

Applications of Group Career Counseling Techniques in Asian Cultures

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In this article, applications of group career counseling techniques to Asian cultures are discussed. The article first identifies how group-oriented cultures differ from individually oriented cultures, reasons that group career counseling is especially appropriate for group-oriented cultures, and relevant issues in group career counseling with Asian populations. Interventions that illustrate the use of group career counseling with Asian clients are prescribed.

Over the past 20 years, career counselors from the west coast of the United States (U.S.) have been traveling to Asia to provide career counseling, administer and interpret career interest inventories, present career development workshops for businesses, lecture on career counseling at universities, and develop a strong international network of career development professionals throughout Asia (Pope, 1995a). This longevity and consistency have fostered development of Asian colleagues' trust and acceptance in dealing with, what could have easily been perceived as, "these American interlopers." Through the cultural sensitivity of these American career counseling professionals and the openness of Asian career counselors to collaboration with their American colleagues, a connectedness between the two groups has developed. Both groups, however, had to take risks and learn to trust each other. In group-oriented cultures like those in Asia (Asante, 1987), trust is built slowly, over time, with persistence.

Career counseling, in general, and group career counseling, in particular, found fertile ground in group-oriented Asian cultures (Chung & Okazaki, 1991; Das & Kemp, 1997; J. C. Lee & Cynn, 1991; W. M. L. Lee & Mixson, 1995; Leong, 1992; D. Sue & Sue, 1991; Tomine, 1991), but not without going through appropriate cultural transformations. Cultural transformations are always required when differ-

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ent cultures meet and one culture chooses to adopt, in whole or in part, institutions originating in the other.

These transformations are being developed in two places simultaneously. First, they are being developed by the multicultural career counseling staff at Career Decisions International, a career counseling and consulting firm headquartered in San Francisco, California. Second, they are being developed and tested by a network of career counselors in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Hong Kong, Beijing, Taipei, Shanghai, Tokyo, and Manila. This current discussion is limited to group career counseling, as a type of psychoeducational group (Association for Specialists in Group Work, 1991), in Asian countries conducted with Asian clientele; however, much of this is directly transferable to work with Asian individuals residing in the U.S. (W. M. L. Lee & Mixson, 1995; Sandhu, 1997).

Asante (1987) and Pope, Cheng, and Leong (1998) suggested that a sense of connectedness is inherent in Asian societies and all group-oriented cultures. This issue is difficult for some individuals raised in the dominant culture of individually oriented societies like the U.S. to understand and appreciate. For example, there is a complex, two-way interaction between the inherent connectedness of Asian cultures and the specific techniques used in group career counseling; each one enhances the effectiveness of the other. That is, the Asian cultural emphases on connectedness enhances the effectiveness of using group career counseling techniques in Asian cultures. Furthermore, the use of somewhat more nontraditional group methods enhances this sense of connectedness (Bowman, 1993; DeLucia-Waack, Coleman, & Jensen-Scott, 1992; Leong, 1992; Tsui & Schultz, 1988; Yu & Gregg, 1993).

This article identifies how group-oriented cultures differ from individually oriented cultures, identifies why group career counseling is especially important for group-oriented cultures, identifies issues that are especially relevant in group career counseling with Asian populations, and provides specific examples of how group career counseling interventions may be especially effective with clients from Asian cultures. These interventions include establishing career exploration groups, teaching job interview skills, teaching career decision making, and using visual imagery in facilitating group career counseling.

HOW GROUP-ORIENTED CULTURES DIFFER FROM INDIVIDUALLY ORIENTED CULTURES

The context in which all activities occur in a society is its culture (Conyne, 1998; C. C. Lee & Richardson, 1991; Pederson & Ivey, 1993;

Pope, 1995b; D. W. Sue & Sue, 1990). Pope (1995b) stated that to be defined as a culture the group must

have their own geographic living areas, economic and social organizations, cultural traditions, and rituals. Further, a definition of what constitutes a cultural minority must transcend national boundaries, although which specific groups meet the requirements of this definition may vary from country to country. (p. 302)

Asante (1987) stated that individually oriented cultures and group-oriented cultures are two ways of constructing the world and making meaning. This model has been referenced and reported by Cheatham (1990) and Ivey, Ivey, and Simek-Morgan (1997).

Individually oriented cultures can be described as individualistic, independent, complex, heterogeneous, modern, Western, industrial, and youth oriented. Furthermore, this type of culture supports self-actualization goals, prefers a written tradition, focuses on nuclear family and the linearity of time, supports the challenging of authority, and prefers precision in language use. Individually oriented cultures have been described as supporting a sense of separation between individuals and having values that include pleasure, winning in competition, achievement, freedom, autonomy, and fair exchange (Asante, 1987; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985; Cheatham, 1990; Hofstede, 1980; Ivey et al., 1997; Triandis et al., 1993).

Group-oriented cultures are often referred to as collectivistic, interdependent, simple, homogeneous, traditional, agricultural, "third world," and respecting older individuals. This type of culture supports group survival goals, prefers an oral tradition, focuses on the extended family and the nonsequential nature of time, supports conforming to authority, and prefers symbolic language. Group-oriented cultures have further been described as supporting the idea that individuals are connected with each other and have values that include security, obedience, duty, ingroup harmony, hierarchy, and personalized relationships (Asante, 1987; Cheatham, 1990; Gudykunst et al., 1992; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Hui, Triandis, & Yee, 1991; Ivey et al., 1997; Kashima, Siegal, Tanaka, & Kashima, 1992; Tata & Leong, 1994; Zhang, 1994). The U.S. is generally considered an individually oriented society (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985; Hofstede, 1980; Triandis et al., 1993), whereas all Asian societies are considered group-oriented (Gudykunst et al., 1992; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Hui et al., 1991; Kashima et al., 1992; Tata & Leong, 1994; Zhang, 1994).

REASONS GROUP CAREER COUNSELING IS ESPECIALLY APPROPRIATE FOR GROUP-ORIENTED CULTURES

Group career counseling has a strong appeal to many Asian clients, and several characteristics of group-oriented cultures—collectivism, primacy of group survival over individual survival, interdependency, and connectedness—make them especially suited to group career counseling techniques. For example, Asian clients' preferences for a more directive and authoritarian style of leadership, along with structured situations and practical solutions (Leong, 1986; Tsui & Schultz, 1988; Yu & Gregg, 1993), strongly coincide with the characteristics of career counseling groups in general (Garfield & Nelson, 1983).

Brammer (1978), Blustein (1982), D. Sue and Sue (1991), and Chung and Okazaki (1991) each noted that the primary way most people in "non-Western" countries receive psychological help is through systems of informal groups. Such informal groups arise from the individual's community, and the group is composed of individuals who have chosen to be a part of the group (Blustein, 1982). Examples of informal groups are peer groups, book discussion groups, self-help groups, religious groups, and school groups. Furthermore, Banawi and Stockton (1993) noted the role of groups in Islamic societies, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and parts of the Philippines. In these Islamic countries, there is an inherent group orientation that allows group counseling to "be seen as an optimal setting and a way for Muslims to experience personal growth" (p. 152). Salvador, Omizo, and Kim (1997) specifically recommended the use of group counseling, peer counseling, and family interventions as important when working with clients from the Philippines because of the special attributes of Filipino culture, which include *amor propio* (love of self), *pakikisama* (group solidarity), *kapwa* (recognition of shared identity), and *compadrazgo* (extending the family with godparents), to name a few.

Finally, although Asian clients tend to underutilize formal mental health services in general (Blustein, 1982; Brammer, 1978; Chung & Okazaki, 1991; Leong, 1992; D. Sue & Sue, 1991), career counseling, in general, is one type of counseling for which individuals from Asian backgrounds are especially likely to seek assistance and may even actually overutilize (W. M. L. Lee & Mixson, 1995; Pope et al., 1998; D. W. Sue & Kirk, 1975; Tracey, Leong, & Glidden, 1986). Seeking assistance for career issues in Asian cultures does not have the same social taboo associated with seeking help for depression, for example.

RELEVANT ISSUES IN GROUP CAREER COUNSELING WITH ASIAN POPULATIONS

Although individuals from group-oriented cultures may be particularly open to group career counseling, this form of career counseling should be fairly nontraditional and culturally specific. More precisely, the use of more traditional group interventions may be experienced by Asian clients as insensitive, presumptuous, and overly intrusive; these experiences are in direct opposition to the inherent sense of connectedness within their cultures (Leong, 1992). For example, according to Shertzer and Stone (1974), one of the primary goals of any group counseling experience is to create a climate in which the open exchange of feelings and thoughts can occur. In contrast, Leong (1992) stated the following:

In many Asian cultures, there is a strong cultural value that involves humility and modesty in social interactions. This value is often expressed in the form of deferential behavior and not drawing excessive attention to oneself and one's personal concerns. . . . The group climate of open and free self-expression may then be experienced by these Asian Americans as an uncomfortable and culturally alien demand. (p. 219)

Group career counselors must build self-credibility as well as credibility for the process of group career counseling. Career counselors need much patience with a career counseling group in Asia (Leong, 1992). Asian values such as avoidance of confrontation and conflict, indirect communication, and preferences for hierarchical relationships and structured groups all lead to the use of more nontraditional approaches to group career counseling. Furthermore, group career counseling leaders are expected to be the experts, the authority figures, sensitive to and knowledgeable about the group's specific culture, not expecting high levels of emotional self-disclosure early in the group process, and not expecting all Asians to be any particular way (I. J. Lee & Kelly, 1996; Leong, 1992).

In providing effective group career counseling, acculturation and identity development are important concepts to consider because knowledge about these issues may allow career counseling professionals to effectively vary their interventions and approaches with clients. *Acculturation* refers to the extent to which individuals may have accepted or incorporated into their lives aspects of the dominant or main culture of a particular geopolitical region (Berry, 1980; Berry & Kim, 1988). *Identity development* refers to the process by which individuals learn to identify with their own cultural groups. Models of acculturation and identity development, however, tend to

differ across Asian cultures (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997; Kwan & Sadowsky, 1997). It is vital, therefore, that group career counselors accurately assess the status of these issues in each of their clients to determine appropriate career interventions. Considerations of acculturation and identity development give group career counseling professionals another tool to use in determining the career interventions that are appropriate for their groups and for the individuals in each group.

Another common issue in Asian career exploration groups is the lack of verbal participation by the group members (Leong, 1992; D. Sue, Ino, & Sue, 1983; D. Sue & Sue, 1991; Yu & Gregg, 1993). There are two primary reasons for this hesitancy to participate. First, some Asians may believe that, because the group facilitator has status and is to be respected, it would be disrespectful to speak during the group session. Second, because many Asian group members may believe that the role of a group member is to sit quietly and learn from the leader (Leong, 1986; Paniagua, 1994; Tsui & Schultz, 1988; Yu & Gregg, 1993), career counseling groups with Asian clients may need to be quite structured and focused with regular discussion built into the group process. Another consideration in Asian career exploration groups is the facilitator's having knowledge of specific local career information resources. Presently, many Asian countries are developing excellent local job market and career development information, such as the *Singapore Career Guide* (Singapore Press Holdings/Singapore Ministry of Education, 1996).

Because Asian culture is not a monolith, "it is important to recognize that much cultural diversity exists within the socio-political category called 'Asian/Pacific Islander'" (Fukuyama & Cox, 1992, p. 27). For example, several authors have identified (a) 35 distinct cultures as part of "Asian" culture (Chu & Sue, 1984), (b) more than 40 disparate cultural groups as part of the Asian/Pacific Islander category (Sandhu, 1997), and (c) over 150 distinct nationalities that, alone, compose China (Barnet & Oliver, 1995). Moreover, as important as it is to know specific cultural considerations of various ethnic groups, it is even more important that group career counselors not expect all individuals who were born and raised in that particular culture to be the same, nor to expect each client to define terms such as *individual*, *family*, *group*, or even *work* in exactly the same way that the dominant national culture does (DeLucia-Waack, 1996; Fukuyama & Coleman, 1992; Triandis, 1993). For example, a native Malay from Malaysia may be more like a European American from New York City than like his or her ethnically related Chinese cousins because of various environmental and cultural influences.

SPECIFIC GROUP CAREER COUNSELING INTERVENTIONS

The techniques presented here are used to illustrate how cultural processes have shaped the basic provision of career counseling services in Asian cultures. Each of these interventions uses group-oriented aspects of Asian culture to enhance interpersonal connectedness among members (Leong, 1986, 1992; Salvador et al., 1997; Tsui & Schultz, 1988; Yu & Gregg, 1993). Although each example is nation focused, it is not necessarily nation limited. The processes and outcomes of each intervention are cross-national and need to be understood in the specific cultural contexts in which they are used.

Career Exploration Groups

In Filipino society, the concepts of *amor propio* (love of self) and *pakikisama* (group solidarity) are important cultural values that emphasize smooth, interpersonal relationships and group cooperation (Salvador et al., 1997). *Barkadas*, which reflect and are built on the concepts of *amor propio* and *pakikisama*, are important unisex socialization groups for young Filipino men or Filipina women. These groups are developed during adolescence, and often continue until members' deaths. *Barkadas* are peer groups of the closest friends (*compadres*) who are of the same age, who always go places together, who go drinking together, who sleep on the beach together, who develop their own private group language, and who go to school together. These close-knit social groups look after each member, because *barkadas* act as ongoing support groups and are powerful forces in the socialization process of young male and female Filipinos/Fillipinas (Roces & Roces, 1994).

Career exploration groups in many Asian countries are modeled after *barkadas* and are a type of support group (Garfield & Nelson, 1983). Career exploration groups consist of individuals who are at a similar stage in their career counseling process, and this similarity is what holds groups together. In career exploration groups, clients are responsible for their own career development process (*amor propio*) as well as other group members' process (*pakikisama*). Ground rules are established in the beginning of these groups regarding behavioral norms and expectations. Interpretation of career assessment results is provided by group facilitators during group sessions, and feedback is encouraged from fellow group members to provide "perception checks" for each individual.

Job Interview Skills

Japanese champions of the sword (samurai) learn their skills through a complex training program conducted in groups. The special movements and philosophy of sword work are broken down into specific component steps that are studied carefully, one at a time, and independently. Each movement is broken down into its component steps and the person becomes conscious of each of those steps. In learning the precise handling of the sword, the naturally talented swordsperson often finds that there is a temporary decrease in dexterity and performance, at first, as the conscious awareness of the many steps interferes with coordination and flow. Nonetheless, the skills and concepts are learned thoroughly and practiced again and again and again, together, in a group. The group members are responsible for each other so that, when one member falls behind, the other members of the group help that member learn, practice, and catch up. No one goes on until they all go on (Ivey et al., 1997).

Once the skills for the entire group are close to expert level, individual samurai retire to a mountaintop to meditate. They deliberately forget what they have been learning. When they return to the valley, they find that their discrete skills have been naturally integrated into their own style or way of being. After this point, they seldom have to think about the discrete individual skills they have learned at all; they simply perform these skills at a more unconscious level.

A group career counseling intervention that is similar to the skill-building techniques used by samurai has been used by counselors to teach client's job interviewing skills in Singapore (L. Desker, personal communication, May, 1997), Hong Kong (B. Lee, personal communication, June, 1997), Malaysia (O. Mohammed, personal communication, June, 1997; M. Musa, personal communication, June, 1997), and China (W. Y. Zhang, personal communication, June, 1997). Group leaders begin the skill development by deconstructing the job interviewing process into small, independent modules that are then studied and learned. Group members are required to do homework, and help for homework tasks is offered by other group members to ensure that all understand and complete their assignments. They then practice mock interviews in small microcounseling triads until they become experts. In addition, before their job interviews, members go away and spend a weekend in personal retreat and meditation, with the goal of deliberately forgetting what they have learned. After their return, they are deemed ready for job interviews. The rehearsal and practice of these basic components have built a new understanding of job interviewing that becomes integrated into individual member's natural style and way of behaving.

Culturally Appropriate Career Decision Making

In almost all important decisions in a person's life in Asia, both family and community are involved. When an Asian individual, especially a Chinese person, wants to get married, the marriage traditionally has been arranged between the two families in consultation with community elders. Although the modern custom in Asia is that the bride and groom select each other, parents and older relatives often still have much input into this matter, especially if the young people still live with their respective parents (Fernandez, 1988; D. Sue & Sue, 1991; Yu & Gregg, 1993).

Similarly, career decisions for Asian clients are also rarely made without both family and community consultation (Pope et al., 1998; Leong, 1992). When clients first present for career counseling, it is important that counselors assess how much involvement of both extended family and community is needed by clients in their decision-making process. The *Assessment of Asian Family Influence Scale* (Pope & Zhang, 1997) is one tool that may be used to assist counselors in determining the level of involvement necessary. This instrument takes into account such factors as the level of modernity of the family, the birth order of clients in their family of origin, clients' income in relation to the socioeconomic status of their family, and clients' educational level, occupational status, and age. All or selected family and community members may attend each of the group sessions or only selected sessions. Before family attendance, it is especially important to discuss with the client the roles of each of his or her family and community members and to identify who is the most important person in the group decision-making process. This person will need the most information and most deference when the client is ready to choose an occupation.

The Use of Stories and Images to Teach Career Skills

In Malaysia, the Malays continue to use an oral tradition in passing on the rituals and traditions in their village (*kampung*; Syed Amir, 1991). When a villager dies, the older members of the village gather at the deceased person's home. These elders will lead younger members in a variety of rituals to prepare the body of the dead person for burial, including washing the body and the home and encasing the individual in white burial cloths. Later, they will all gather and have dinner together and tell stories about the person's life. The stories will be about how the person was stronger than a water buffalo pulling a plow or how they were like this or that wind or this or that rich man. The use

of imagery, symbols, and stories—a form of indirect communication of their loss and grief—is how they console each other during this time and how they process the pain of the loss (Paniagua, 1994).

By using visual imagery, symbols, and stories, the important traditions of Asian culture are maintained and taught to future generations. Feelings and thoughts are indirectly communicated through these cultural narratives (D. Sue & Sue, 1991). Facilitators can use these techniques to lead Asian career counseling groups. Their group process can use images, symbols, and stories portraying how others have been successful using these new skills in their career planning and development, in their job search, and in their jobs (Horne, 1993).

An example of a story that illustrates what can happen if people are inflexible in their career development process is the old Chinese “tale of the bamboo.” During a fierce storm, the bamboo bends every way the wind blows, while the other trees (e.g., oak) stand straight and resist the wind. But after the storm, the bamboo tree stands proudly, looking into the skies and reaching for life, dreams, and hopes. The other trees lie on the ground lifeless and without hope because they resisted the wind; they were not flexible and did not move with the wind (Chung & Okazaki, 1991).

SUMMARY

In this article, the benefits of group career counseling interventions with individuals from Asian cultures were discussed. These interventions include establishing career exploration groups, teaching job interview skills, teaching culturally appropriate career decision making, and using visual imagery in facilitating group career counseling. In addition, issues that are specifically important to consider, in the context of group career counseling with Asian clients, are (a) to develop relevant and specific cultural information regarding local communities and clientele, (b) to not expect everyone who was born and raised in Asia to be the same or use the same definitions for even the same words, and (c) to assess the levels of acculturation and identity development. The use of these group career counseling techniques may be helpful to many Asian clients.

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