision-making. I pointed out that there is a learning specialist to assist students with academic skills that need to be improved. I informed students of the Study Skills Seminars if they felt they needed further help. Academic Advisors provide assistance with information about courses and questions about regulations and requirements. The Centre for Academic Writing can help students meet the writing requirements and offer support courses for writing in different fields of study. The Awards Office can assist with bursaries and other forms of financial assistance. The Registration Office answers many questions that students have as they begin their university career. I pointed out facilities that are available to give personal assistance with issues such as housing and day care. Also, the Mature Students Organization was described as a resource for support. I tried to stress that there were many areas to support them in attaining their academic goals.

## **Sociological characteristics**

Most adult students require support in similar areas; such as academic, financial, and family areas, although their individual needs within each category may vary greatly. For example, many students who consult counsellors state problems in their families, but these problems could vary from young adults in their early 20's experiencing pressure from their parents, to older students in their 30's or 40's having problems as parents.

One of the most important sociological characteristics that affects students' satisfaction is their academic background. "If all variables are controlled, either statistically or by sample selection, the most potent correlation between a demographic variable and persistence at any level is previous educational attainment." (Noel et al, 1986, p.147). Adult students who have previously achieved some level of academic success are more likely to return to a program in higher education and stay in it to completion, regardless of other variables.

Pappas and Loring (in Noel et al, 1986) stated that "Despite the diversity of adult students, we can divide them into three broad categories: degree seekers, problem-solvers, and cultural enrichment seekers." (p.144). Degree seekers want to attain their degree in a timely fashion for various reasons. Problem-solvers are looking for programs which can be utilized toward a specific goal, such as a new career. Cultural enrichment seekers will be interested in expanding their knowledge in a variety of academic and cultural areas for personal growth. These authors went on to point out:

Unfortunately, factors such as illness, changing jobs, overtime work, poor public transportation, and lack of child care are so student specific that it is difficult to generalize from one institutional or geographic environment to another. We must assume that these variables are indeed important

even though no research finding can be isolated. Some students seem to persist in spite of the existence of these factors, while others use them as the basis for dropping out. (in Noel et al, 1986, p.151).

### **Economic characteristics**

Many adult students require financial assistance in order to be able to return to school. Young adult students may be financially assisted by their parents, or may be financially responsible only for themselves; while many mature students have obligations to support families. They may feel guilty that school is taking finances away from the rest of the family. Even those whose education is financed by an employer may feel guilty that they are not contributing an income to the family. These students may also feel an obligation to their employer to do well to "justify" their education. "Institutions that have been able to create adult scholarships ... seem to be much more successful in retaining adult students. Tuition reimbursement from employers also appears to result in a very high persistence rate." (Pappas and Loring, in Noel et al 1986, p.151). Career improvement is cited as one of the strongest motivators to return to school.

Since adults are likely to be working to support their education, they want it to be worth their time, effort and money. Many adult students, who are not sponsored by their employer or are not able to qualify for a government loan, need to have part-time employment while they are going to school. This, in turn, will stretch their education over a longer period of time or add significant amounts of pressure. Since students are under so much stress, they may be more critical of the education they are receiving.

Many of the students I interviewed were dealing with issues of stress, trying to balance the demands of jobs, school and family. They needed to work to pay for their education, but then this left less time for school. This usually meant that it would take them longer to complete their education. The trimester system seemed to help somewhat by allowing them to spread out their courses over the year.

## **PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Counselling Approaches**

Counselling can be broken down into two main fields, psychotherapy and developmental counselling. Psychotherapy is a remedial approach used to treat severe or pathological problems, usually involving a medical basis for treatment. It is often thought to involve longer term therapy, and may include medications prescribed by a psychiatrist. Developmental counselling assists people to deal with the psychological problems and personal decision-making that occur in normal day-to-day living. During my practicum I used a developmental approach to help adults deal with problems or make better use of their resources.

Many theories outline the sequence of developmental stages which people progress through during their lives. Each stage or age period brings its own tasks to which people adapt before moving on to the next level of development. Since development does not progress in a linear pattern, problems can develop when this adaptation does not go smoothly. Many students seek help for these periods of regression or transition, and express relief just for having a concerned, objective person with whom to discuss their developmental issues.

Most counsellors are somewhat eclectic in their approach. Even those who profess to follow a certain school of thought adapt their style to accommodate

different clients or situations. Gazda, Childers, and Brooks (1987) synthesized common themes from six leading theories of counselling:

1. Counselling is a learning process.
2. The counselling relationship is the primary vehicle for behavior change.
3. The client has primary responsibility for the course of treatment and its outcomes.
4. The counsellor or therapist is highly active during counselling sessions.
5. It is important to separate the personhood of the client from his or her ineffective behavior.
6. The counsellor or therapist is limited in what can be accomplished in the treatment session.
7. Effective approaches avoid diagnostic labels. (pp. 38-39).

I found these themes to be a helpful reassurance because I tend to take on too much of the responsibility for the "success" or "failure" of each session. It helped me to be reminded that the willingness of the client to be an active participant is an integral part of the interview. During the practicum sessions I placed most emphasis on using the Egan model to interview clients. This approach felt most comfortable because it is the model I am most familiar with at this point. During my practicum sessions I used an approach which combined aspects of Egan's model and Cognitive Behavioral therapy. Although these two models are similar, I found the Cognitive Behavioral approach to be more directive.

Typically, when working with a client I would use more of the Egan model when establishing rapport and helping the client tell their story. Using techniques such as active listening, paraphrasing, reflecting, and empathy builds a sense of trust and caring. I have learned to give clients more time to tell their story because it may take several sessions before the client feels trusting

enough to disclose important information. I found that often their "presenting problem" was not the real issue with which they were having difficulty. In this way, the client led the direction of the sessions. If I rushed in too quickly to try to resolve the presenting problem, the client may not divulge the more disturbing underlying issue. When developing a plan of action with clients, I tried to evaluate whether they would be more comfortable with an abstract approach or more concrete techniques. Clients who preferred a more abstract approach seemed to feel more comfortable at arriving at more self-understanding through dialogue or journals. They may have resisted concrete techniques, which they interpreted as "gimmicks". If I felt that the client preferred concrete solutions, as many young adults do, then I would incorporate more cognitive behavioral techniques such as balance sheets, activity schedules, or keeping track of dysfunctional thoughts.

I encouraged clients to see that their problems are only one part of them. On the whole, clients are usually functioning quite well in most parts of their lives, but they can forget this if they become overwhelmed by their problem. Through this approach I tried to instill hope and confidence that they would be able to resume better control of their lives.

### **Aspects of Egan's model which I incorporated into my counselling**

Gerard Egan (1994) has established an approach to interviewing which gives a very helpful framework to the beginning counsellor. The interview structure is broken down into three main components: telling the story, developing the preferred scenario, and constructing a plan of action to deal with the issue. Each of these stages is further refined into various components. Although clients do not follow such a neatly defined path, the layout helped me in assisting clients to relate all the necessary information. Egan stated that



there are two main goals of helping: problem management and opportunity development, and helping clients become more effective at managing their lives.

Most counselling methods state the importance of setting up a warm relationship between counsellor and client as the first key step in the process. I feel that I have a strength in the area of establishing rapport. Clients usually seem to warm up quickly and are not hesitant to tell their stories. Establishing a positive relationship within the first few minutes of the interview is especially important when working with adults. They can usually tell if they are going to feel supported and understood by the counsellor. Adults are often hesitant about seeking help, thinking they should be able to handle their own problems, or fearing rejection. Through effective listening and responding skills I tried to demonstrate that I was trying to understand the client's perspective.

During the initial phase of telling the story, counsellors may come up against reluctance or resistance. Reluctance may illustrate clients' hesitation about changing their usual approach to issues. Resistance denotes a stronger fight to maintain the status quo. Egan (1994) defined the difference as "Reluctance is often passive. Resistance is active." (p.149). As Bauman (1972) stated many years ago "Learning, however, implies change, and change, no matter how desired, is often feared. The learner therefore usually employs some degree of resistance to protect himself against unwanted or drastic changes." (p.251). But since growth often takes place after some degree of disequilibrium has been created, I tried not to be deterred by this natural self-protection, but rather saw it as a form of strength in clients. During my practicum I found resistance was more likely to appear in counselling sessions which dealt with personal issues such as depression, rather than more straightforward problems such as career counselling or academic advising. This seems logical since personal changes would probably be perceived as more difficult and threatening.

Counsellors should also be aware of their own feelings of resistance when they come up against new learning experiences. Bauman (1972) pointed out that novice counsellors may demonstrate several types of resistance to the teachings of their supervisors, such as submission, turning the tables, the "I'm no good" approach, helplessness, or projection.

Many clients need assistance to clarify what they actually want out of life. Young adults have just passed through the life-cycle of adolescence. They are still developing their independence and may not be used to making important decisions which will affect their lives. Many of the younger clients I saw were in this period of confusion, adjusting to making their own important choices. Although they were not abdicating their responsibility, they wanted support and approval of their choices, that is, confirmation. Older adults can experience changes in their career or personal lives, caused by events such as the "empty nest", death of a spouse, or divorce, which challenge them to reevaluate their direction in life. A tool that I found useful for helping students develop their goals is the "Letter From The Future", (an assignment given by Lori Friesen in Practicum 43.516). (see appendix A). By describing their fantasy of a successful future, students became aware of the things that are important to them in various realms of their lives. Many clients need help to evaluate how committed they are to withstand the disruptions of change. This is a point at which resistance may become a counselling issue.

Planning how to activate or achieve their goals was the only support some clients wanted. Developing strategies through brainstorming and assessing their skills helped students to put their plans into action. Various strategies needed to be assessed to determine the best fit for each client. Some clients responded well to a narrative form of evaluation, while other, more concrete clients preferred a "paper and pencil" approach such as developing a

balance list of pros and cons, which is a more cognitive-behavioral approach. Once students embark on their designed plans they often need periodic support to maintain their commitment to their goals. Ultimately success will be determined by students feeling capable of handling problems themselves.

### **Aspects of the Cognitive Behavioral model which I used in my approach**

A Cognitive Behavioral approach to counselling combined quite well with the Egan approach, especially for helping clients develop a plan for action. A Consumer Reports article from November 1995, described cognitive therapy as "aimed at helping people recognize and change distorted ways of thinking". (p.739). During my practicum I often used a cognitive approach to teach students that emotional and behavioral responses to situations are preceded by thoughts. As McWhorter (1995) pointed out "It is vitally important that counselors understand and address how the client's context contributes to the client's difficulties." (p. 34). Often clients were reinforcing their distorted beliefs through self-talk. By learning to control the negative content of their thoughts they eventually began to feel better. Clients can be taught how these ways of thinking have been reinforced through their social environment so that they do not blame themselves for being irrational. Feelings of self-blame are disabling and counterproductive.

Corey (1996) noted that cognitive-behavioral therapy "has been widely applied to treatment of depression, anxiety, marital problems, stress management, skill training, substance abuse, assertion training, eating disorders, panic attacks, performance anxiety, and social phobia." (p.472). Cognitive behavioral therapy takes a more collaborative approach than Rational-Emotive therapy, which is quite directive. I preferred to take a more supportive, interactive role by teaching clients the basic concept of cognitive therapy, i.e.

emotions are preceded by thoughts. I felt that this collaboration was more consistent with Egan's style of interviewing. The versatility of cognitive behavioral therapy made it a very useful tool for helping students who often seek help on a short term basis, such as solving an academic problem like exam anxiety.

I found that by combining aspects of Egan and Cognitive Behavioral models, I was able to let clients lead the direction for the sessions. They had control over which issues they wanted to work on. This approach involved clients learning about the effects of irrational thoughts and gave them a sense of control over their unconstructive actions by substituting more adaptive behavior.

### **Multicultural Counselling**

The populations on university campuses are becoming more and more culturally diverse. In order to accommodate the wide variety of clientele, counsellors must become more knowledgeable about how to serve people of varying backgrounds. Culture is an internalized perspective that evolves as one experiences life and acquires social skills. People who share many similar experiences are more likely to form similar attitudes and values than those whose experiences are quite different. People usually think of themselves as "normal" and those from far away places as belonging to a "culture". We, as counsellors must be aware of our own culturally indoctrinated beliefs. I come from a white, middle-class North American culture which is consistent with much of the university population. However, many of the clients I met with during my practicum were foreign students. I learned that I need to broaden my knowledge of dealing with other cultures.

To some extent, all counselling is multicultural because clients and counsellors have differing background experiences. "Culture-centered

counselling skills are not specialized approaches for dealing with exotic populations but generic skills for matching the variety of behaviors, expectations, and values that separate any one person from another but also unite them." (Pederson & Ivey, 1993, p.8). Because of the shrinking globe, many more people of differing backgrounds are coming in contact with each other. This diversity of clientele needs to be addressed because of "the traditional segregation that limits the knowledge of different ethnic groups by persons outside that group; the growing percentages of 'nonwhite' persons in the population; and the historical and present negative tensions that exist between groups." (Proctor & Davis, 1994, cited in Baird, 1996, p. 77).

In order to be more versatile and more helpful to a wider variety of clientele, beginning counsellors are encouraged to expand their ways of applying their repertoire of communication/counselling skills. As Pederson and Ivey (1993) pointed out "Persons differ in their interviewing style, and in the way they interpret information to make decisions." (p.87). Egan (1994) concurred by stating that even a common approach such as problem-solving and opportunity development would look quite different in an authoritarian versus a democratic society. Cultures can be analyzed to find general commonalities within groups. However, even individuals who share a common culture will differ in their specific approach to others.

How can counsellors accommodate the wide variety of communication patterns that their clients bring? Culture-specific approaches usually deal with one particular group to which the counsellor will have the most exposure. Attention is focused on language, attitudes and assumptions. The approach that I found helpful was developed by Pederson and Ivey (1993). They discussed how the basic communication skills of counselling can be adapted to meet the needs of a mixed base of clientele. They used data from 55 countries and

synthesized the similarities and differences into four synthetic cultures to come up with four patterns of counselling skills which can be adapted to meet clients' needs. The hypothetical cultures were broken down to: Alpha (high power distance, i.e. the culture accepts that power is unequally distributed in institutions), Beta (strong uncertainty avoidance, i.e. the culture has a lack of tolerance for ambiguity or uncertainty), Gamma (high individualism, i.e. the culture expects people to take care of themselves and remain independent of institutions and groups), and Delta (strong masculine, i.e. the culture values assertiveness, money and things versus nurturance, people and quality of life). (see appendices B & C). "These four extremes provide a framework to organize, classify, and analyze the range of similarities and differences in real-world cultures." (p.3). Each synthetic culture uses variations of the basic counselling micro-skills: attending, paraphrasing, summarizing, encouraging, questioning, reflecting, confrontation, mediation, focusing, directing and interpreting skills. The "goal is to help counselors match the right method with the right person at the right time in the right way." (Pederson & Ivey, 1993, p.85).

For example, I had a male client from Giana who was experiencing difficulties in his relationship with a Canadian Jewish girl. We explored whether their problems were related to cultural differences or personality preferences. He believed they were based on cultural misunderstanding. Initially, I thought a major obstacle was due to the fact that he described his culture as being male dominated, whereas his girlfriend was quite liberal thinking. The more we talked, the more I realized that although the masculine culture was a big difference, a lot of the difficulty he was experiencing related to the ambiguity of the relationship. As soon as his girlfriend expressed any uncertainty about the relationship or wanted more space, my client would get depressed and

frustrated. This reaction fit with the description of the Beta culture. As well, my client stressed issues of truth, duty, justice and structure in our discussions. His communication style fit in well with the description of Beta cultures, but not at all with the description of Delta cultures. This awareness gave me a new perspective to explore. I found that by having this repertoire of four general methods of accommodating skills, I was better able to adjust to clients from different cultures. Although I am not adept at multicultural counselling at this point, I am trying to keep this new perspective in mind and challenge my assumptions. I found it helpful to decide first if the client felt more comfortable dealing with issues in an abstract manner through discussion, or in a more concrete style. This influence was probably the result of working with young children for many years, and determining their approach to learning. This way of looking at the problem was somewhat similar to the idea of the Beta culture, tolerance of ambiguity. For example, one of the first clients I saw was a female Asian student who wanted advice on deciding on a career. I asked her to write out three stories of times when she had felt successful. Also, I suggested she could write out her "ideal job" to help determine her goals. At our next meeting I asked if she had tried the stories, she said "No". However, she was interested in going over lists of values, interests and skills, and discussing them with me. Also, she liked the idea of starting a "Career Portfolio" to keep track of information she gathered on potential careers. Obviously the abstract, fantasy stories did not appeal to her so she did not take ownership of the task.

Since many cultures (eg. aboriginal or Asian) consist of numerous subgroups within the culture (eg. various tribes or geographic groups) it would be next to impossible to learn the communication style of each specific culture to which counsellors may be exposed. As more cultures blend it has become more evident that the traditional forms of counselling in the western parts of the world

are not the predominant form of counselling for large sections of the globe. More attention is being paid to ethnic, gender, class, and educational differences. Therefore, this approach to multicultural counselling from the framework of four synthetic cultures is a very useful tool. Utilizing this method I can approach clients by analyzing their individual communication pattern, rather than a generalized, stereotyped cultural style.

### **Main Issues of Concern**

#### **Career Counselling**

During my practicum I found that most of the students who came for counselling were concerned with academic or career issues. Often they felt they may have made the wrong course selections in previous years and now they feared they had wasted a lot of energy and money by not being sure of what they want to do after they complete their degree. Many students found their interests had changed after they completed some courses which did not meet their expectations. They felt that they had to pinpoint exactly the right job to aim for before selecting courses. However, in today's market, and in the foreseeable future, workers may be required to shift careers several times, so it is important that students remain flexible and keep many options available.

Herr and Cramer (1992) outlined six goals that a "truly comprehensive career guidance program" in higher education should aim to achieve:

1. assistance in the selection of a major field of study
2. assistance in self-assessment and self-analysis
3. assistance in understanding the world of work
4. assistance in decision-making
5. assistance with access to the world of work



6. assistance in meeting the unique needs of various subpopulations.  
(pp. 467-468).

### *Selection of a major field of study*

About 60-70% of university students will change their major at least once during their academic career. (McWhorter, 1995, p.12). They are encouraged in their freshman year to take courses from a variety of fields to give them a well-rounded background from which to choose a major. However, by second or third year many students start to panic that they have made the wrong choice. A study done at Brigham-Young University by Goodson (1978) found that there was a "chicken-egg type of relationship between choice of major and choice of occupation. The more career-oriented students choose an occupation first, whereas the less career-oriented students choose a major first." (cited in Herr & Cramer, 1992, p.467). Some guidance during the early stages of university life could help to reduce this confusion and frustration, and perhaps reduce the drop-out rate for first-year students. Many students whom I interviewed believed that most of their peers have a clear vision of what career they are heading toward. By second year they start to worry if they have not decided on a specific career to enter after they complete their degree. Speaking with a counsellor helped to "normalize" their feelings and assisted them to begin focusing in a specific direction. As Gordon (1986) stated "Many very capable students leave college because they possess an underdeveloped vocational identity, cannot formulate clear career goals, lack vital information, or lack the skills to work through the decision-making process in an orderly way." (p. 133). Fearing that they are wasting valuable resources, they may decide to withdraw. Some of the students I interviewed felt that if they could take a year off, they would develop a better idea of which career they should pursue. However, unless they work on

these issues (eg. clarifying goals) they will still be in the same position a year later.

But who should have the responsibility of advising students? Frost (1991) reported that advising by faculty rather than by professional advisers or peer advisers, was still the most predominant method of delivery. In fact, most research in this area has been done on faculty advising. (Frost, 1991). However, Herr and Cramer (1992) stated that faculty advising is not a very effective way of offering assistance in career decision-making. Faculty tend to be biased toward their area of specialization. They may not be fully informed or currently informed of the wide range of options available. I found this to be true of the students who had spoken to faculty. Sometimes the advice would be so pessimistic that the student would be quite discouraged by it. One student had approached her professor for help in deciding whether she should pursue a three year or a four year degree in science. He told her that with a three year degree she would be qualified to sell shoes! Needless to say she was very discouraged. Perhaps faculty do not see this type of career advising as part of their job, so they do not take it seriously or realize the impact it is having. Gordon (1986) noted "Probably the most important component of a program for retaining the undecided student is the availability of specially trained advisors who are knowledgeable about the academic programs on campus, understand how educational and occupational decisions are integrated, and can help students assess their personal characteristics in relation to alternatives." (p.134). Perhaps further research on the effectiveness of professional career counselling and academic advising would yield more positive results for retention of students.

### *Self-assessment and self-analysis*

Students can benefit from being counselled to understand themselves as thoroughly as possible, their values, skills, preferences, and interests, in order to make effective decisions that will fit their personality and lifestyle. Through personal interviewing clients can be assisted to better understand their strengths and what things are truly important to them in relation to their lifecareer choice. By clarifying values and recognizing life patterns, or through various forms of interest and skill inventories, clients become better acquainted with what makes them unique and which personal characteristics will be important to consider when selecting a career path. Counsellors need to consider not only "what are a person's aptitudes and interests, but also how do people *view* their ability to perform the tasks of various occupations." (Herr & Cramer, 1992, p.475). Adults may have a more realistic view of their abilities, which may be why younger workers tend to be more dissatisfied with their career choice than older workers, according to Schlossberg et al, (1986). Also, more highly educated people are more satisfied with their careers than their less educated counterparts, probably because they have more options available and feel they have more control over their lives. I referred to these long-term benefits to encourage students to persist with their education when things seemed difficult.

Different types of clients respond to different methods for assessing their interests and abilities. In order to determine clients' knowledge of and need for information, counsellors can use materials such as the Occupational Card Sort to facilitate dialogue. Clients use the card sort technique to classify many different types of occupations into three piles - like, dislike, or undecided. Counsellors and student-clients can discuss the reasons behind these choices to find patterns or themes which reflect clients' values and interests. Clients then rate and prioritize the themes. This **type of technique** gives clients a lot of

control and can enhance greater self-understanding. This type of approach appeals to students who are quite concrete. Various types of paper and pencil assessment tools are available as well for helping with self-understanding. The Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) can be used to help students better understand their personality traits which will influence their career satisfaction. The Strong Interest Inventory (SII) can help clarify interests which correspond to specific careers. Students who are not sure if they should pursue university, can take the Career Assessment Inventory (CAI). It assesses interests for trades as well as professional careers. Some students may find their interests are better suited to collage programs such as Red River or Robertson. The Career Values Inventory (CVI) can be used to help students assess which values are most important to them. Interfacing this self-knowledge with information on different workplace environments ensures more congruence in career selection.

At the time of my practicum, I was not qualified to use the Strong Interest Inventory which is the career test used at the University of Winnipeg. When I met with students who were concerned with career issues, we discussed values, interests and skills. My career course and my familiarity with the Choices computer program for career exploration helped me formulate topics to explore.

Some clients responded well to narrative approaches in which I asked them to describe events, such as times at which they have felt successful or proud of their accomplishments. It might have been projects they did at school or clubs to which they belonged. We evaluated their verbal or written responses to determine areas in which they felt competent, or demonstrated an ability or skill. I attempted to clarify their values and goals by asking clients to write a description of "My Ideal Job" or "A Letter From The Future" ( see appendix A ) describing how they would like to see their life unfolding in 5, 10, or 15 years. These narrative types of approaches appealed more to abstract thinkers. Since

clients were asked to describe a fantasy ideal, this type of assignment was not intimidating to most students.

When looking at clients, counsellors should keep in mind that inventories measure skills, interests, or values at a specific time. However, people are constantly changing and learning new attitudes and behaviors with each experience. Symons (Spring 1997) said that "Rather than working with a process of focusing, narrowing, and exclusion, we must bring our focus to one of expansion, diversification, and inclusion." (p.10). I encouraged clients to develop new interests and skills when possible. This expansion can include education as an ongoing process. Rather than using the traditional measurement tools, Symons suggested narrative stories such as those recommended by Richard Bolles (1996) in *What Color Is Your Parachute?* I used this book as a career resource because it is readily available in bookstores and libraries so clients could refer to it as well.

Another resource that is being used in some high schools for tracking client information is the *career portfolio*. I suggested that clients use it to keep track of skills, interests, transcripts, experiences, talents, volunteer and paid positions. Clients can use the portfolio not only as a means of organizing information on themselves, but also to follow patterns which may develop in their interests or skills to aid in their self-understanding and growth. The portfolio makes information readily available for writing resumes as well. Documenting this type of information helped clients gain a clearer picture of who they are, what their potential may be, and which areas they need to strengthen.

### *Understanding the world of work*

Career information can be used both to educate and to motivate students. Students need to learn how to acquire knowledge about the changing world of

work so that they will be able to access information themselves throughout their careers. Teaching students how to acquire more information increases their sense of control over their destiny. "It is the responsibility of the counselor to help clients regain a sense of control by pointing out to them expanded alternatives, by offering them guidance in narrowing down options, and by making them aware of existing resources." (Schlossberg et al, 1978, p.44). People who feel in control are able to make better decisions and are more satisfied with their choices.

McDaniels and Gysbers (1992) stated that some clients come for counselling to obtain career information only. I found this to be true of many of the students seeking advice. Some counsellors prefer to advise clients on where they can research the career information on their own and then come back for counselling. In other situations various forms of "hardware" such as books, media or computer-systems are used to deliver career information. Other counsellors may feel that delivering career information during individual counselling takes too long or there is too much information and it disrupts the counselling process. According to McDaniels and Gysbers (1992) however, career information sharing should be included in the process as a counselling intervention. By combining the personal interview with information on various forms of resources that students can access on their own, such as the National Occupations Classifications (NOC), or computer information from Human Resources Canada, students are assisted with their present search. As well, it teaches them valuable tools that they can use throughout their lifecareers. Students who have clarified their career search down to one occupation may be assisted to hook up with a mentor in the field so they can spend some time in that job to verify if that is actually what they want.

In *Redesigning Career Counselling*, Cameron Symons (Spring 1997) pointed out that the marketplace is evolving and counsellors need to expand their approaches to accommodate the uncertainty in the workplace of today. "When we talk with the student in our office today, we have no way of knowing what might or might not exist in the marketplace he/she will enter." (p.8). Therefore, I took care not to reduce the occupational choices down to one occupation or even one field. Students were told that they will probably need to change careers many times during their lives. Even the concept of *jobs* is being redefined to include many part-time occupations over a lifetime. These jobs are usually self-employment services which include many skills from a variety of fields. The successful workers of the future will need to be able to contract their services to several employers. So, I pointed out that it is important that they have a clear understanding of themselves as they evolve through their experiences, and how to access information on the changing world of work as they need it. At the University of Winnipeg information on careers is available from the Counselling office as well as in files in the Student Employment Centre.

### *Decision-making*

Once students have gathered information on themselves and the world of work, they may need assistance to process the information into short-term and long-term goals that will work for them. I found that many of the students seen at the university counselling centre need help with deciding on their goals. Peavy (1984) defined the decision-making process as: "to arrive at a solution which ends (or at least greatly reduces) uncertainty." (p.177). He stated that all decisions are preceded by a wish. This wish sounds akin to Egan's (1994) 'preferred scenario'. That is, the student must first know *where* they want to go before they can plan *how* to get there. Adult students may be blocked at this

stage by a fear of rejection or feeling vulnerable. Some students have been dependent on others to take care of them and make decisions for them up until now, so they feel they have little control.

Stewart (1995) stated that younger students may experience three types of vocational indecision: 1. *developmental* - due to immaturity, i.e. they have not thought about vocations yet, 2. *acute* - specific factors such as anxiety or external focus of control are interfering, 3. *chronic* - due to personal dysfunctions such as a lack of a clear sense of self-identity or lack of self-confidence. (p.53). In such cases counsellors may need to start by working on identity formation or interventions for identifiable factors such as anxiety or lack of problem-solving skills. Although most adult students are past the developmental stage, many are still bothered by issues of acute and chronic indecision. Counselling provides an objective, caring support during this phase of learning how to take control of decisions which affect their lives. Gordon (1986) emphasized that institutes of higher learning have an obligation to assist students to progress through the career decision-making process as smoothly and effectively as possible.

I found some students were using university to postpone making a decision. They failed to see that by deciding not to decide they were still making a decision, but probably not a helpful one. Several students came in anxious about having to decide on a major. I tried to help them clarify their values and interests to assist them in decision-making.

Several clients needed assistance to express their feelings and wishes in order to make a decision. They wanted someone to tell them what they should do. "Deciding - versus letting the world decide for you - is at the heart of helping as it is at the heart of living." (Egan, 1994, p.200). Decision-making bridges the gap between wishing and action; but many people find it difficult to make decisions. Some decisions are clearly defined while others may be more vague



or general. Counselling helps to clarify these issues. Unmade decisions can be costly, emotionally and financially, and can interfere with relationships, as well as academic or career decisions. Every choice made means other alternatives are allowed to fade. Making a decision means assuming responsibility for it, and perhaps some guilt as well.

A very important consideration for counsellors is that most clients are *reluctant* decision makers, beset by worries, doubts, and conflict, struggling with clashing loyalties, longings, preferences and dislikes, and struggling to find emotional relief by procrastinating, rationalizing, avoiding and denying. Very large numbers of people, especially those who seek employment or vocational counselling are prone to withdraw from conflict, uncertainty and commitment. (Peavy, 1984, p.199).

Many of the students seen during my practicum supported this statement. They would choose to withdraw by abdicating responsibility for decision-making to me, or contemplating taking time off from their studies hoping the decisions would just happen with time. The skilled helper can facilitate in the decision-making, problem-solving process by clarifying, exploring and expanding options with the client.

The first phase of decision counselling is the "relationship stage", connecting with the client. Peavy (1984) pointed out that while establishing a "facilitative relationship" based on Carl Rogers' and Carkhuff's necessary conditions may be suitable for many clients, others who are less trusting may respond better to a "negotiation relationship". Clients who are passive, indifferent or disengaged may need more of a "direction relationship". Often younger students want the more objective, directive relationship. I needed to be careful that the client was not led into decisions by relying too heavily on my suggestions or opinions.

There are several steps in the decision-making process. Peavy (1984) used the Krumboltz model as one example that links the steps in the process to counselling interventions that I can use:

1. When defining the client's goals, the counsellor can use empathic listening, clarification, time-setting and mild challenging.
2. Agreeing to work towards the goals involves paraphrasing, verbal reinforcement, challenging, and cueing.
3. Generating alternatives requires brainstorming, creative instructional set, imaging.
4. Elaborating the alternatives involves modeling, role-playing, verbal cueing.
5. Examining consequences of alternatives involves emotional inoculation, rehearsal, induced cognitive dissonance.
6. Deciding or testing alternatives requires modeling variations, peer modeling, simulation strategies, and contracting. (Peavy, 1984, p.192).

However, clients do not usually follow such a linear sequence. Egan (1994) confirmed that most clients will move through the process in a nonlinear pattern but will go through the steps of information gathering, analysis, and making a choice. Basically, most decision-making processes begin by defining the problem, brainstorming for options, weighing the alternatives, making a choice, acting on it, and evaluating the decision. Once a plan of action is decided on, counsellors need to follow through to encourage clients to stay committed to their goal.

### *Access to the world of work*

Students can be assisted to access the world of work through a variety of modes. Not all of these services are delivered through the counselling department. Many universities have student employment centres to help

students make direct contact with employers by supplying information both to students and to employers. Some institutions host on-campus presentations by companies looking for graduates. Computer career programs that can connect employers with potential employees, are becoming a more popular tool.

Once students have accumulated information on themselves, they may need direction in selling themselves through resumes, interviews, or other job-search strategies. As well, some students may need assistance getting to graduate school or finding scholarship information. This assistance may come through counselling or specific departments set up for this type of advising, such as Academic Advising.

#### *Meeting the unique needs of various subpopulations*

Various groups on campus, such as visible minorities, foreign students, and mature students, may have special barriers with which they need assistance. More of these groups are gaining access to higher education and as Richard Bolles (1996) has stated "one out of every three *new* workers in the U.S. is either Black, Hispanic, or Asian, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics." (p.434). Some foreign students come from cultures with a strong male dominance. It may be difficult for these people to accept the idea of equal opportunity for both sexes in education and occupations. It may happen that at a particular time there may be more opportunity for females to access certain jobs. If the students are second generation immigrants there can be conflict between the traditional values of the families and the new culture values. Counsellors need to take a multicultural approach to career counselling in order to accommodate these changes in client populations.

Visible minorities still may encounter discrimination in higher educational institutions. Racism impacts not only students' self-concept, but also their

motivation, performance and career decisions. Counsellors must be careful to assess each individual's abilities and background.

Foreign students may study here so long that they are not acquainted with the changing job market in their home country. Also, they may need counselling to prepare them for the reverse culture shock of returning home to different lifestyles, equipment and opportunities. Some cultures, such as the Chinese discourage self-disclosure so it is more difficult for them to ask for help when they need it. This cultural feature also leads more Asian students into the physical sciences rather than the social sciences or humanities. According to Salimi and Hsi (1977) career counselling with a developmental approach may be beneficial since foreign undergraduate students frequently do not have realistic career plans. (cited in Herr & Cramer, 1992, p.468).

Another minority group on campus, mature students, may be assisted by professional career counselling, as well as meeting peer counsellors, having extended counselling hours, and being provided with adequate orientation for adults returning to the academic environment. Mature students are receptive to career counselling to optimize their learning. They are highly motivated to translate their learning into their everyday lives. They want accountability; to be able to apply their learning to their lifecareer. Counsellors need to be aware of any age bias on the part of faculty or other students that may be impacting on their older clients.

## **Mature Student Orientation Sessions**

Mature students at the U. of W. are defined as being students over 21 years of age who lack the academic requirements to qualify as regular students. Since mature students are accepted on a probationary status, they are required to attend an orientation session prior to registering for courses. During my practicum period I delivered the mature students orientation sessions. I included information on the facilities which can be accessed to help solve problems, such as daycare, or to acquaint them with other mature students through the mature students' organization and lounge. I gave the students information on the types of programs available and the requirements they must meet to change their probationary status to regular status. I included a brief section on time management to help them assess how many courses they could carry, especially if they were working or had family obligations. I highlighted the Study Skills Seminar since mature students have been away from academic learning for a while. Several support services were outlined as well. The students signed up for sessions with the Counselling office and I conducted the day or evening sessions. Since this was mainly information sharing, I did not consider this to be the same as group counselling.

At the end of each session, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. (See appendix D ). I conducted 11 sessions, and questionnaires were obtained for 10 sessions. The results are included in the appendix in italics. From the results it can be seen that there was a pretty even balance between males and females. The majority of mature students were under 30 years of age, and single. Most would be working part-time while taking classes. 25 of the 43 respondents had been out of school for 1 to 5 years. When asked

why they were interested in returning to school, 38 replied that career advancement was their main incentive.

## **Personal Issues**

### *Self Esteem*

Self-esteem is such a critical component of learning, that attention must be paid to it throughout students' lifetimes. Feelings about themselves impact on all areas, not only in the educational field, but in all aspects of their daily lives. The attitude toward themselves that students develop affects their choices in so many areas, from peers, to coursework and ultimately their career. Motivation to achieve is greatly influenced by self-esteem or feelings of self-worth. People may have several different attitudes about their competence according to which area is being evaluated. This idea was confirmed by an article in *American Psychologist* (Jan. 1996) which stated "Researchers have concluded that, contrary to intuition, individuals have not one but several views of their selves, encompassing many domains of life, such as scholastic ability, physical appearance and romantic appeal, job competence, and adequacy as a provider." (p. 26). Their overall level of self-esteem is influenced by how much they value the areas at which they feel successful. For example, if they feel very competent as an athlete, but they place more value on intelligence, then winning a race is not as significant in boosting their confidence as doing well on an exam.

Van Ness (1995) pointed out that overall self-esteem is learned by about the age of six through children's interpretations of the feedback they receive from others. Can counsellors help adult students work on raising their level of positive self-esteem? Westen (1996) used the term self-consistency to define the need to interpret information to fit into the way people already see

themselves. This consistency helps to explain clients' resistance to change even when they realize it would be in their best interest. Although it is difficult to change self-esteem, every step of improvement can have positive results in many areas of the clients' lives. It is well worth the hard effort involved.

The biggest difference between counselling adult learners and adolescent students is the amount of life experiences they bring. This difference can be positive by giving adults more helpful data and more mature reasoning abilities. Often they have a stronger commitment to learn than younger students. However, if adults come with low self-esteem it is more difficult to reframe this negative image of themselves and the accompanying self-talk. Adults who have been away from the school environment for some time may lack confidence in their ability to learn. They need assistance to see their successes in life and how these positive experiences can be transferred to their new learning environment. "Early success and supportive encouragement, along with avoidance of embarrassment and strong criticism, are crucial factors when striving to provide adults with a lifejacket of self-confidence in the sea of learning." (Van Ness, 1995, p.32).

All of the strategies that are helpful with students in general apply equally to older learners. However, adults do have some special considerations: 1 - Adults learn at an increasingly slower pace as they age. 2 - Sight, hearing, and motor abilities deteriorate with age so these difficulties need to be accommodated. 3 - Adults are more affected by the physical and psychological climate of the learning setting. (Van Ness, 1995). Adjustments to these conditions improve learning. Counsellors need to keep in mind that self-esteem may be even more important to adult learners than their more resilient younger counterparts.

Various authors use different approaches to helping clients work on enhancing their self-esteem. Some use cognitive behavioral techniques to

approach the problem by increasing positive self-talk and decreasing the negative or misconstrued messages. (J. Beck, 1995, Palladino, 1994, Burns, 1980). This is the approach that I used during my practicum experiences. Beck (1995) pointed out that individuals often function from a "negative bias in information processing, especially when evaluating themselves." (p.224). They focus on negatives and ignore or forget the positive messages. Students eventually believe that which they tell themselves the most, the self-fulfilling prophecy. Although making self-affirmation statements is often viewed as being boastful in our society, it can be an empowering technique for clients to learn. I found that hesitant clients felt this approach was too simplistic and doubted its effectiveness. However, I encouraged reluctant clients to journal these positive statements, or say them to themselves daily, over a two week period to help them learn to focus more on positive aspects of their behavior.

There are four levels of self-talk according to Shad Helmstetter in What To Say When You Talk To Yourself. These levels are: 1 - negative ("I can't...") 2 - conditional ("I'd like to ...") 3 - affirmation ("I can...") and 4 - confident, self-assured ("I have become..."). (cited in Van Ness, 1995). Obviously, getting students to focus more on the strength of positive feedback is a goal of counselling. This approach also gives clients more hope that things can improve and that they can have more control over their feelings.

Palladino (1994) looked at self-esteem from a life-career perspective. Her self-help approach is based on cognitive behavioral techniques which lead individuals through a system designed to create a "positive belief system" by focusing on strengths, setting goals and devising an action plan geared toward success in the workplace or learning environment. I found I was able to incorporate this approach into Egan's method of interviewing.



Perhaps a lesson can be learned from people with high self-esteem. When they experience failure in one area, for example failing a test, they compensate by pointing out their strengths in another area, for example social helpfulness. (Westen, 1996). This strategy was used to raise self-esteem in individuals who needed support. Inventories of strengths were built up and added to on a continuing basis to combat the self-defeating action of negative self-talk. Daily journals to record accomplishments, large and small, helped to focus individuals' attention onto their positive achievements, rather than dwelling on negatives.

Students' accomplishments are influenced by the level of expectations placed on them. They perform better when expectations are high. However, the expectations must be realistic enough to be achievable. Students who can meet the challenges have a better chance of developing an inner source of positive reinforcement, and thus become less dependent on the opinions of others. Van Ness (1995) suggested using the SMART system to help students set realistic learning goals. That is, "all goals should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and tied to a reasonable Time frame." (pp. 17-18). Whether students view the goal as being attainable has the greatest impact on self-esteem. It was important for me to make sure that clients took ownership of their plans before trying to implement them. Focus must be placed on strengths and achievements so that ultimately clients view failures as successes yet to be attained.

Van Ness (1995) has cited another cognitive behavioral system to raise the self-esteem of learners, called ASPIRE, which was developed by Ellen Mauer, a Ball State University counselling psychologist. The acronym stands

for: **A=Aware.** Become aware of negative self-talk, the tendency to rely on other-esteem, and the danger of allowing criticisms and errors to damage self-esteem.

**S=Stop.** Turn off negative self-talk. Do not rely on others to provide self-acceptance and self-confidence. Refuse to allow errors to lower self-esteem.

**P=Positive.** Replace all negative and pessimistic thoughts with positive, constructive, and realistic ones.

**I=Imagine.** Imagine success by establishing realistic goals and visualizing the desired outcomes.

**R=Reward.** Reward yourself and celebrate success within, as well as with others.

**E=Energize.** Use persistence and resilience to make the goals and positive visualization a reality. (Van Ness, 1995, pp. 25-26).

Improving self-esteem is hard work for adults because their level of self-worth has been set at an early age and is resistant to change. But as Connie Palladino (1994) has stated "self-esteem is a personal trait that can be improved by any person willing to commit him- or herself to the task of positive self-development." (p. iii). I believe self-esteem is the foundation upon which other abilities are built. Since people's view of their self-worth impacts so greatly on all aspects of their lives, it is well worth the hard effort to raise it.

### *Perfectionism and Procrastination*

Often students have a great deal of difficulty handling the required assignments in their courses. Their fear of failure causes them to respond with inactivity. They may set unrealistic expectations and punish themselves when they cannot meet them. The more they pressure themselves to do a task, the

more they resist, and consequently feel like they have failed. Usually procrastination is linked to feelings of perfectionism; and since perfection is quite unattainable in most situations, they are setting themselves up for feeling like they have failed.

Kathleen McWhorter (1995) advised students to take control back by: 1. giving yourself five minutes to start, 2. dividing the task into manageable parts, 3. clearing your desk, 4. starting regardless of what you do, 5. recognizing when you need more information, 6. thinking positively, 7. recognizing escape routes, and 8. avoiding "the great escape" - television. (pp.32-33). These are helpful suggestions but they require persistence to develop them into habits. I found the most helpful part was breaking the task into small, manageable steps so the task does not seem overwhelming.

Several of the younger students I met with were dealing with issues of procrastination about deciding on their major. They realized that this is a very important decision and the enormity of it overwhelmed them so they would put off doing anything about it. It was almost as if they were saying "If I don't choose, I won't make a big mistake." However, by putting off their decision they were narrowing their options. They have to choose a major once they have accumulated between 30 and 60 credit hours, and they can only take a specified number of credit hours. They could end up being forced into a major just to complete their degree within the allowed number of credit hours. Making an informed academic and career decision takes time, so it should be started early.

David Burns (1980 & 1989), a cognitive-behavioral psychiatrist stated that to fight procrastination, clients must learn to overcome their perfectionism. He gives very concrete suggestions for helping clients deal with this problem:

1. List the advantages and disadvantages of perfectionism.
2. Aim for 80% or 60% or 40% instead of 100%.

3. Use an "antiperfectionism sheet" to record how effectively you did a job, and to record how satisfying it was. eg. Fixing the kitchen sink; - you might have been only 20% effective but felt 90% satisfied because you actually did it!
4. Realize perfection doesn't exist. Everything could be improved.
5. Confront your fear - risk criticism, failure or disapproval. Refuse to give in to your compulsive tendencies.
6. Use the vertical arrow method to discover the silent assumptions behind your fear. eg. "If I can't write the paper - I would get a low grade - I might fail the course - If I fail the course, I'm a failure."
7. Focus on the process not the outcome. eg. Refuse to do an excellent job; aim for a good, consistent effort at each session regardless of how the client responds. This guarantees 100% success forever.
8. Set strict time limits on all your activities for one week. Fight procrastination by setting modest goals.
9. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Focus on learning, not whether or not you're making mistakes.
10. Note the things you do right each day. Do this for two weeks to learn to focus more on the positive things instead of overfocusing on negatives.
11. Notice your all-or-nothing thinking - talk back to it and shoot it down.
12. Self-disclose. Share your inadequacies and ask for suggestions on how to improve.
13. Think of a happy memory. What was perfect about that experience? Probably nothing! It's your expectation or how you choose to think about an experience that determines how you will feel about it.
14. Lower your standards. You may find more pleasure with many good, solid performances than with one stress-producing masterpiece.

15. It is human to make mistakes. Cherish them and figure out what you can learn from them.

I found when working with students, it was helpful to use what I refer to as "The Swiss Cheese" approach to tasks. I break them down into major components, then I break each part down further and further, until each step is so small that it is no longer intimidating. Once a couple of small steps are accomplished, the task seems easier, and I am more motivated to continue.

I asked one client to list the advantages and disadvantages of finishing two assignments for one of her courses, rather than receiving an "incomplete". I found that when she had to put her reasons down in black and white it was harder for her to rationalize her procrastination. This helped her to assume responsibility for choosing to finish the assignments or to accept the "incomplete".

Burns' suggestions have been very helpful, not only while working with clients, but also for my own use.

### *Anxiety, Stress and Coping*

University is a new and challenging experience that can produce stress because of the expectations students put on themselves. Clients often react to feelings of anxiety by being unable to act. Their fear of failure may produce symptoms such as difficulty concentrating, headaches, fatigue, weight loss or gain, or listlessness. A certain amount of stress is inevitable; and some stress can keep clients active and alert, but too much stress is incapacitating. When anxious, small annoyances can become exaggerated into large problems, or they can dominate clients' perspectives. Naturally, stress and anxiety will be greater at certain times of the year, such as before exam time. Sometimes just

talking over problems or writing about them helps to alleviate some of the trauma.

Students can be taught self-help techniques to deal with everyday levels of anxiety. Meditation or relaxation have proven helpful for many clients. Taking just a few minutes for deepbreathing exercises greatly reduces the physiological symptoms and helps clients feel more in control again. McWhorter (1995) offered a few suggestions for dealing with the normal stresses of university life: manage your time effectively, eliminate stressors if you can (such as a part-time job or a difficult roommate), accentuate your accomplishments, get involved with campus activities, avoid simultaneous life changes, establish a daily routine, seek knowledgeable advice, get physical exercise, eat nutritious meals, and get adequate amounts of sleep. This advice can be utilized throughout students' lives whenever they feel stressed.

At the end of May, a very stressed female student came to see me. She sounded very agitated as she spoke and her hands were shaking. Her thoughts were fragmented, all over the place. She said she had been near a nervous breakdown because of issues in her academic and personal life. As she spoke, she flitted from topic to topic. I could see she was getting herself more worked up and feeling overwhelmed by all the details she with which she was dealing. While we were talking, I tried to break her concerns into three main areas, academic, financial, and personal. I would then focus on one area at a time. Pulling all these disjointed details together seemed to make them appear more manageable to her and she calmed down somewhat. I tried to get her to prioritize her concerns and see which things she was capable of handling. For her academic concerns, we discussed time management and the study skills seminar. She started carrying a daytimer which helped her record course requirements and due dates. At subsequent meetings we discussed her part

time job and student loans. We also dealt with issues around her boyfriend who was working in Korea, her problems with roommates, and how these were influencing her school work. Since her parents had moved to Ontario, we talked about the personal supports she had in the city. I found she used a lot of negative self-talk which was contributing to her lack of motivation. I asked her to keep a record of her accomplishments for two weeks and learn to focus more on positives to support herself. I felt that perhaps she was nervous about finishing school and was unsure of what her role would be once she was no longer a "student". So, we discussed some of her thoughts about what she might like to do after graduating, and explored how feasible or realistic some of her ideas were. I saw this client for four sessions and she seemed to get more organized over that time. She was no longer overwhelmed by all the details in her life and seemed to be developing better coping skills.

Some individuals who have been extremely shy since childhood may experience more persistent forms of anxiety. Since this trait can run in families, the *American Psychologist* (Jan. 1996) suggested that there might be a hereditary basis for reacting this way. Anxiety which is intense and unyielding may respond to cognitive behavioral therapy to counter the irrational thoughts and fears. Some of the techniques recommended by Burns (1980 & 1989) for fighting perfectionism can be utilized for stress reduction as well. I recommended many of these techniques to clients. Gazda, Childers, and Brooks (1987) suggested using behavioral techniques such as systematic desensitization, assertiveness training, or flooding, to deal with various forms of anxiety or fears.

## *Depression*

Depression is an exaggeration of the normal ups and downs that everyone feels from time to time. One of the main differences between people who are feeling sad and those who are truly depressed, is the feeling of helplessness and hopelessness which depressed patients feel. There is an overwhelming feeling of loss of control. Getting an accurate diagnosis of depression is important and sometimes difficult since as many as ninety-seven physiological illnesses can mimick the symptoms of depression (Gold, 1995). Historically, mood disorders and physical illnesses were separated so that the unique qualities of depression could be better understood. Now however, more emphasis is being placed on reconnecting the link between the mind and body so that better treatment procedures can be developed. As well as medical tests, there are several questionnaires available for assessing depression such as the Beck Depression Inventory (Burns, 1980), the Carroll Rating Scale (Slagle, 1987), and the Burns Depression Checklist (Perl, 1993).

Depression is caused by a combination of biological and psychological factors. Contributors may include family history (genetic predisposition), diet, lack of exercise, stress, physical illness, as well as distorted thinking. (Perl, 1993 and Slagle, 1987). Sleeping disorders, chemical imbalance, and hormonal changes also have been shown to lead to depression.

One of the clients I met with during my practicum was a female whose symptoms fit many of those described for depression. Although her presenting problem was her relationship with her boyfriend, she soon related feelings of overwhelming sadness and hopelessness for the future. She cried throughout the first session and said her mother had recommended she see a counsellor because her depressive behavior had been going on for quite some time. As she related her story there seemed to be many parallels between her situation



with her boyfriend and her parents' relationship years earlier which ended in divorce.

Several authors recommend combining behavioral and cognitive techniques for greater results. (Gold, 1995; Burns, 1980; and Perl, 1993). Behavioral interventions such as making contact with others, exercise, and increasing the number of weekly pleasurable activities may be necessary first steps in treatment, since depression can interfere with concentration, attention, and memory, thus incapacitating the patient from benefiting from cognitive self-therapy. However, I was met with resistance to each suggestion. When I suggested she keep contact with others besides her mother, sister, and boyfriend, she replied that her two best friends were working away from the city now. When we discussed exercise, she didn't like it. So I suggested she could try to build exercise into her regular routine by doing things like getting off the bus a couple of stops before her stop. When I talked about the importance of a healthy diet, she stated that her mother was using herbal remedies to treat menopausal symptoms and my client was skeptical about the effectiveness. She had been on three different types of birth control but had taken herself off them after one or two weeks. I explained this would not be a long enough time to give them a fair evaluation. She complained that her hormones were causing her mood swings but had no faith in doctors' advice. She and her boyfriend spent most of their time together discussing their relationship, so I suggested they try making a pact to not discuss it for two weeks and go out and enjoy each others' company, but she said that they had tried that but they end up back at it after one or two days. In a couple of instances I tried to introduce the idea of trying to combat her negative thinking by discussing the idea that emotions are controlled by our thoughts. I suggested that she keep a journal of positive thoughts for a couple of weeks to begin to train her mind to notice and pay more attention to

positive events. But she said it would be much easier to keep a diary of her negative thoughts. She was very resistant to discussing her relationship with her father which still seemed to be filled with anger and mistrust. She felt her parents' divorce had been so long ago that it couldn't have any influence on her present situation with her boyfriend. However, there seemed to be many similarities between her father and her boyfriend, even the fact that they both had red hair and they were both in theatre. When she described the type of boy she always thought she'd end up with, she said he would be a business type in a three piece suit, the opposite of her present boyfriend! Perhaps she was getting a bigger payoff of attention from her mother and boyfriend by staying depressed. Unfortunately the client did not return after the second session. I felt there were many issues of control with this patient, and she did state that she liked to be in control of situations. Perhaps not returning was one more way to control the situation. Slagle (1987) believed the most effective treatment for depression consists of combining proper nutritional balance, cognitive therapy, and behavioral techniques such as exercise and visualization. Future sessions with this client would have had to deal with resistance because I would not be able to help this client until we were able to work through the resistance.

Some researchers now believe that people inherit a "set-point" for happiness. "We find that for events like being promoted or losing a lover, most of the effect on people's mood is gone by three months, and there's not a trace by six months." (Goleman, July 1996). This observation fits with the cyclical pattern of milder forms of depression. Serious trauma can override the predetermined set-point, but mood shifts that persist for years mark problems such as clinical depression. However, Dr. Martin Seligman, a University of Pennsylvania psychology professor, stated that depression can be combatted with a cognitive therapy approach by teaching clients to be optimistic rather than

pessimistic. He believes that pessimism is a risk factor for depression "like smoking is a risk factor for lung cancer." (Unland, Aug.1996). Seligman believes pessimism influences not only the likelihood of depression but also level of achievement and physical health. Being optimistic or pessimistic influences how people interpret the setbacks in life, whether they feel some level of control or feel hopeless, whether they think of setbacks as temporary or permanent. Dr. Seligman stated that depression is 10 times more common today than two generations ago, but it can be treated with cognitive therapy. He believes optimistic behavior can be learned and this is a more ethical treatment than "drugging an entire generation". He believes the "depression epidemic" sets in at puberty and continues until 60. He partly blames what he calls the self-esteem movement for teaching children to feel good about their failures instead of teaching them the skills to improve. The "strength-challenge" approach sounds akin to the approach that Dr. Seligman proposes. Counsellors can help clients see the areas they are competent in and build on these to fill their voids.

## **REFLECTIONS ON MY LEARNING**

### **Demographics**

Over the ten week period of my practicum, 64% of the clients who came for drop-in at the Counelling Service were females. Although the population was pretty evenly divided between students who were under 21 and those who were over 21, those who were over 21 were usually in their twenties, so the majority of the clients I saw were young adults. When my practicum started at the beginning of May, students were getting results from their fall and winter session

courses. Because the University of Winnipeg is on a trimester system, this was also the registration period for summer and fall courses. Consequently a majority of the concerns centred around academic problems such as incompletes or choosing future courses. Purely academic concerns are handled by the Academic Advisors. However, since registration is such a busy and confusing time, the Academic Advisors often refer undecided students to counselling for some assistance with clarifying career goals before going further in their course selection.

During the first few weeks a high percentage of the students I met were foreign or Visa students who were getting into difficulty with meeting Visa or loan requirements, or admitting to their families that they were not meeting family expectations. Over the course of my practicum, most of the presenting problems concerned career/academic decision-making, although these problems also involve personal issues of anxiety and stress. My supervisors agreed that more of the personal problems such as depression and relationship issues come in over the fall and winter sessions. This makes sense considering that it is more difficult to maintain healthy personal care habits such as exercise, diet, contact with friends, etc., during the winter months and this can contribute to mental health concerns.

### **Personal Reflections**

According to Pederson and Ivy (1993), when giving myself feedback on my counselling skills, I should focus on:

1. behavior
2. observations - not inferences
3. descriptions - not judgements
4. the here and now

5. sharing information - not giving advice
6. *what* was said - not *why* it was said
7. giving only as much information as the person can use
8. information that is useful to the other person - not just myself (p.89)

I am learning to place more value on my past experiences and I am drawing on them to relate to clients' problems. Although the content of people's stories will vary, there are common threads running through them. For example, my experience of my father's sudden death from a heart attack and the shock and grief I went through, helps me empathize with clients who are dealing with loss in relationships. It may not be a loss from death but also it could include divorce, or separation from loved ones.

I have learned to give clients lots of time to tell their stories clearly and completely. If I jump in too soon in an effort to help the client, it may cut the dialogue short and focus the conversation onto something at the surface of the problem and perhaps block exploring the topic deeper to get at the underlying issues.

I think of counselling as helping people with growth issues, problem-solving and decision-making. Now I find I tend to give clients a lot more time to describe their situation to me. Often, the mere act of gathering their thoughts together to relate their story clearly has the benefit of clarifying some issues for them as well. While helping the client tell their story I am basically defining all the details of their problem, helping them see it in more specific terms rather than an all-encompassing situation that is clouding their whole life. Giving the problem a more definable shape, by breaking it into main areas such as personal, academic or job, helps them to reframe it into more manageable terms. They gain hope and some confidence in their ability to handle it. While defining their preferred scenario we are setting goals and brainstorming for possible

solutions. We can look at each alternative and evaluate whether or not it would be a feasible and desirable outcome. Later, once the client prioritizes their goals, we can set about developing an action plan. Sometimes reframing the problem from a new perspective helps to point out resources that have been overlooked or not utilized fully to this point. Later the plan can be re-evaluated for its effectiveness and adjusted if necessary. These are the same steps used in decision-making.

I have used several of Burns' (1980 & 1989) suggestions with clients to help them look at their attitudes more objectively. Several clients have responded well to the idea of journaling their positive accomplishments daily for a two week period to help them focus more on the positive aspects of their lives. Otherwise they tend to focus more on negatives and bring themselves down into a depressing spiral.

Initially, I was inclined to use a concrete approach such as cognitive-behavioral techniques, more often than an abstract approach. This could be influenced by the fact that I was a teacher of very young children for many years, so I am used to dealing in concrete learning terms. I need to remind myself, however, that some clients function more comfortably with a more abstract approach. I am beginning to feel more comfortable with this. I need to be cognizant of the client's learning style or approach to problems. I need to allow the client to explore their emotional issues adequately before moving on to something else too quickly. Now I try to listen to the affective side of their problems rather than getting too caught up in the content and problem-solving.

When it comes to assisting clients to establish a plan of action, I find that many situations and many young adults respond well to cognitive techniques. Perhaps this is because young adults are at a stage in their development when acting independently is still a relatively new experience. They like having a few

concrete suggestions that they could work on on their own, such as writing the "Letter From The Future" (appendix A) to help them clarify their goals. In this way they do not feel their ideas are being judged. Tools such as this can be used by clients throughout their lives.

Initially, I wanted to break topics down into their basic parts. For example, I viewed career counselling as separate parts such as values, skills, interests, and multiculturalism as specific cultures such as Asian, or Aboriginal. I need to step back and view some of the similarities in the "big picture". There are many basic skills which are common to all types of counselling, such as effective listening, clarifying goals, and decision-making. At first I tended to see personal and career counselling as requiring two quite different styles of interviewing. Perhaps this was because I had taken these topics as separate courses. It helped to have my advisor point out that career counselling utilizes many of the same skills as personal counselling. When I was doing career counselling, I felt it was important not to focus too much on narrowing options down. Look at encouraging the client to expand their skill base to broaden their feasible options by trying new experiences. I encouraged clients to keep a portfolio, make contacts, and try a mentoring program if possible once they have decided on a career.

*Strengths:*

It is the personality of the counsellor rather than the techniques or theories used, that is the most important key to therapy. I feel that I am able to establish rapport with clients relatively easily and put them at ease. My friendliness and sense of humor have been assets in the initial stages.

I am able to be pretty open with most clients. I can self-disclose if it will move the therapy forward. However, self-disclosing can be detrimental if done

too much or too soon in the therapeutic relationship. Knox, Hess, Peterson and Hill (1997) stated that self-disclosure can make the therapist seem more human, can make the client's experiences seem more universal, and can serve as a model of self-acceptance, assertiveness or problem-solving skills. These researchers found that self-disclosing had more positive than negative outcomes. Care should be taken to turn the focus back to the client quickly.

After being an early childhood teacher for many years I know the value of reinforcing people's strengths. This not only helps self-esteem which is at the base of many problems, but it also motivates people to take charge of their lives.

I have become more comfortable with silence and giving clients lots of time to think over what they are going to say. I used to be more eager to jump in and rescue people if I thought they were having difficulty expressing themselves. My motive was to alleviate their discomfort, but others may not interpret it this way. Besides, the client needs to put it in their own words, not have my interpretation of what I thought they wanted to say. I have learned to be much more comfortable with silence.

Although I am not a risk taker, I am willing to try new experiences and new ways of looking at things. I am a firm believer that we never finish learning and every new experience can teach us more.

Because I have had many experiences, and have been through most of the stages of the life-cycle that students go through, I feel I can understand and empathize with their concerns.

*Areas that I would like to develop further:*

I think the biggest issue I have right now in relation to counselling is a lack of self-confidence but this is getting stronger as I gain more experience. As well, I think the experience of being shifted into a new career at my age rocked



my self-confidence but it is gradually coming back. I realize it is normal to lack confidence when one is just beginning. In fact, it might be more dangerous to be blindly self-confident because you might not consider all sides of issues.

I find that I tend to be too self-critical when I have missed an opportunity to help a client. I need to remind myself that I'm still learning. It is helpful to be reflective in these instances to learn from them but too much criticism is not helpful and can be crippling. I have high expectations of myself. I need to remind myself that sometimes just being there for the client is support enough. It helps to calm their emotions so they can see their problem more clearly, to see which resources they may already possess, or to initiate some action or decision. It helps them to process their problem by taking the time to stop and think about their situation more clearly as they tell their story.

I know that I have difficulty expressing strong negative emotions such as anger. This could limit my ability to help others explore these emotions. But I am learning ways of coping with this such as using "I" messages to express these feelings constructively.

I am aware that I have a need to be accepted and liked, but I should not let this interfere with using strong probes if the situation requires it. I find it difficult to challenge clients when I meet resistance. I may back off and assume I have failed to come up with the "right" approach to the problem. For example, my client who was dealing with depression would just stare at me silently. I felt like she was saying "O.K., you're supposed to have all the answers, tell me what to do." It is difficult to work with people who are not willing to commit some involvement in the process.

I need to remind myself at times that the client has responsibility for the issue as well. I tend to take on a feeling of responsibility for coming up with a solution or options to discuss and try, rather than encouraging the client to

explore options and weigh the merits of alternatives. This is probably influenced by my years as a teacher. I need to remember that I am a facilitator, not a fixer.

I will continue to develop a closing technique with which I feel comfortable. Perhaps it would be more helpful to ask the client to summarize or highlight which issues were the most important for them. This would help them to process their learning as well.

I find the type of client I feel most awkward with is a male similar to me in age. I tend to think that they have had experience in the work world and want to see "results" right away. I feel I have to prove myself before they will see me as being credible.

I find it distracting to have "unfinished business" on my mind; I like to focus on one issue at a time. However, when seeing many clients I need to trust my organizational skills. It is important to time interviews so that I have a break in between clients to write brief case notes and clear my mind. I find it difficult to close a session when a client wants to go on. But by not staying with the schedule I may be giving the message that their problem is so severe that I am going to cancel other appointments to stay with them. Keeping limits sets an example for the client and conveys the message that I have faith that they will be able to handle their problem until our next session. Of course if it was an extreme issue such as suicide, it would be appropriate to extend the limits.

I found that augmenting my practicum with the literature review provided me with an invaluable learning experience.

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## **Appendix A**

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### **A Letter From The Future**

**(assignment given by Lori Friesen in 43.516)**

## **A LETTER FROM THE FUTURE**

Write a "letter from the future": (Acknowledgements to Yvonne Dolan, M.A.)

Pick a time in the future that is meaningful to you. It could be 6-12 months or 3, 5, 10, or 15 years from now. Imagine that the intervening time has passed. Choose a friend to write to. At the time of the letter writing, you are living a wondrous, joyful, healthy and satisfying life. The goals which you had set for yourself in January, 1997 have been achieved. Describe how you are spending your time, where you are living, your relationships, your beliefs and source of meaning, and your reflections on the past and the future.

**The following directions may be helpful to you personally, and cognitively, as you seek to integrate Egan's three stage model into your counselling. However, for this week, what is important is that you take time to write this letter, so that part of your life story can contain one "turning point" from the future.**

How to use the letter:

After completing the letter, notice what you included in your letter that is not yet happening in your life. What would be the smallest step that you could take towards making one of those things happen?

What difference would that small step make if it continued over time? Are other small steps needed? What would be the next smallest one? What will the results be for each of the steps you can identify?

Do you want to start? If not, is it the wrong goal? If you want to start but feel stuck, are there any advantages to not starting? If so, can you preserve those advantages without staying stuck? What will be the consequences and how will you feel in 5, 10, or 15 years if you do not start?

If you want to start, don't be discouraged by the smallness of steps.



Remember, if the process of change stalls, or if you become overwhelmed or stuck, check to see if the goal is truly what you want, and if so, ask yourself if the step needs to be made smaller. Keep making it smaller until it is one you can do.

Don't give up; you deserve the life you want!!

**Keep a record:**

The objectives I intend to reach by  
\_\_\_\_\_ (date)

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What small step do I need to take first?

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second? \_\_\_\_\_

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third? \_\_\_\_\_

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What can I do today?

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This week?

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## **Appendix B**

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### **Power Distance Index and Masculinity Index**

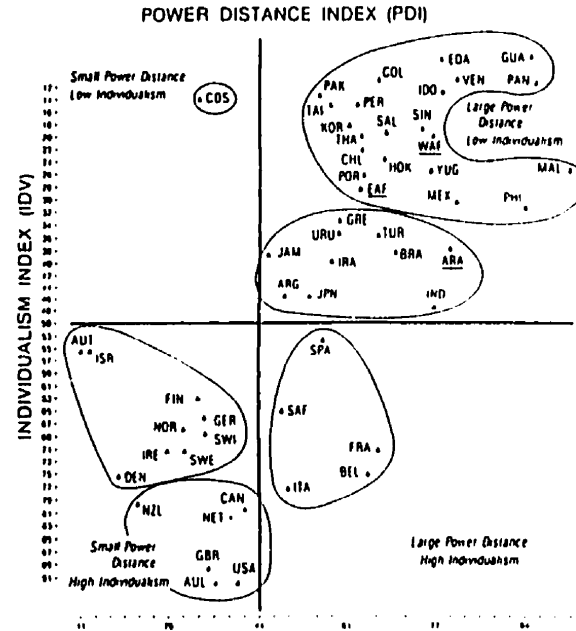


Figure 3.1 A power distance × individualism—collectivism plot for fifty countries and three regions.

Source: Hofstede (1986): 309. By permission.

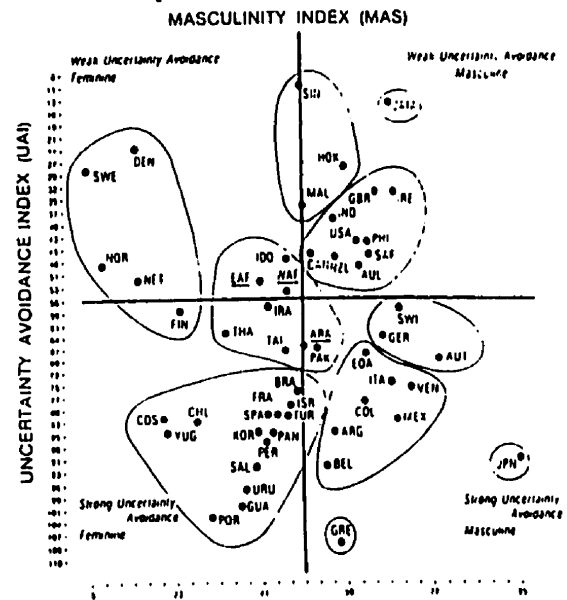


Figure 3.2 A masculinity-femininity × uncertainty avoidance plot for fifty countries and three regions.

Source: Hofstede (1986): 310. By permission.

Table 3.1 Country Abbreviations

ARA Arab countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi-Arabia, U.A.E.)	GER Germany	PER Peru
ARG Argentina	GRE Greece	PHI Philippines
AUL Australia	GUA Guatemala	POR Portugal
AUT Austria	HOK Hong Kong	SAF South Africa
BEL Belgium	IDO Indonesia	SAL Salvador
BRA Brazil	IND India	SIN Singapore
CAN Canada	IRA Iran	SPA Spain
CHL Chile	IRE Ireland	SWE Sweden
COL Colombia	ISR Israel	SWI Switzerland
COS Costa Rica	ITA Italy	TAI Taiwan
DEN Denmark	JAM Jamaica	THA Thailand
EAF East Africa (Kenya, Ethiopia, Zambia)	JPN Japan	TUR Turkey
EOA Ecuador	KOR South Korea	URU Uruguay
FIN Finland	MAL Malaysia	USA United States
FRA France	MEX Mexico	VEN Venezuela
GBR Great Britain	NET Netherlands	WAF West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone)
	NOR Norway	YUG Yugoslavia
	NZL New Zealand	
	PAK Pakistan	
	PAN Panama	

Source: Hofstede (1986) 311. By permission.

Appendix - 2 Power Distance Index and Masculinity Index

Ref - Pederson and Ivey (1993) Culture-centered counseling and interviewing skills: A practical guide. Westport, CT: Prager Pub

## **Appendix C**

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### **Synthetic Culture Beliefs and Behaviors Guidelines**

Ref. - Pederson and Ivey. (1993). Culture-centered counseling and interviewing skills: A practical guide. Westport,CT: Prager Pub.

#### Four Synthetic Cultures

71

anti-counselor, and one as a pro-counselor—to work with a counselor for a ten-minute interview.

8. Videotape any of the above exercises and debrief the group by discussing it.

The participants and facilitators may well come up with other variations using the four synthetic cultures as a safe way to develop working with more complex and dynamic real-world cultures on real problems. In any case, it will be important to have clearly specified objectives ahead of time, and it will be important to evaluate the exercise afterward to see if it accomplished those objectives or not.

#### SYNTHETIC CULTURE BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOR GUIDELINES

The following guidelines will help facilitators guide participants to simulate the four synthetic cultures.

##### Alpha Culture (High Power Distance)

Power distance indicates the extent to which a culture accepts that power is unequally distributed in institutions and organizations.

##### Alpha Behaviors

###### I. Language

- A. Alphas will use the following words with a *positive* meaning: respect, father (as a title), master, servant, older brother, younger brother, wisdom, favor, protect, obey, orders, pleasing.
- B. Alphas will use the following words with a *negative* meaning: rights, complain, negotiate, fairness, task, necessity, codetermination, objectives, question, criticize.

###### II. The Cultural Grid

- A. The following behaviors will express the following expectations in Alpha culture.

Behavior	Expectation
Soft-spoken, polite, listening	Friendly
Quiet, polite, not listening	Unfriendly
Ask for help and direction	Trust
Do not ask for help and direction	Distrust
Passive, but no eye contact	Interest
Expressiveness, unanimated, but with eye contact	Boredom

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#### Culture Centeredness

##### III. Barriers

- A. Language: Alphas are very verbal but usually soft spoken and polite.
- B. Nonverbal: Alphas are usually restrained and formal.
- C. Stereotypes: Alphas are hierarchical and seek to please.
- D. Evaluation: Alphas tend to blame themselves for any problems that come up.
- E. Stress: Alphas internalize stress and express it indirectly.

##### Beta Culture (Strong Uncertainty Avoidance)

Uncertainty avoidance indicates the lack of tolerance in a culture for uncertainty and ambiguity.

##### Beta Behaviors

###### I. Language

- A. Betas will use the following words with a *positive* meaning: structure, duty, truth, law, order, certain, clear, clean, secure, safe, predictable, tight.
- B. Betas will use the following words with a *negative* meaning: maybe, creative conflict, tolerant, experiment, spontaneous, relativity, insight, unstructured, loose, flexible.

###### II. The Cultural Grid

- A. The following behaviors by Betas will indicate the following expectations

Behavior	Expectation
Detailed responses, formal and unambiguous, specific	Friendly
Generalized, ambiguous responses, anxious to end the interview	Unfriendly
Polarized responses separate right from wrong unambiguously	Trust
Openly critical and challenging the other person's credentials	Distrust
Verbal and active questioning with direct eye contact, task oriented	Interest
Passive and quiet with no direct eye contact	Boredom

##### III. Barriers

- A. Language: Betas are very verbal and well organized, somewhat loud
- B. Nonverbal: Betas are animated in using hands but with little or no physical contact
- C. Stereotypes: Betas have rigid beliefs that don't change easily

- D. Evaluation: Betas quickly evaluate a situation to establish right and wrong, sometimes prematurely.
- E. Stress: Betas externalize stress and usually make the other person feel it.

**Gamma Culture (High Individualism)**

Individualism indicates the extent to which a culture believes that people are supposed to take care of themselves and remain emotionally independent of groups, organizations, and other collectivities.

**Gamma Behaviors**

- I. Language
  - A. Gammas will use the following words with a *positive* meaning: self, friendship, do your own thing, contract, litigation, self-respect, self-interest, self-actualizing, individual, dignity, I/me, pleasure, adventurous, guilt.
  - B. Gammas will use the following words with a *negative* meaning: harmony, face, we, obligation, sacrifice, family, tradition, decency, honor, duty, loyalty, shame.
- II. The Cultural Grid
  - A. Gammas will display the following behaviors when they intend the following expectations.
 

Behavior	Expectation
Verbal and self-disclosing	Friendly
Criticize other persons behind their backs, sabotage enemies	Unfriendly
Aggressively debate issues and control an interview actively	Trust
Noncommittal on issues and more passive, ambiguous, or defensive	Distrust
Loudly verbal with lots of questions, touching, and close physical contact	Interest
Maintain physical distance with no questions or eye contact	Boredom
- III. Barriers
  - A. Language: Gammas are verbal and self-centered, using "I" and "me" a lot.
  - B. Nonverbal: Gammas touch a lot and are somewhat seductive.
  - C. Stereotypes: Gammas are defensive and tend to be loners who see others as potential enemies
  - D. Evaluation: Gammas use other people and measure the importance of others in terms of how useful they are.

- E. Stress: Gammas like to take risks and like the challenge of danger to test their own ability.

**Delta Culture (Highly Masculine)**

Masculinity indicates the extent to which traditional masculine values of assertiveness, money, and things prevail in a culture as contrasted to traditional feminine values of nurturance, quality of life, and people.

**Delta Behaviors**

- I. Language
  - A. Deltas will use the following words with a *positive* meaning: career, competition, fight, aggressive, assertive, success, winner, deserve, merit, balls, excel, force, big, hard, fast, quantity.
  - B. Deltas will use the following words with a *negative* meaning: quality, caring, solidarity, modesty, compromise, help, love, grow, small, soft, slow, tender.
- II. The Cultural Grid
  - A. Deltas display the following behaviors when they intend the following expectations.
 

Behavior	Expectation
Physical contact, seductive and loud	Friendly
Physical distance, sarcastic and sadistic	Unfriendly
Tend to dominate discussion and be competitive	Trust
Openly critical, disparaging, and attempt to end the discussion	Distrust
Sports oriented and eager to debate every issue from all points of view	Interest
No eye contact, discourteous, drowsy	Boredom
- III. Barriers
  - A. Language: Deltas are loud and verbal with a tendency to criticize and argue with others.
  - B. Nonverbal: Deltas like physical contact, direct eye contact, and animated gestures.
  - C. Stereotypes: Deltas are macho, hero and status oriented, and like winners
  - D. Evaluation: Deltas are hard to please, tend to be overachievers, defensive, and blame others for their mistakes.
  - E. Stress: Deltas are Type A personalities, generating stress through fast-paced life-styles.

It is important to generalize from the four synthetic cultures to real-world cultures. The synthetic cultures are useful to demonstrate how real-world

cultures contrast with one another in emphasis but also to demonstrate that they each combine aspects of every synthetic culture to some extent. To demonstrate your ability to generalize from the synthetic cultures to a more complex real world, identify specific aspects of the four synthetic cultures that you have experienced in your contact with the following real-world cultures.

Identify a particular example of a real world culture that belongs to one of the following categories and indicate which aspects of the four synthetic cultures you associate with that particular group based on your own experience.

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**Real World Cultural Category**
**Salient Synthetic Culture**


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- I. Ethnographic
  - A. Nationality
  - B. Ethnic groups (African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic, Native American, other)
  - C. Religious group
  - D. Language group
- II. Demographic
  - A. Gender group
  - B. Age group
  - C. Place of residence group
- III. Status groups
  - A. Social
  - B. Economic
  - C. Educational
- IV. Affiliations
  - A. Formal (family, job, etc.)
  - B. Informal (idea, value, etc.)

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**KEY IDEAS**

1. The advantages of synthetic culture.
  - Synthetic cultures provide a safe context for training.
  - Extreme examples help identify contrasting alternatives.
  - Synthetic cultures can be defined and controlled.
  - Familiarity with stereotypes may facilitate analysis.
  - Specific behaviors can be linked to specific expectations.
  - Synthetic cultures are based on empirical data.
  - Cultural contrasts become more personalized in roles.
  - Synthetic culture groups combine real culture differences.
  - Synthetic alternatives help clarify real culture beliefs.
  - The synthetic culture framework is convenient for analysis.
2. The empirical basis of synthetic cultures.
  - Synthetic cultures based on Hofstede's four dimensions.
  - Hofstede's research based on a fifty-five-country sample.
3. Alpha culture based on high power distance.
  - Inequality of status and power is accepted.
  - More authoritarian values are applied.
  - Hierarchical relationships are preferred.
4. Beta culture based on strong uncertainty avoidance.
  - A need to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity in relationships.
  - Clear structure is preferred for all tasks.
  - Laws and rules are important.
5. Gamma culture based on high individualism.
  - Individuals are more important than groups.
  - Competitive in their relationships.
  - Self-interest is of primary concern.
6. Delta culture based on high masculinity.
  - Achievement and assertiveness are important.
  - Male roles are dominant over female roles.
  - Sports oriented in their metaphors.
7. A synthetic culture training design.
  - Groups are divided into four synthetic subgroups.
  - Each synthetic subgroup learns cultural rules.
  - Synthetic subgroups send out consultants to seek common ground.
  - Debrief on strategies to bridge cultural differences.
  - Alternative ways to use synthetic cultures in training.

## **Appendix D**

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### **Mature Students Orientation Questionnaire**



Mature Students  
Orientation Information Form

In order to assist in the implementation of future mature student orientation sessions, we ask your assistance by volunteering the following information:

1. Are you: male\_(23)\_\_\_\_\_ female\_\_(20)\_\_\_\_\_
2. Age range: 21-30yrs\_(38)\_\_\_ 30-40\_(4)\_\_\_ 40-50\_(1)\_\_\_ over 50\_(0)\_\_\_
3. Are you: single\_(34)\_\_\_ married\_\_(6)\_\_\_ sep./div./widowed\_\_\_\_\_
4. Number of children: 0\_\_\_ 1-6yrs old\_\_\_ 7-15yrs old\_\_\_ over 16yrs\_\_\_
5. Do you need daycare for preschooler(s)?\_\_\_\_\_ (6)\_\_\_\_\_
6. Are you employed while attending university? Part-time (1-10 hrs/wk)\_(10)\_\_\_  
(10-15 hrs/wk)\_\_(8)\_\_\_ (15-20 hrs/wk)\_(3)\_\_\_ ( 20-35 hrs/wk)\_\_(5)\_\_\_  
Full-time (35 or more hrs/wk)\_\_(7)\_\_\_\_\_
7. How long have you been out of school? 1-5 yrs\_\_(25)\_\_\_ 5-10 yrs\_(9)\_\_\_  
10-15 yrs\_\_(6)\_\_\_ 15-20 yrs\_\_(1)\_\_\_ more than 20 yrs\_\_(1)\_\_\_\_\_
8. Why are you interested in returning to school? (eg. intellectual stimulation,  
career advancement, etc.)\_\_\_\_\_ (*intellectual stimulation* - 9) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_(*career advancement* - 38) \_\_\_\_\_
9. Are there any support services in which you might be interested?  
Financial services \_\_\_\_\_ (20) \_\_\_\_\_  
Library tours \_\_\_\_\_ (14) \_\_\_\_\_  
Academic advising \_\_\_\_\_ (24) \_\_\_\_\_  
Learning skills \_\_\_\_\_ (19) \_\_\_\_\_  
Writing program \_\_\_\_\_ (24) \_\_\_\_\_  
Career counselling \_\_\_\_\_ (21) \_\_\_\_\_

Personal counselling\_\_\_\_\_(12)\_\_\_\_\_

Mature student lounge\_\_\_\_\_(17)\_\_\_\_\_

Native student lounge\_\_\_\_\_(4)\_\_\_\_\_

Multicultural groups\_\_\_\_\_(6)\_\_\_\_\_

Daycare facility\_\_\_\_\_(7)\_\_\_\_\_

Safewalk program\_\_\_\_\_(8)\_\_\_\_\_

Health information and services\_(5)\_\_\_\_\_

Housing information\_\_\_\_\_(3)\_\_\_\_\_

10. What do you think will be your main priority while attending university?

Family\_\_\_\_\_(11)\_\_\_\_\_

Job\_\_\_\_\_(8)\_\_\_\_\_

Studying\_\_(38)\_\_\_\_\_

Social life\_\_(2)\_\_\_\_\_

Other\_\_\_\_\_(2)\_\_\_\_\_

11. What part of the orientation was most helpful?\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_(Largest response was registration information)\_\_\_\_\_

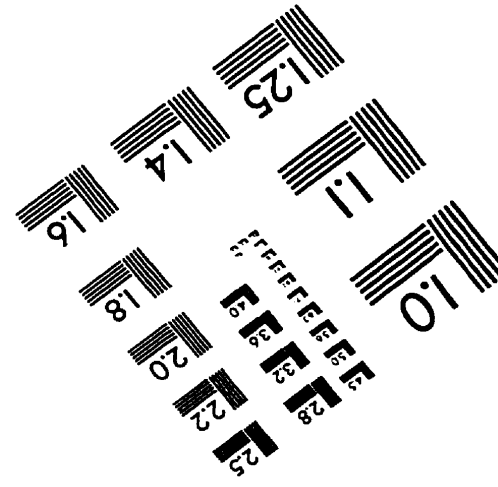
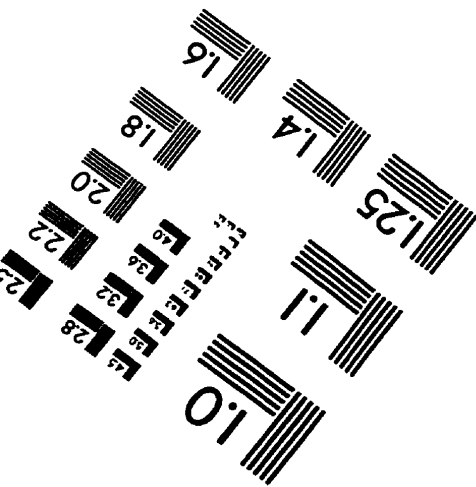
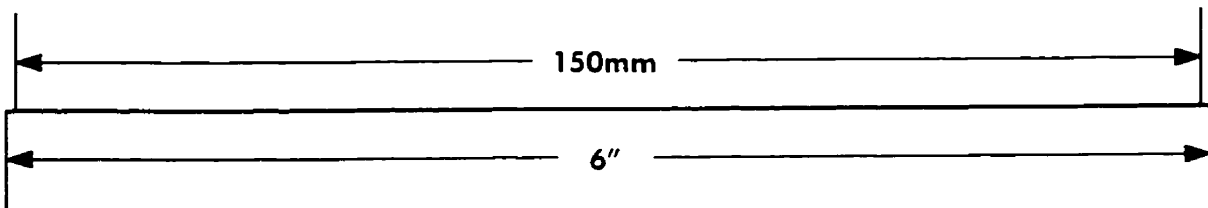
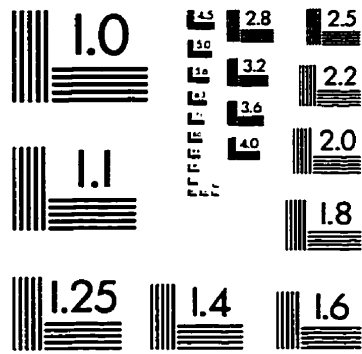
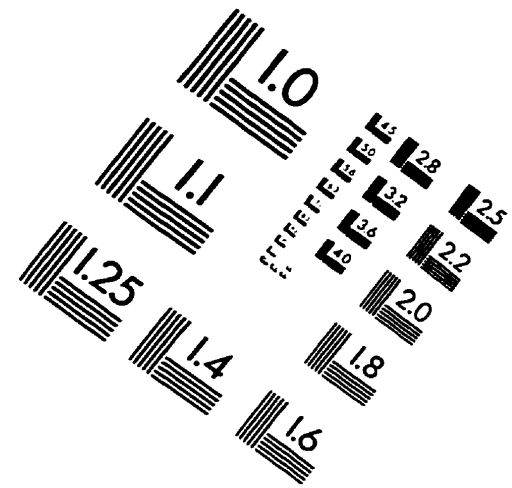
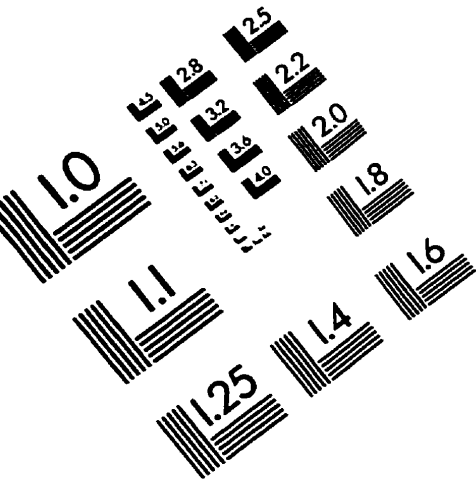
12. How can the orientation session be improved?\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_(No suggestions)\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE

# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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