Cross-Cultural Practice

Social Work

With Diverse Populations

Karen V. Harper &

Jim Lantz

LYCEUM

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WITH DIVERSE

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BOOKS

Dedicated to our Families
Stacia and Christopher
A N D
Jan and Max

About the Authors

Karen Harper is dean of the School of Social Work, West Virginia University, and Jim Lantz is associate professor at The Ohio State University College of Social Work. Both have served as consultants, trainers, and supervisors to a variety of social work agencies and family treatment centers in the Midwest. The authors have published extensively in the areas of existential family therapy and cross-cultural social work practice, and both have actively pioneered the use of Dr. Viktor Frankl's existential treatment concepts in the social work profession.

Foreword

In the past two decades or so, several specific developments have occurred in the field of social work. The work of Karen Harper and Jim Lantz reflects some of these developments and, in fact, integrates them so that they have direct practice relevance.

One such development involves the need for practitioners to attempt to enter into, and understand, the world in which the client operates. This world is not just the objective quality world itself but includes the way in which the client processes the world, and the way in which social meanings are both created and exchanged between actors and significant social environments. This theoretical development requires a corresponding evolution in the range of practice responses. To support change efforts by clients, practitioners have to be allowed by clients into the world of clients and have to encourage—say say "coach"—clients to assess change possibilities. This emphasis on meaning and change on the clients' terms is central to practice. Practitioners need to realize this and to actually help promote client understanding of meanings, the evolution of meanings, and so on. Harper and Lantz continually stress the importance of client and practitioner engaging each other at the point of meaning and relevance.

Practice issues of meaning and relevance clearly require the practitioner to be aware of a second development in social work—the growing amount of material on diverse groups in society. Social workers need to know how members of different groups process their worlds and how their cultures actually organize meanings and answers to address basic human concerns. Embedded in the diversity content of this book is a strong appreciation of a strengths perspective. Practitioners need to see that a strengths perspective can be used only if workers know the distinctive cultural packages available to clients. With this knowl-

edge, valid assessment and intervention can occur. Harper and Lantz typically encourage clients to reflect the functional and positive aspects of themselves and their social environments.

Finally, social work practice has reflected the growing appreciation of the fact that certain groups routinely have to deal with difficult situations. Social workers need to know about these situations and the stressors experienced. Harper and Lantz discuss this interplay, especially as it relates to women and veterans and how practitioners who work with clients from these two groups choose to respond.

All in all, Harper and Lantz provide a major service to the practitioner. They directly link the content on diversity to practice, and in so doing suggest the range of roles appropriate for both client and helper.

Thomas M. Meenaghan
Professor, New York University
School of Social Work

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barriers to positive helping outcomes in the cross-cultural helping relationship. These variables include language differences, class-bound value differences, and culture-bound value differences between social worker and client (Atkinson, Morten, and Sue, 1989). Class-bound value differences may include such variables as different attitudes about being on time or about making and keeping appointments. Culture-bound differences often occur in attitudes toward self-disclosure where the white, middle-class social worker values such disclosure and may become uncomfortable or feel that the client is uncooperative if the client remains withdrawn or quiet (Tsui and Schultz, 1985). The minority culture client may have experienced negative evaluation and may fear that responses made will be used against them. This has been the historical experience of many African Americans; Mexican Americans, particularly males according to Molina and Franco (1986); and Native Americans. For most Asians, self-disclosure is not culturally sanctioned nor is the expression of feelings in the presence of those of higher status or in group situations. For many, these are issues of respect, not uncooperativeness as the uninformed social worker may mistakenly think (Ridley, 1984; Locke, 1992). These language, class, and cultural value differences between social worker and client can trigger negative stereotyping, client resistance, and negative counter-transference feelings on the part of the helper (Torrey, 1986; Frank, 1973; Lewis and Ho, 1975; Lantz, 1978).

Those who believe that social workers and other professional helpers should not work with persons from other cultures are not without support from the research literature (Frank, 1973). For example, Carkhuff and Pierce (1967) have provided important research evidence suggesting that counselors who are different in gender, ethnicity, and social class from their clients have the most difficulty stimulating client change. Frank, Torrey (1986), and Lantz (1993) have all pointed out that giving a client an explanation of what is causing the client's difficulties is a universal curative factor that reduces anxiety which is found in almost every culture, and that the helper's ability to give such an explanation to the client in a way the client can accept is very dependent upon the worker's level of respect for the client's worldview beliefs and the cultural similarities between worker and client.

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Believing that one's own worldview is functional for others can turn cross-cultural social work practice into a damaging process. The tendency of the worker to both consciously and unconsciously view his or her own values and worldview as functional and the client's different values and worldview as pathological (Lantz, 1978, 1993) is not unusual. Such an imperialistic frame of mind can easily result in a practice focus of helping the minority client adjust to the status quo. Practice toward such adjustment can produce attempts by the social worker to "help" the minority client to "give up" those aspects of the client's cultural heritage that trigger anxiety in the worker. Such an imperialistic attitude on the part of the social worker is generally not helpful to the minority client's sense of self-pride and self-esteem (Lantz and Harper, 1990; Lantz and Pegram, 1989; Frankl, 1959; Jilek, 1982).

Although we believe that cross-cultural social work practice has great potential to be a damaging act, we still believe that effective cross-cultural practice is both possible and necessary. Effective cross-cultural social work practice depends upon the worker's ability to both accept and respect human differences as well as accept and respect human similarities.

In our view all people are both different and similar. The basic processes of human existence are the same for all persons in all cultures: All persons need to eat, to have clothing and shelter, to learn, to grow through the life cycle, and to experience a sense of meaning and purpose in their existence (Frankl, 1988; Day, 1952; Lee, 1976; Krill, 1969; Lantz, 1974, 1989, 1994). These basic aspects of human existence are sometimes called "common human needs" (Towle, 1952). Although all people throughout the world have the same common human needs, different cultural heritages teach the members of each culture very different ways to go about the process of meeting these needs (Lee). Only by respecting the sameness of our common human needs and the uniqueness of our different cultural methods of meeting these needs can a person begin to become a competent cross-cultural social work practitioner (Jilek, 1974, 1982; Lantz and Harper, 1990; Lantz and Pegram, 1989; Lantz, 1987, 1991, 1993; Midgley, 1991).

Cross-cultural commonalities reflect basic human needs as well as culturally consistent processes for meeting these needs. Culturally prescribed institutions or processes of helping are compatible

with cultural mores. Each culture's helping processes incorporate culturally significant sources of help or problem solving. A social worker who is competent in cross-cultural practice moves beyond assessing cultural differences and develops awareness of processes people use in meeting needs and solving problems. Such awareness is not merely a question of determining adaptation or acculturation of client to culture but is also the task of determining the match between the client's life patterns and the problem-solving patterns in his or her culture (Garland and Escobar, 1988). Relying upon culturally relevant problem solving strengths is consistent with cross-cultural practice and with problem solving in the generalist social work practice model involving clients and their social systems including society and culture.

It is the social worker's responsibility to understand that cultural experiences underlie identity and awareness of self in the world, for both clients and workers alike. As a professional, the social worker must pursue a global understanding of being and meaning in the world from perspectives of both self and client. Every culture has a process of "helping," and to "help" cross-culturally requires not only an understanding of cultural similarities and applications of helping within cultural variations, but also an understanding of the basic humanness of every human being (Garland and Escobar; Lantz, 1974, 1990, 1991, 1993; De Anda and Riddel, 1991).

Competent cross-cultural social work practice requires that practitioners grow in understanding meaning events in the lives of their clients as well as in their own lives. Openness to cultural differences, assessment of life experiences, and openness to uniqueness of psychosocial development in a client's life are lenses for viewing another's approach to making meaning of ordinary and life events (Tseng and Hsu, 1991; Tully and Greene, 1994). To enter into the process of helping cross-culturally, there must be awareness and freedom from bias so the common human condition can be promoted through informed practice.

The organization of this book includes a chapter introducing cross-cultural curative factors and linking them to humankind through ethnomethodological discovery. Various ethnic and racial groups, special populations, and populations of women and elderly are ordered in clusters merely for ease of reading from

chapter to chapter. Each chapter informs the reader about the population and about intervening in the lives of people from a cross-cultural curative factors perspective. Populations included in the book are (1) those groups identified by race or culture as follows: Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians; (2) special populations: migrating clients, Appalachian clients, Vietnam veterans, traumatized clients, and gays and lesbians; and (3) women and elderly who constitute such a large proportion of the population in the United States.

The purpose of this book is to provide students of social work with a place to start in their lifelong efforts to become competent cross-cultural social work practitioners. Social work students must develop a deep understanding of human diversity in order to serve their clients well. We hope the book's dual focus upon both common human needs and human cultural differentness will give students a window of information on helping in cross-cultural social work practice situations.

Consistent with the strengths perspective and compatible with generalist social work practice, this approach helps the client use personal strengths and experiences as well as supports from available services in helping systems. We also hope the book will be useful to social work educators who seriously intend to integrate information on gender, race, special populations, and other at-risk groups into practice course content, as is required by the Council on Social Work Education.

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Karen V. Harper, Ph.D.
and
Jim Lantz, Ph.D.

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Cross-Cultural Curative Factors

The primary job of the direct-service social work practitioner is to help the client develop and utilize internal and external resources in the face of a problem, difficulty, or danger (Harper and Lantz, 1992; Lantz, 1974, 1989; Sands, 1991). Such a task provides the concerned social work practitioner with considerable motivation to discover treatment processes and activities that are helpful with heterogeneous population groups in a wide range of practice situations (Lantz and Lantz, 1989; Dixon, 1979).

Every culture has processes, healers, medications, and prescribed practices that enter the shared worldview of healing. It is from these experiences of healing activities when observed in the field in which they occur, and then recorded and observed again, that phenomena can be understood and shared. Healing or curative factors have emerged through the discovery of natural and sanctioned helping in the world. A cross-cultural curative factor is a treatment activity that has been discovered to be helpful in many different cultures with many different kinds of clients in a variety of helping situations (Frank, 1973; Torrey, 1986).

Qualitative-naturalistic studies identifying such curative factors are useful to the social worker because such forms of study can help the social worker learn about basic treatment methods that are often helpful with clients of differing ethnic background, gender, race, class, or socioeconomic status (Frank, 1973; Lantz, 1993; Lantz and Pegram, 1989; Torrey, 1986). So that the social work student can better understand how the cross-cultural curative factors have been identified and discovered, the following overview of naturalistic research is provided.

Naturalistic Research

Naturalistic research is a form of qualitative research that occurs "in the field," using a "flexible human instrument" to gain and evaluate data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Lather, 1991; Kirk and Miller, 1986). Naturalistic research is done in the field so data can be observed in its natural context and evaluated in terms of its connection with its social environment (Greenlee and Lantz, 1993; Kirk and Miller). Naturalistic research is somewhat different from experimental research as experimental research flows from theory and confirms or disconfirms theory, while naturalistic research attempts to flow from data observed in the field, with the result that theory is created from the data observed (Lincoln and Guba; Lather). Theory evolving out of naturalistic research is called "grounded" theory because it is "grounded" in the themes that emerge during observation of data in the field (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Wells, 1995). Some authorities state that classical experimental research uses deductive analysis, while naturalistic research uses inductive methods of analysis (Lincoln and Guba; Kirk and Miller; Glaser and Strauss). Four stages of naturalistic research have been outlined by Kirk and Miller (1986): the invention stage, the discovery stage, the interpretation stage, and the explanation stage.

The Invention Stage

During the invention stage of naturalistic research, the field worker begins to develop a relationship with the culture to be studied (Kirk and Miller, 1986). In this stage the field worker identifies individuals or organizations who can introduce the field worker to members of the culture to be studied and help the worker to gain entry into that culture. Kirk and Miller report that in this stage of naturalistic research, the research worker focuses primarily upon "getting in" and "getting along."

The Discovery Stage

In the discovery stage, the field worker concentrates upon collecting data. Such data collection should be systematic, organized,

and prolonged, and the field worker should use maximum variation sampling methods to obtain rich and adequate data that are filled with detail and thick with information (Kirk and Miller, 1986; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The field worker realizes that the data collection stage is nearing an end when data collection stops bringing in new facts, new associations, and new data relationships (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The Interpretation Stage

In the interpretation stage, the field worker attempts to identify data themes that emerge and reemerge from the collected data base. The field worker attempts to assure that the identification of these themes has both credibility and dependability (Greenlee and Lantz, 1993). Qualitative research methods (such as data triangulation, member checking, audit trails, and peer debriefing) are used to assure dependability and credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Kirk and Miller, 1986). Kirk and Miller report that the field worker's major task in the interpretation stage is "getting it straight."

The Explanation Stage

In the explanation stage, the field worker exits the field, returns home, and writes the research report. In this stage, field workers must terminate their relationships with the persons whom they have been observing in the field. The focus of this stage is closure for all involved. The field worker should leave the field in a way that minimizes harm to the subjects of the research (Kirk and Miller, 1986). The explanation stage is characterized by "getting out" of the field in a way that is fair to the persons left behind. The preparation of the research report marks the field worker's return home to his or her own personal culture and is a milestone of great importance, both for the project and for the field worker.

This brief overview of naturalistic research has been an attempt to help the student understand the manner in which cross-cultural curative factors presented in the following section have been uncovered by anthropologists, sociologists, social workers, and other transcultural mental health practitioners.

Eight Cross-Cultural Curative Factors

Several cross-cultural curative factors uncovered through naturalistic research have great relevance to the practice of social work with varied populations. Their application in cross-cultural social work practice can aid the worker in discovering helpful treatment activities with special populations and clients with different cultural backgrounds. Eight cross-cultural curative factors to be described are: worldview respect, hope, helper attractiveness, control, rites of initiation, cleansing experiences, existential realization, and physical intervention (Lantz, 1993; Lantz and Pegram, 1989; Lantz and Harper, 1989).

Worldview Respect

The first and most important cross-cultural curative factor is worldview respect (Torrey, 1986; Lantz and Pegram, 1989). Anthropologists and experienced cross-cultural social work practitioners consistently point out that nonmedical, verbal, or psychosocial healing does not work unless the healing methods used are compatible with the client's worldview (Frank, 1973; Jilek, 1982; Lantz, 1993; Torrey, 1986). Since most nonmedical emotional problems result from social, interpersonal, existential, or symbolic difficulties, the healing method or ceremony used to help must be compatible with the client's cultural beliefs (Torrey, 1986; Lantz, 1987; Lantz and Pegram, 1989; Locke, 1992). The following case material illustrates worldview respect in cross-cultural social work practice.

Mrs. A requested social work treatment at a nearby mental health center because she wanted to leave her husband but "couldn't." Mrs. A was a 38-year-old African American who lived in a ghetto neighborhood. She had no children and did not feel dependent upon her husband for financial security. She wanted to leave her husband because he beat her. She reported that she could not leave him because he had "hired a root woman to hex me." The hex was the factor Mrs. A believed was keeping her in the marriage.

Mrs. A was provided with supportive social work services but was also linked with a local folk healer with whom the staff at the

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