

Practical Factors For The Consideration of Psychotherapists Working With Magnaculture Aspirants

Dr. Ben Wilson, Jr.
Professor Emeritus
Sul Ross State University
Uvalde, Texas

ABSTRACT

Considerable attention has been given to various cultural groups in our country with minimal discussion relative to acceptance of mainstream culture. This article introduces the concept of the *magnaculture* and the desire of many to matriculate into it. The magnaculture consists of much more than the Euroculture, for it is made up of contributions of peoples from throughout the world. This paper discusses the desire of movement by individuals into this major American culture and ramifications of it for the therapist. It examines several key considerations for the therapist working with multicultural groups.

Special attention is given to the need of cultural sensitivity and a number of other issues existent in cultural groups aspiring to become a part of the magnetic multitude referenced as the magnaculture. The treatise also discusses the need for the therapist to examine self in light of modeling behavior, continuing to work on ethical issues; and the avoidance of ethnic, cultural and racial prejudices.

Volumes have been written about multiculturalism and diversity. Some mental health therapists have developed and or advocated specific theories to assist this varied population. In addition various groups have in the past, and presently, made greater efforts to hold to subcultural traditions, customs, and values than emphasizing the importance of collective traditions, customs, and values found in the *magnaculture*. Magnaculture, as defined by this writer, is a unified United States culture consisting of a variety of identifiable indicators manifested and demonstrated by mainstream participants. Specific magnaculture indicators include, (a) belief in God, (b) allegiance to the country, (c) contributing member of the greater society, (d) strong work ethic, (e) dedication to family, (e)

support and participation in the educative process, (g) striving to improve social and economic status and (h) identifying personal biases and prejudices which are harmful to self and others and working toward the elimination of same.

The writer would like to emphasize that matriculation into the magnaculture does not imply the forfeiture of all customs, mores, or values passed on from previous generations. After all, such customs, mores, and values in most cases were the contributions that make up said culture. Matriculation does however afford greater opportunities. The subculture should not be exclusive from the greater society to the extent of non-participation in the previously described factors that make up the magnaculture. Multiculturalism is a reality in our country. This need for understanding and appreciating differences is expressed well by Wood, Russell, and Wilson (2003 p. 4) in the following narrative:

“Is multicultural education important? What about cultural pluralism? Some people in the United States think everyone living in the United States should assimilate into a so-called “American Culture? Which to them is built on Caucasian middle-class ideals and values. This often implied speaking “only” in English and practicing Christianity. Citizens and residents of the United States often forget that our country began with people from many countries who spoke many different languages. They also brought many of their customs, traditions, and religions with them. Learning about other ethnic groups, races, and so forth will help to ameliorate misunderstandings that often arise from ignorance. When one group is placed on a higher pedestal it leads to prejudice. People should be proud of their heritage, race, language, and ethnicity, but that is not possible when a group is consistently being “put down.” The prevailing attitude in places where English dominates is that we should be a monolingual society. The benefits of bilingualism and biculturalism or multilingualism and multiculturalism are seldom expressed in our schools and communities.”

The magnaculture described herein could be referred to as the American culture. It draws individuals from all walks of life that dwell on American soil and people from various nations who desire to migrate to this country. Put simply, the culture being explored in this treatise is of great magnitude and encompasses the American way of life. It is as a magnet drawing peoples of the country into a unified system of living. Participation is free and encouraged. There are; however, cultural inhibitors which thwart matriculation into the magna acculturation. Examples include the lack of appreciation for education, geographical restraints (self imposed or otherwise inflicted), language limitations, family influences, and economics. When working with these individuals whether it is career counseling or personal therapy it would be helpful to keep a number of factors uppermost in mind. It is my intention in this writing to present for your consideration several of these factors.

First, let us examine why the therapist needs training in cultural sensitivity. Group differences are so important that the Association for Assessment in Counseling, a division of the American Counseling Association, published a compilation of professional standards and guidelines to further the development of “Diversity, Development, and Dignity”, ACA’s special theme for 1993 (Prediger, 1993). This effort was at that time, and continues to be, primary in the mission of helping individuals matriculate into the magnaculture.

The therapist should constantly evaluate his or her attitude toward members of other cultures and avoid the pitfall of becoming victim to the very thing society is struggling to overcome. Michael

D'Andrea writing on this subject of dignity, development, and diversity suggests that multicultural counseling competencies are very important. D'Andrea states: "One professional body that can do much to promote more effective, respectful and ethical counseling practices within the context of our culturally and racially diverse society is the main organization responsible for accrediting counselor education training programs. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs can indeed do much to foster inclusion of professional competencies that counselors need to work more effectively and ethically in nurturing the healthy development of people from culturally and racially diverse groups (D'Andrea, p 34)

Tolerance of others is an absolute essential in therapeutic relationships. This concept is not new to our professions, but rather an age-old philosophical mandate in therapeutic work. The determination to teach tolerance of others has become a strong societal concentrated act during the past forty years and continues to gain momentum.

One reported example of the effort is the Teaching Tolerance grants program that was instituted in 1997. This program "has awarded more than 1,000 grants, totaling more than \$1,000,000.00, to education nationwide. The money supports a broad variety of innovative student-centered projects (SPLC Report p5)." On a massive scale students in public schools throughout the nation are receiving tolerance lessons on a consistent basis. Churches too, are becoming involved in the theme and are underscoring the message through action-oriented activities.

Secondly, authorities in the study of the multicultural learner have identified salient points, which the therapist might consider. Though the following listing is not intended to be represented as complete, Wilson and Wood (1994), compiled a useful sample:

1. Students should not be viewed as coming from the same cultural background solely on the basis of similar racial characteristics (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990).
2. A multicultural education helps students transcend their cultural boundaries and acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to engage in public discourse with people who are different from themselves (Banks & Banks, 1993).
3. Large numbers of secondary students come from social and cultural backgrounds having little in common with those of their teachers (Armstrong & Savage, 1990).
4. The diversity of student population should not be the key factor in vocational choice or career assistance. Rather, individual interest, aptitude, academic performance, future plans, and experiential criteria should be used in assessment and evaluation (Wilson, 1966).
5. Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics are more likely to drop out of school than European Americans (Chavez, Belkin, Hornback & Adams, 1991).
6. Home-culture and school-culture mismatch has been cited as a cause of students dropping out of school in both the Native American and Hispanic populations (Chavez, Belkin, Hornback & Adams, 1991).
7. Knowledge of the student's background, learning style, and language proficiency will enhance the counselor's effectiveness potential (Wood, 1993).
8. Language can be a barrier to cross-cultural communication. (Brophy & Good, 1994).
9. Value systems differ in various cultures. It is therefore important that students and professional personnel be cognizant of existing differences. This knowledge and Understanding will help the individual reach a higher level of cultural sensitivity (Wilson, 1992).

10. Guidance counselors should encourage minorities to take high-level academic courses as well as vocational courses (Gay, 1993).
11. Without exception, knowledge of attitudes, beliefs, customs, manners, mores, and other influencing factors relating to various subcultures, along with other disciplines normally included in a college counselor certification program, particularly an in-depth study of professional counselor ethics, will prove helpful to the counselor. Also, personal visits, contacts, and associations with members of various cultural groups would add immensely to a counselor's repository of knowledge respective of those groups (Wilson, 1981 p122).
12. Counselors who are aware of differences in cultures and ethnic groups are likely to be more sensitive and can help students adjust to the school culture (this sensitivity is usually developed through contact experiences with difference groups) (Wood, 1993).

Although many of the sample items address school conditions or environment, they are equally as important in other interactions such as work, in the neighborhood, church, social functions and definitely in therapy.

A third, and indeed a vital aspect of therapist behavior, is the modeling factor. This is particularly important for those working with youth in our public schools, however not all exclusive. It is important that all therapists who contact varied groups provide appropriate modeling. One major factor in this modeling is relationship, a point emphasized in every respectable training program. This point is illustrated clearly in the following quotation:

“Professional practitioners would find it very difficult to dispute the need for establishing rapport, for emphasis on friendship in practically all counseling theories is highly regarded not only as a valuable asset but also as an absolute essential. It would not be difficult, however, to find those who would take exception to the degree of involvement considered by some to be necessary in achieving the goal of establishing this mutual friendship. The idea has been presented for example that in order to effectively counsel members of certain groups one must accept and adopt behavior of the group. This alteration of a mode of behavior for acceptance alone is less than professional and characterizes deceit and trickery. Often those very problem traits exist in the client and are unacceptable in the greater society.

If the purpose of seeking counselor assistance, or in many school settings, the referral of a client, is to alter a way of behavior which is contradictory to the mores of society it seems reasonable that the counselor should manifest a demeanor congruent to that objective and possess a character reputable to the cause. Accordingly, this places certain restrictions or limitations on counselor involvement with clientele.

Client involvement to the extent of becoming a friend in confidence, rather than a professional whose confidence is needed principally for the purpose of helping resolve problems, can result in personal disappointments for both the counselor and the counselee. This has proved especially true in cases where practitioners have assumed personal responsibility for providing material goods, entertainment, recreational activities, and exceptionally close companionship. The perpetration of a dependency syndrome, whether

knowingly or unintentional, inevitably results in a relationship which is not conducive to effective counseling. The professional should avoid a mode of conduct which would make him susceptible to becoming a self declared guardian, keeper or protector of his clients (Wilson, 1981 p 119-120)".

A fourth area deserving attention of the therapist is the nature of violence among various minority groups. Statistical reporting has consistently reflected high evidence of crime among African Americans and Hispanics during the past half-century. Domestic violence, although not limited to minority groups, is quite prevalent in our country today. Also, the tragedy of drive-by shootings and the impact such events have on individuals trying to transition into the magnaculture can be quite detrimental. The psychological effects of domestic violence on children, family violence, dating violence, and bullying are also subjects worthy of the therapist's attention.

Training in cultural sensitivity, important points relative to the multicultural learner, therapist behavior, and violence among minority groups are important issues to the therapist when working with individuals attempting to make the transition under study. A fifth and final observation relative to the movement into the magnaculture is finance. Work is essential therefore work exploration is vital. A full discourse on this subject would be quite appropriate. Counseling the disadvantaged or under privileged requires knowledge of pathways to success and how one may climb out of poverty.

Matriculation into the magnaculture is available to all who desire such movement. They need help from a number of agencies, especially education institutions and therapists who are willing to expand their knowledge and provide assistance. This major culture of the world embraces freedom, democracy and the apparent opportunity of success for millions. It is no wonder that there exists a constant multitude knocking at our door for entrance.

Notation:

For the therapist or educator who desires additional insight into multicultural issues relating to personal and group movement into the magnaculture please see the National Forum of Multicultural Issues Journal Vol 1 Number 1, 2003, and Volume 2 Number 1, 2004. Articles in these journals are well researched and provide helpful information regarding several different cultural groups.

References

- Armstrong, D., & Savage, T.V. (Eds.). (1990). *Secondary education: An Introduction* (2nd ed.). New York: Macmillan Publishing.
- Banks, J.A., & Banks, C.A. (Eds.). (1993). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Brophy, J.E. & Good, T.L. (1994). *Teacher-student relationships: Causes and consequences*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Chavez, R.C., Belkin, L.D., Hornback, J.G. & Adams, K. (1991). Dropping out of school: Issues affecting culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct student groups. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 8,9-11.
- D'Andrea, M. (2005). Dignity, development and diversity. *Counseling Today*, 48 (2), 34.
- Gay, G. (1993). Ethnic minorities and educational equality. In J.A. Banks & C. A. Banks (Eds.), *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (2nd ed., pp 171-194). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Gollnick, D.M., & Chinn, P.C. (1990). *Multicultural education in a pluralistic society* (3rd ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill.
- Prediger, D. J. (1993). *Multicultural assessment standards: A compilation for counselors*. Association for Assessment in Counseling.
- SPLC Report (2005) Reading programs builds cross-cultural bridges. *Southern Poverty Law Office*, Vol 15 No 2, p 5.
- Wilson, B. (1966). The function of the Gary counselor. Paper presented to the American Personnel and Guidance Association, Dallas, Texas.
- Wilson, B. (1981). The counselor: A model, not just a pal. *Texas Personnel and Guidance Association Journal*, 9 (2) 119-122.
- Wilson, B. (1992) Ethics in counseling. Presentation at Counselor Training Workshop (Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas), Eagle Pass, Texas.
- Wilson, B. & Wood, J. (1994). Why counselors need training in cultural sensitivity. *Texas Counseling Association Journal*. 22 (2), p 52.
- Wood, J.A. (1993). Cultural awareness and why it is needed. Presentation at Spring Bilingual Conference, Texas A & I University, Kingsville, Texas.
- Wood, J. A., Russell, T. T. & Wilson, B. (2003). Importance of multicultural education in myriad strands of United States society. *National Forum of Multicultural Issues Journal*, Vol 1 (1), 3-24.