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DIGEST



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*The Professional Counselor
DIGEST*

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Opportunities for Action: Traditionally Marginalized Populations and the Economic Crisis – DIGEST

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The current economic climate has taken a significant toll on millions of individuals in the United States. Although a broad range of populations have experienced the career development problems associated with this economic context, the economic circumstances have impacted traditionally marginalized populations (e.g., women; historically oppressed racial/ethnic groups; people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer [LGBTQ]; immigrants; individuals with mental or physical disabilities; and those of lower socioeconomic status) more dramatically than others. While there is ample knowledge about marginalized populations regarding their overall career- and work-related challenges, there is a gap in the literature concerning the particular challenges they face in the context of the current economic climate. Such knowledge would make it possible for career development professionals to take evidence-based action to address these problems, and would allow



the career development field to continue its tradition of social action in solidarity with marginalized populations.

As such, the purpose of this study was to investigate the career- and work-related challenges that traditionally marginalized populations face in the context of the economic crisis. Secondly and more importantly, this study investigated actions that might ameliorate these challenges. The results of this study suggest that, while marginalized populations face many significant challenges, there are multiple actions that career development professionals can take in the near future to address these challenges. Specifically, 18 action items, ranked in terms of their importance, emerged from this study. These action items fell into four categories: Practice, Training, Theory & Research and Advocacy. These action items provide concrete pathways toward addressing the career development challenges faced by those who have been pushed to the margins in our society.



Several implications flow from the results of this study. Strategic planning can be a daunting task, but the results of this study provide some ideas and possible starting points for organizations that provide career development services to traditionally marginalized populations. Depending on the nature of a certain organization and the population(s) it serves, the organization can consider these action items in order to determine which are most relevant to its mission and vision. Furthermore, organizations such as the National Career Development Association (NCDA) might use these results to prioritize initiatives in a way that addresses the dire situation of traditionally marginalized populations in the context of a challenging and difficult economic climate.

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Animating Research with Counseling Values: A Training Model to Address the Research-to- Practice Gap – DIGEST

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The research-to-practice gap poses a conspicuous problem for the mental health field. Ideally, published research would focus on topics that are relevant for counseling practitioners and that contribute to solid evidence-based practices. Practitioners would be prepared to contribute to research processes and to effectively utilize published research. Such an approach would represent a useful engagement with research in the field of counseling. However, a reciprocal and productive relationship between counselors, counselor educators and research does not seem to exist. This may be due to a conflict between values that have historically undergirded the counseling profession and the research environment in higher education. Research in counselor education is often conducted within academia, where historically

the dominant discourse has valued positivistic ways of knowing and prioritized measurable academic products. Central to this discourse is the perspective that value-neutral researchers can acquire knowledge through reducing complex human experiences to isolated variables that are discrete and measurable. The resultant research climate increasingly prioritizes positivistic ways of knowing. Working within this framework appears to position many counselor educators' research selves in direct conflict with the values implicit in counseling, supervisory and pedagogical orientations.

Counselor education has historically been a practitioner-oriented field that has emphasized clients' individuality and strengths instead of reducing them to their dysfunctions. As a



result, training programs are primarily concerned with preparing counselors for practical work. The positivistic research perspective is often seen as limited in its practical utility and often inherently alienates those in practice; many practicing counselors view research in counseling and the practice of counseling as separate and unrelated arenas. With the limited content, knowledge and skills, and fragmented identities in counselor training programs, the research-to-practice gap appears to naturally emerge

from such a research training environment. Until counselor education can alter its relationship with research through developing sustainable engagement with research, the gap between research and practice will persist.

In this article, the authors examine the conflicting relationship between counselors, counselor educators and research. They also introduce and describe a research training model that they carried out in a counselor education program, which was animated with the values that guide clinical, supervisory and pedagogical identities within counseling and counselor education. This model may provide an avenue for more effective training in research, which can serve to reduce the research-to-practice gap.

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Counseling People Displaced by War: Experiences of Refugees from the Former Yugoslavia – DIGEST

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of refugees from the former Yugoslavia who migrated to the United States as a result of the 1990s civil wars. Refugees are a diverse population with different worldviews, beliefs and traditions, which helping professionals must acknowledge when working with them. The objective of the present study was to understand the complex effects of pre- and post-migration traumatic experiences on their mental health.

The present research utilized a phenomenological method. The authors recruited 10 participants using convenience sampling and the snowball method. They scheduled a preliminary meeting in order to discuss issues of confidentiality and informed consent. Individuals who decided to participate engaged in a semi-structured in-depth interview protocol. Open-ended questions acted as a guide to elicit thoughts, perceptions and feelings about the participants' pre-displacement experiences, arrival and reception in the United States, and adaptation issues in the host country. The authors analyzed the data for themes relating to the pre- and post-migration experiences, documenting high rates of exposure to war-related violence and the presence of multiple stressors during resettlement. The first set of stressors the participants experienced in their homeland was compounded by a second set of stressors participants faced in their adjustment to the United States. The participants encountered many difficulties in resettlement and utilized a variety of strategies to overcome these hardships. This study offers an integration of the collective essences and meanings of refugees' experiences.

This study demonstrated the depth of the trauma experiences suffered in the participants' homeland. Findings suggested that being a refugee and resettling in a new country are complex and life-changing processes. Overall, the results indicated that the migration process for refugees from the former Yugoslavia was modulated by stressors during the war, migration and resettlement. This study contributed to the understanding of the experience of war in the former Yugoslavia from the perspective of the study participants, and its impact on the mental health of the refugees who are now resettled in the United States. The participants in this study did not utilize any counseling services and indicated that they were not familiar with the counseling profession or services that were available in their communities. The results provide counselor educators, school counselors and mental health counselors with education, suggestions and strategies necessary to work with refugees displaced by war.



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Career Development of Women in Academia: Traversing the Leaky Pipeline – DIGEST

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Women's experiences as they consider, pursue and at times leave jobs in academia are laden with a fundamental set of issues pertaining to gender inequalities. For example, a 1999 issue of Massachusetts Institute of Technology *Special Edition Newsletter* reported on the experiences of women faculty at numerous colleges and universities, stating that women disappear



from the *pipeline* of academic careers at various points. Researchers have approached the question of *why* this is the case from myriad perspectives, including sociological, psychological and cultural. The existing body of literature investigating women's experiences as academicians addresses the issue of women's struggle for equality in the institution, but does not comprehensively address how faculty women developed their career aspirations and expectations, how the essential component of career development influences their experiences within the pipeline, and how career counseling may address women's career outcomes.

To aid in the comprehension and explanation of these considerations, the authors review empirical literature on women's processes in career development and academia, identify salient themes, and present a model reflecting women's career development and

experiences around the academic pipeline. In sum, the authors' career development model of women in academia has three parts: early career development (preacademic appointment, which includes experiences leading up to graduate school), the pipeline (graduate school through academic job/career), and postpipeline (outcomes of academic career). Regarding the first part of the model, women's career development influences are organized into five major groups of variables: cognitive, coping, environmental, personality and relational. The second part of the model, the pipeline, specifies numerous variables affecting women's experiences in academia, which are grouped into the following categories: academic duties, academic environments, individually centered, resources and social. The final section of the model indicates two major outcomes of women's career development and the academic pipeline: career satisfaction and institutional responses.



The model conveys a new perspective on the experiences of women in academic careers before, during and after their faculty appointments. The documented trend of women prematurely leaving higher education and academia is conceptualized via the “leaks” in the pipeline. The authors note the outcomes of the processes that occur within the pipeline and present predictions based on the model. This model is intended to help career counselors identify, conceptualize and treat women academicians' career development issues, and to provide a resource for further research about the inequalities between men and women before, during and after their academic careers.

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Global Links and Gaps in Counselor Education Programs: Establishing a Baseline – DIGEST

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The American counseling profession is becoming frequently viewed as part of a larger global movement. Global connection through students' and educators' international experiences is often considered beneficial to both their multicultural development and their counselor education program. While Leung and colleagues have made strides in shaping the narrative of what internationalization means theoretically in the context of counselor education, there is a lack of empirical research exploring what the concept means in practice.

The authors designed this study as a first step toward addressing that gap. They developed an interactive survey and administered it to representatives from all CACREP-accredited counselor education programs to obtain baseline data on their international engagement. Questions were designed specifically to assess the following aspects of internationalization: How many counselor education programs have



a departmental commitment to international activities? To what extent do faculty and students participate in international activities? What kinds of activities are included?

The resulting data set illustrated the practices of one-third of all accredited counselor training programs. The most noteworthy findings reflected the support for and directionality of international activities. A disconnect appeared between the programs' stated desire for such practices (large) and the resources that institutions actually dedicated to them (small). Particularly, counselor training rarely incorporated international pursuits in a structured, program-wide way; and participating students and to a lesser extent faculty bore the financial cost of these ventures. Also, the predominant form of international activity in counselor education programs was through faculty scholarship (e.g., conference presentations) and occurred



in one direction: that of American professors going abroad, which corroborated the findings of Gerstein and Ægisdottir's review of the literature.

Though this research is a first attempt to quantify the extent and nature of internationalization in counselor education, it does offer data from which to continue an informed dialogue on the subject. The first author has already incorporated findings generated from this study into research on specific internationalization strategies—namely cultural immersion. With this baseline, the counseling community

can further explore the important questions of why faculty and students get involved, what barriers inhibit their participation, and what outcomes result from their engagement in international activities. And equally important, now that data has corroborated the notion of one-way immersion, counselor education professionals can address how to increase reciprocal international cooperation and involvement.

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Smiles from the Heart: Humanistic Counseling Considerations for Fathers of Sons with Asperger's Disorder – DIGEST

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In an effort to contribute to the counseling knowledge base regarding fathers of children with autism, this article reports the results of an in-depth, narrative inquiry study of four fathers of sons with Asperger's disorder. The study investigated what fathers reported as the rewards, challenges and coping strategies associated with raising sons with this specific form of autism. The research process included interviewing each father once with a semistructured interview protocol, transcribing the interviews verbatim and confirming their accuracy with participants, and extensively reviewing the transcripts in close detail for coding, categorizing and identifying themes that the fathers communicated based on the frequency of shared words and messages.

Autism rates are increasing; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in March 2014 that one in 68 children in the United States is diagnosed with a form of autism. Counselors confront the challenge of staying abreast of appropriate clinical interventions to support individuals with autism and

to also help support their families' well-being. The fathers who participated in this study were recruited from the local site of a multistate mental and behavioral health service agency in a small, rural town in the northeastern United States. The fathers' reported occupations were oil professional, meteorologist, stay-at-home father and professor. Their ages were 59, 37, 54 and 36 respectively. All of the fathers reported to be White. All of the fathers in this study had sons diagnosed with Asperger's disorder, a specific form of autism as designated by the text revision of the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)*. The sons' ages were 14, 16, 11 and 6, and they were diagnosed with Asperger's disorder at ages 8, 6, 7 and 3 respectively.

Themes emerged for all of the fathers for each of the three research questions. The fathers stated that discovering a clear communication system was the most rewarding aspect of raising sons with Asperger's disorder. The fathers identified behavioral issues as the most challenging aspect of raising sons with the disorder. They also reported that acceptance was the most effective coping strategy for the challenges associated with raising sons with Asperger's disorder. Counselors who might engage with these fathers are encouraged to consider humanistic counseling strategies, in order to help fathers make meaning of the experiences and processes associated with raising sons with Asperger's disorder, instill hope in the fathers through strength-based counseling interventions, and demonstrate empathy with the fathers. Considerations for additional research also are presented in the article.



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Profiling the Personality Traits of University Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students at a Research University in Malaysia – DIGEST

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Research universities in Malaysia are striving to transform into world-class institutions. Institutional transformation at research universities may cause stress, anxiety and uncertainty for the students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. There is a need to monitor the psychological well-being of these students during the transformation process so that proactive intervention can be proposed to help them cope with the higher standards and demands in learning as well as research performance. Psychologists and counselors at the university can help the students to develop positive coping strategies during this transitional period. This study aims to profile and monitor the personality profile of the university students during this transformation, and to

propose proactive intervention to help the student community cope with this change.

The researchers used a quantitative research method over three phases to gather data relating to personality traits and psychosocial behaviors of the postgraduate and undergraduate students in the selected research university. The personality traits were profiled using an online assessment: the Behavioral Management Information System (BeMIS).

The results revealed a promising personality profile among the undergraduate and postgraduate students at the selected research university. In fact, personality traits such as optimism, endurance, dominance, order, exhibition, self-confidence and creativity were

highly expressed and developed, indicating that the students are dignified, flexible, hopeful and unyielding in their desire to excel. They also value cognitive activity and are insightful. However, their profile does show some concerns in that traits such as support seeking and security seeking dropped continuously over the period of the study. Such findings suggest that the students may not be ready for counseling and prefer not to seek help and support if they encounter problems. Furthermore, the differences between the real-self and the preferred-self traits were much more exaggerated in the third phase. When the preferred-self traits are much higher than the real-self traits, the students may feel frustrated. According to Rogers, incongruence between real and preferred value in personality traits may increase one's vulnerability or anxiety.



Gradual and orderly structural policy changes may facilitate adjustment and minimize needless stressors. In 2010, Tosevski, Milovancevic, and Gajic suggested building trust in the instructor-student relationship to promote autonomy and clarify role expectations. Practicing a student-driven learning approach may inspire creativity and leadership, and may bring forth greater self-satisfaction among the students. It is crucial to continually monitor the personality profile and psychological well-being of the students. The institution can establish proactive intervention to support the mental health and development of human capital in all students.

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The Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Counseling Outcomes – DIGEST

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While the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and mental health is well documented, SES is not well represented in mental health counseling literature, especially outcome research. To respond to this shortcoming, we investigated potential links between SES and counseling outcome. To do so, they examined various indices of SES (e.g., household income) and the degree to which they predicted positive changes in symptom checklists between the first and last sessions for a sample of clients ($N = 49$) at a university counseling center. Because contemporary SES researchers have stressed the importance of perceptions regarding SES, we examined SES using both objective (e.g., household income, educational attainment, health insurance status) and subjective (e.g., perceived financial security, perceived SES) indices. They also explored whether SES predicted three factors that are known to facilitate positive change

in counseling: client motivation, treatment expectancy and social support.

The participants of the study included 49 adult clients who had started counseling at an on-campus university training center. The center was staffed by students enrolled in a CACREP-accredited counseling program. Prior to their first sessions, clients completed survey packets assessing SES, motivation for counseling, treatment expectancy and social support. At the beginning of each session, clients completed a brief symptoms checklist called the Outcome Questionnaire-45.2 (OQ). To measure client change, the researchers compared first- and final-session OQ scores for each client.

Overall, SES was not related to motivation, treatment expectancy or social support. The only significant relationship revealed was between perceived financial security



and social support. To test our main hypothesis—that SES predicted counseling outcomes—we used hierarchical regression. The SES variables predicted significant variance in OQ posttest scores after accounting for OQ pretest scores. Entering client motivation, treatment expectancy and social support into the next step of the hierarchical regression did not significantly predict additional

variance. The following two SES variables individually predicted outcome: education level and health insurance status. Each additional level of education accounted for a 3.6-point reduction in posttest OQ, while clients who had health insurance reported an average 8.7 OQ points greater positive change than those who did not have insurance. Access to education and health insurance may provide

positive external resources that allow clients to focus on the internal work of change in counseling.

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Small But Mighty: Perspectives of Rural Mental Health Counselors – DIGEST

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Clinical literature and counselor pedagogy remain limited regarding rural mental health counseling. As a result, counselors new to the mental health profession are often ill-equipped to ethically and competently serve rural clients. The purpose of the current study was to detail the experiences of licensed mental health counselors practicing in rural areas of the Midwest region of the United States, as well as, inform future rural mental health practice. From a critical theory perspective, this study asked the global question, “What is the experience of rural mental health counselors?” Three subquestions included the following: (a) How does the experience of working in a rural setting impact the counselor’s roles? (b) What are the contextual factors impacting counseling supervision in rural areas? and (c) What is the essence of the professional development of supervisors and supervisees providing counseling services in rural areas?

The author designed and administered a semistructured interview to four practicing mental health counselors working in rural settings. Participants were all female, three of four were in their mid-30s, and three of four had ten years of counseling experience. The participants’ responses categorized the nature of rural mental health counseling into five different themes: (a) flexibility, (b) resource availability, (c) isolation, (d) ethical dilemmas and (e) finding meaning in one’s work. This study demonstrates the nature of rural mental health counseling, highlighting the extra roles and duties participants took on (e.g., teacher, case manager, secretary, grant writer, administrator), as well as the multiple settings in which they practiced (e.g., clients’ homes or place of employment, libraries, churches, funeral homes). This study further emphasizes the ambiguous nature of availability and accessibility of rural mental health resources. At times, funding existed for professional



development, and in other instances, participants had to rely on free, online, and/or local training opportunities. Inevitably, hard work and creativity were necessary in order to secure continuing education and collegial interchange. This study also exhibits problems with anonymity, multiple relationships and cultural bias in rural communities. Limitations of the study include self-report reliability, as well as narrow demographic representation and small sample size, all of which minimize external validity. Based on the results of this study, counselor education training areas of particular import include telesupervision, social justice advocacy and management of dual relationships and breaches in confidentiality.

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