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Keywords

mental health of adults, adult development

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Melinda M. Gibbons, Amber Hughes, and Marianne Woodside

This study sought to understand how culture in general affects career development. Using an adapted version of the Career-in-Culture Interview (Ponterotto, Rivera, & Sueyoshi, 2000), the authors interviewed 14 adults from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Through a qualitative analysis of the interviews, themes were identified based on 4 of the interview questions and were reported based on occupations the participants were aware of while growing up, their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, religious/spiritual backgrounds, and family influence. These themes promote a developmental consideration of career-related issues in counseling. The findings can help counselors better work with clients by focusing not just on the individual but also on cultural influences on career development.

Keywords: mental health of adults, adult development

Cultural influences that affect career development are important to consider when working with counseling clientele. Duffy and Dik (2009) identified four categories of external influences on career (i.e., family beliefs, life circumstances, spirituality, and underlying motivations) and noted the many influences beyond people's control that significantly shape their career development. Cultural influences affecting career development include gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion, socioeconomic status (SES), and disability (Erford & Crockett, 2012). Most researchers focus on the unique career needs of a specific cultural group and consider how counselors might best serve these groups. The purpose of the current study was to explore the cultural influences on career development for participants from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Specifically, we wondered about the influence of one's cultural background, religion, and family on career development, given that these were the issues covered in the Career-in-Culture Interview (CiCI; Ponterotto, Rivera, & Sueyoshi, 2000) protocol.

CULTURE AND CAREER

Exploring cultural influences on career development remains an essential aspect of career counseling. Flores and Heppner (2002) noted the increase in ethnic minorities and women in the workplace as reasons to explore culture in career counseling. Similarly, Ponterotto et al. (2000) pointed to demographic changes in

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the workplace as the rationale for developing a culture-based intake interview for career counseling. Blustein, Kenna, Gill, and DeVoy (2008) focused on socioeconomic differences in workers as a motivation for including cultural implications on career development in counseling. Whiston and Keller (2004) identified the direct influence family has on career development, stressing the need for family exploration in career counseling. In all cases, scholars viewed people's cultural background as influential to their career development and choice.

Although many calls for inclusion of conversations about culture exist, studies demonstrate some gaps in both research and training. Whiston and Keller (2004) observed the influence of family on career choices, but found that most studies concentrated only on the influence in childhood through early adulthood. The studies they did find with adults focused primarily on one aspect of culture, typically ethnicity or gender, so they called for more overarching studies on family influence on career with adult participants. Vespia, Fitzpatrick, Fouad, Kantamneni, and Chen (2010) investigated perceived multicultural competence in career counselors and learned that although these counselors felt confident in their abilities to provide culture-sensitive counseling, they were not always able to apply their abilities with actual clients. Fouad and Byars-Winston (2005) reviewed studies on the effects of race and ethnicity on career development and identified that perceived barriers were the primary difference between ethnic minority and majority clients. However, they noted the lack of studies that considered multiple contextual factors and called for a broader understanding of cultural influence in future research. In his review of career and spirituality, Duffy (2006) found only a few studies that explored how religion affected career development tasks. He called for future research on how spiritual beliefs shape career choice and the role that religion plays in healthy career development. In all of these studies, researchers identified cultural influence as a key aspect of career development, but few studies truly demonstrate the specifics of these links.

CAREER AS A DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS

Viewing individuals through a life-span lens reflects a belief that human beings change over time, from birth to adulthood (Santrock, 2011). This perspective explores the complex aspects of growth and looks for ways to describe physical, cognitive, and social aspects of life experience, including principles of human development and influences of culture, race, and ethnicity on that development. Although most newer career theories include a developmental mind-set, Donald Super (1957) first introduced the concept of career as a developmental process. Originally conceived as a stagelike developmental process, Super later adapted his theory to include the recycling of stages based on changes in the world of work (Sharf, 2010). Savickas (1997) stressed the importance of adding adaptability to this developmental approach, noting the effects of culture and environment on work-related perspectives. Although revised, the concept of a life-span approach to career development remains central to career counseling.

More recently, new terms such as *protean* and *boundaryless* describe the ever-changing landscape of today's adult workforce (Briscoe, Henagan, Burton, & Murphy, 2012). A protean mind-set reflects a values-driven approach to career

in which people feel self-directed and responsible for their own success, whereas a boundaryless attitude focuses on careers independent of a physical organization or worksite and embraces the idea of contractual and short-term work assignments with a single business (Briscoe et al., 2012). As work changes, so does the way we approach career development.

Two new approaches to career counseling, developed in recent years, focus specifically on cultural background as an important aspect of career development. Blustein (2011) suggested a relational approach to career counseling, focused in part on how early experiences with family and society shape one's path to a career. He described culture as "the lens through which we understand relationships and working" (p. 9). Blustein called for research that helps explain the ways that cultural background affects career development and choice. Relatedly, Savickas (2012) promoted the idea of career construction, an approach that responds to the changing nature of the world of work. Savickas noted the loss of predictable career paths that lead to the continual reimagining of one's career identity to support the need for new visions of career counseling. As part of the counseling process, educators teach counselors to pay particular attention to meaning assigned to cultural roots in their lives, because these meanings are essential to identity formation (Savickas, 2012). Career as a developmental process, directly affected by cultural background, served as an impetus for this current research.

In this study, we used Ponterotto et al.'s (2000) CiCI to explore the influence of cultural background, religion, and family on the career development of adults from diverse backgrounds. When designing the interview protocol, Ponterotto and colleagues noted five interacting spheres affecting career development. We identified one, titled *culture, religion, and family*, as the focal point for our research. We wanted to qualitatively assess the commonalities of cultural influence in adults who represented a wide variety of backgrounds, including differences in gender, sexual orientation, region of country, ethnicity, SES, and career choice, but focused on the role of culture, religion, and family influences in our analysis.

METHOD

We chose a qualitative approach to examine cultural influence on career development based on several rationales. First, we recognized the multiple realities and worldviews of our varied participants (Creswell, 2007). In fact, our goal was to focus on these various realities, especially as they were influenced by cultural background. In addition, our aim was to consider the intersection of various cultural experiences, allowing us to explore the essence of experience across individuals (Creswell, 2007) rather than focusing on a single aspect of culture. Finally, we wanted to use the interview protocol described below, and this required a qualitative analysis. We selected the constant comparative method (CCM; Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as an analysis approach.

Features of CCM support qualitative inquiry using inductive analysis to articulate the meaning of participant experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). There are two primary areas of focus of analysis for CCM: data suggested by the researcher based on participant language, or data that are particularly relevant to the area of study (Glaser

& Strauss, 1967). Data include written and oral data such as individual interviews, focus groups, and written documents (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The value of CCM is that it provides researchers with a tool to compare and contrast interview data to identify and connect categories of thought on a given subject.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) first used CCM as a way to analyze data for grounded theory. The use of CCM expanded in two ways since its introduction by Glaser and Strauss. First, researchers suggested that CCM needed a clearer process of analysis (Boeije, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In response to this limitation, several researchers articulated step-by-step approaches. For example, Boeije (2002) provided a five-step process, used in this study, to conduct a CCM analysis. Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, and Coleman (2000) used the metaphor of the kaleidoscope as a way to describe the CCM data analysis process. Addressing a second concern, the link of CCM to grounded theory, Fram (2013) described a much wider use of the method and proposed creative uses. In addition, she suggested the importance of creativity when using CCM, such as integrating it with discourse analysis or introducing a theoretical frame, both beyond the usage established by Glaser and Strauss.

Participants

This study’s purposeful sample (Merriam, 2009) included 14 adults recruited through word-of-mouth. We intentionally sought participants who represented a variety of cultural backgrounds (e.g., ethnicity, sexual orientation, SES, education level, region of country). To achieve this diversity, we created a list of 14 qualities we were seeking and found participants who represented a specific cultural group. This method is known as quota sampling, in which researchers select the number of people and the characteristics of the participants when designing the study (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Using quota sampling, saturation was not our goal; instead, we sought a representative group through which to examine cultural influence on career. Although we selected participants to represent specific demographics, most represented various other demographic categories as well. For example, we selected one participant because she was African American. She was also a first-generation college student and was in the military. All participants were between ages 26 and 55, and seven men and seven women participated in the interviews. Participants primarily resided in three U.S. states—two in the Southeast and one in the Midwest—although several lived in different regions during their childhood. Demographic information about the participants is presented in Table 1. Pseudonyms are used to protect participants’ identities.

Procedure

We conducted interviews over a 6-month period. Each interview lasted between 10 and 60 minutes and we asked all participants the same 10 questions in the same order. Differences in interview length were primarily due to the extent to which participants elaborated on their responses. We gave participants a gift card for their participation. We used the interviews for two purposes. First, we used the interviews in our graduate-level career counseling courses. Students watched the videos and created career interventions based on themes they identified in the interviews. In addition, students completed the interview themselves with a peer during class time. Second, we used the interviews to investigate cultural influences on career development.

TABLE 1
Participant Descriptions

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity/Race	Education Level	Current Occupation
Brad	Male	Mid-30s	Caucasian	High school	Roofer
Jeff	Male	Late 20s	Caucasian	Associate's	Computer networker
Ashley	Female	Mid-20s	Caucasian	Associate's	Bartender
Carol	Female	Early 50s	African American	Master's	Academic advisor
Robert	Male	Early 30s	African American	High school	Car detailer
Maryanne	Female	Early 30s	Caucasian	Master's	Herpetologist
Susan	Female	Early 30s	Caucasian	Master's	Career counselor
Mark	Male	Late 40s	Caucasian	Bachelor's	Investment banker
Jose	Male	Mid-30s	Latino	Bachelor's	Civil engineer
Karen	Female	Mid-30s	Caucasian	High school	Program coordinator
Nicole	Female	Early 40s	African American	Master's	Nurse educator
Heather	Female	Late 30s	Caucasian	Bachelor's	Insurance adjuster
Dan	Male	Mid-50s	Caucasian	Bachelor's	Hair stylist
Thomas	Male	Late 20s	Caucasian	Master's	School counselor

Note. Education level refers to the highest degree completed by the participant.

We used an adapted version of the CiCI (Ponterotto et al., 2000) as the basis for all interviews. The CiCI is a semistructured intake interview developed to explore cultural influences on career development. The 10 questions in the adapted interview focus on study participants' early awareness of occupations, work experience, cultural and ethnic background, spiritual background, family influence on career, community influence on career, and career goals. Ponterotto et al. (2000) pilot tested the CiCI with graduate students and learned that most found the interview helpful as a way to understand career concerns and explore cultural influences on career choices.

In their initial development of the original, 23-question CiCI, Ponterotto et al. (2000) theorized that the questions represented five interconnected domains related to overall career development. Ponterotto et al. later created a 13-question CiCI; we adapted this version to create our 10-question interview. The three questions we removed were: Do you believe you can accomplish whatever goals you set for yourself? How do you see career counseling helping you achieve your career goals? and What do you see as the greatest barrier to achieve your career objective? Our interviews were not with career counseling clients, so these questions seemed less relevant for our purposes. The remaining 10 questions included at least one question from each domain, with a focus on the domain representing culture, religion, and family. Our research interest was to explore cultural influence on career development, so we included only the four questions in this domain for the current study. The specific questions were: (a) What type of occupations were you aware of growing up? (b) Tell me about your cultural and ethnic background; (c) Tell me about your religious/spiritual background: How important is religion or spirituality in your life and how is your religious/spiritual background related to your current career goals? and (d) How has your family, both immediate and extended, influenced your career goals and do your career goals match or conflict with your family's expectations?

Credibility

Tracy (2010) outlined various criteria for maintaining credibility in qualitative research. The first of these is that the topic is relevant. Understanding how culture

interacts with career development is a topic that needs more research to explain the connection. Therefore, this topic is extremely relevant to career researchers and practitioners. Tracy also identified rich rigor as a second source of credibility. We maintained rigor throughout the data analysis process by meeting as a team to analyze the data, taking notes along the way, and reporting all steps of the data analysis process. Finally, we used multiple levels of comparison in coding, at the question level and the individual level, to increase validity (Boeije, 2002).

Data Analysis

Before beginning our analysis, we discussed our views about cultural influences on career development, as well as our own upbringing and the influence of culture on our career choices. We also shared our general perspectives on career and culture, and discussed how our experiences might influence our data analysis. These steps helped us become aware of our potential biases; considering our own lived experiences allowed us to set aside preconceived frames of reference and view the interviews through less biased eyes (Moustakas, 1994).

All interviews were transcribed for analysis purposes. To analyze the data, we utilized the CCM introduced by Glaser (1965). This method involves multiple steps of comparison depending on the type of data collected (Boeije, 2002). First, we separated the interviews by question. Using the open-coding method described by Boeije (2002), we individually coded each passage of the questions. New themes emerged as we read responses from each participant. Then, we met together and discussed our thematic analysis. In these meetings, we returned repeatedly to the transcripts and negotiated meanings and themes. After three rounds of individual analysis followed by group meetings, we created themes and subthemes for each of the four questions.

RESULTS

Results are presented for each interview question. We describe the common themes found across participants and provide quotes to illustrate the themes.

What Occupations Were You Aware of Growing Up?

We identified two topics and two themes (italicized in text) for this question. Nine participants discussed *careers that their parents held*. In some cases, participants simply named their parents’ careers, whereas in other instances, they described those careers to us. For example, Dan explained,

Of course I knew my parents’ occupations. My father was with the railroad. My mother was more or less a bookkeeper. My dad did have a college degree. My mother, I think she was like a business, which was like a 2-year program I think for just bookkeeping.

Brad was briefer, saying “Probably just my dad being a Pepsi man. Mom was waiting tables and stuff.”

Six participants described *careers other family members held* as well. Heather mentioned several family members, indicating,

I was exposed to the retail environment through my grandmother and an aunt of mine. I guess a lot of science careers. I have an uncle that’s a chemist and my grandfather was an engineer. A lot of my cousins are engineers and my sister is a chemical engineer. So a lot of sales, insurance, and science.

Carol described one family member who influenced her own career path: “I have one cousin that was educated, and she was a teacher. So I just always thought that I would be an educator or a teacher, but an elementary ed. teacher.” Participants mentioned family as a source of information for career knowledge.

Two general themes emerged beyond the topics they discussed. First, seven participants discussed their *limited career exposure as a child*. Susan said,

It was a factory town. It was an industrial town. So it wasn't a town where there was a lot of professional businesses. I think that because of that, I really didn't know about more occupations until I got to college.

Thomas indicated he knew about various careers, but “more specific ones, I was probably not aware of because nobody really opened them up to me because I didn't ask about them or anything like that.” For these participants, limited exposure to careers directly affected their own career paths. Five participants also mentioned *careers that all kids know*. Interestingly, these careers differed from participant to participant, and included teacher, firefighter, police, doctor, lawyer, nurse, architect, secretary, ballet dancer, and astronaut. For example, Ashley explained,

A police officer. When I was 6, I wanted to be a ballet dancer but that didn't happen. And teacher. But other than that, like growing up wise as a little kid, those are the only careers that are really dominant.

Participants had different career experiences growing up.

Tell Me a Little About Your Cultural or Ethnic Background

Participants shared a variety of cultural information in response to this question. Four major background types were named, and three themes resulted from this prompt. The primary cultural groups participants specifically mentioned were: region of the country (eight participants), race or ethnicity (eight participants), religion (seven participants), and SES (four participants). Examples of these topics include Robert explaining, “Well, I grew up in the church my whole life, until I was 18. I went to church every Sunday, so that's pretty much where a lot of my background came from” and Ashley mentioning, “We're not rich, but we're not really poor either, even though we do have hard times.”

Participants also identified three themes. The first theme stemmed from the interview prompt “Tell me a little about your cultural or ethnic background” being used as a way for participants to provide a *nonthreatening way to tell family stories*. Ten participants shared stories in response to this question. For example, Nicole revealed,

Family was a big part of our growing up. There was never a time at our home that we can just remember just our family living together, like me, my mom, my dad, my siblings, just us. We always had an extended family member living with us.

Susan explained why her family left the church, saying,

We had an African American family, husband and wife, and their son who was placed in our church. At that time, we were going to church pretty regularly. . . . But the story I guess is that our town really ran that family out and were very unsupportive and not welcoming to that family. . . . So that was actually the last time that my family and I went to church regularly, because my parents were just not going to be a part of that.

Most of the participants responded with diverse stories about growing up in their families as a result of being given this prompt.

The second theme from this interview prompt was *stories about education*. Eight participants went well beyond just describing their educational level to sharing their school experiences and their family's beliefs about schooling. Karen, who recently returned to school, explained,

Neither side are big in education at all. Like even now, my parents are like, "Why are you doing this?" And they don't pay for us to learn anything. They are like, "Really?" Education is just not important to them like it is to me.

Carol's family had the opposite perspective on education:

Neither of my parents were educated. My father made it to the fourth grade. My mom would be considered functional illiterate. My great grandparents were slaves. And so the interesting thing, even though my parents were not educated, especially my mom, she always pushed education on us. So, as a child, I always knew that once I graduated from high school I was going to college.

Many of our participants reflected on the cultural role of education on their upbringing.

Finally, five participants discussed *exposure to diversity*. Jose explained, "Growing up, my mom always did teach me that it's not important—color, gender, race, or anything." Heather also discussed her exposure to others: "I guess just the broad range of people I was exposed to influenced me the most." For these participants, it seemed important to explain how they viewed culture in general as well as to describe their own cultural backgrounds.

How Important Is Religion/Spirituality in Your Life and How Is It Related to Career Goals?

Four major themes, two with subthemes, emerged from this question. Most of the participants described their *own religious views*. Within this theme, eight participants discussed their *religious views now versus growing up*. Carol mentioned, "I was raised in a southern Baptist church. Still go to church. It's important to me. I'm more into spirituality now instead of religion." Similarly, Heather explained, "I grew up in the Episcopal Church and still lean that way. I am currently not a member of a church . . . and hadn't been since I'd been to school up here." Nine participants also discussed their *personal belief system*. Jeff said, "I've never really took on a title of religion. I do believe. I know there is something up there. There is a greater power. We don't go to church, but I do believe there is a higher power." Participants felt their religious views were important to describe.

Another theme that emerged was the *influence religion had on their career paths*. Specifically, six participants mentioned that religion influenced *the way they act at work*, and three explained that religion *directly influenced their career choices*. Ashley explained, "I try my best to not gossip. Gossip leads to trouble and that's just not good." Mark described how being Jewish and in the bond business were related for him.

The bond business in this country, it floats around the Internet now and then, but one of the first financiers of the American Revolution was a Jewish guy from Philadelphia. So we've been involved in it. [Jewish coworkers] might be killing each other during the day, but at night they were raising money for Israel for other Jewish welfare projects. So they may not have gotten along during the day, but all of those people got along outside of work.

For some participants, their religious backgrounds affected their work behavior and influenced career choices.

Two other themes also arose. Five participants described a *sense of community* related to religion and spirituality. Jose said, "In the military, obviously, there are a lot of religions. I went to all the services. . . . I think it's just the unity among everybody where we're all mankind." Karen, who had recently began working in a field related to her religion, said, "and now that I do work in the Jewish community, I love it. I love that everybody I talk to knows the same holiday that I know or knows the same prayer." For these participants, religion is a way to bring people at work together. For five others, religion and spirituality seemed to have *no effect on their career development*. Maryanne said, "I don't know if they're really related at all. I don't feel as if my position requires that." These few viewed religion and career as completely separate.

How Has Your Family Influenced Your Career and Do Your Career Goals Match Your Family's Expectations?

Two major themes emerged from this question. Eight participants described *encouragement of career exploration* from their families. Participants mentioned that their parents encouraged them to explore careers in general rather than pushing them toward specific jobs. As Maryanne described, "I always felt like my family was supportive. No one ever told me not to do certain things or do certain things." Thomas also experienced general encouragement, saying, "But as far as support from my family when I was going to school, they never actually tried to direct me on which path I should pursue or anything like that." In addition, participants' parents generally supported the choices their child made. Jeff explained, "I've detected a note of pride in my father's voice when he's bragging to family that his son is a computer tech. So I think they're happy for me." These participants also noted their parents' encouragement to explore careers as they saw fit.

Twelve of the participants also mentioned the *level of support* they received from their families. Six participants cited passive support. Dan mentioned, "They said if you want to try that then feel free go ahead, and so I was very fortunate to have that. Even changing colleges midstream, they said if that's what's going to make you happy then that's fine." Four other participants noted that their family was a major influence on their career path. Nicole described her mother's reaction to her winning an award for academic excellence: "I came home and told my mom. And basically what she said was that she wasn't expecting any less. So there was that expectation . . . there was that pressure to maintain that level of excellence." Two of the participants indicated they received no career-related support from their families. Brad responded, "Well, I guess probably none at all. I never really had a person to look up at." Participants expressed different levels of family influence on their career development, and these levels affected their career choices in various ways.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored cultural influences on career development in working-age adults. The results demonstrate the influence people's cultural backgrounds have on their career development and the various ways that culture can affect

career choices. In this section, we discuss these results and provide suggestions on how to address the themes in counseling.

The most important result of this study was verifying the obvious influence that culture has on career development. Our participants described culture broadly, including SES, ethnicity, religion, region of country, and education. They discussed how family influenced their career choices and career behaviors and how early exposure to careers affected them. Every participant identified some aspect of their cultural background that swayed their career path. Without exploring these topics, career counseling clients might not recognize how their client's background affects their career outlook.

In addition, culture affected the participants not only in their early career development but also in their current career choices. Segers, Inceoglu, Vloeberghs, Bartram, and Henderickx (2008) noted the influence of culture on boundaryless and protean career attitudes. They found that education level, age, gender, country of origin, and cultural background all affect adults' work-related attitudes, both internal (protean) and external (boundaryless). Briscoe et al. (2012) studied workers in today's unstable workforce and found that boundaryless and protean mind-sets affected current levels of help-seeking, coping skills, and psychological well-being. Because cultural background often influences these mind-sets, and because these perspectives help clients to better navigate current career issues, it is vital that counselors include discussions of culture in their work with clients of all ages.

Using an intake interview such as the CiCI (Ponterotto et al., 2000) can provide counselors with a way to help clients reveal how culture influenced their career development. Questions target various aspects of career development, including specific and broader cultural influences. Discussion about these cultural influences on careers can become part of the rapport-building process with all clients, leading to a more holistic picture of career counseling clients.

Influence on Careers

Family, cultural background, and religion had both direct and indirect influences on the careers of the majority of participants. Participants' families influenced their careers through the career knowledge they provided and the different levels of support. Whiston and Keller (2004) noted the profound influence of family on career development, so it seems reasonable to include this topic in career counseling. Discussions about the level of family influence (e.g., none, passive, active) early in the career counseling process might shed light on the powerful messages clients receive about their careers. Gibbons and Woodside (2014) found that adults from low education households were more influenced by messages received from their fathers. In our study, the participants who named the careers their parents held seemed to know more about their fathers' careers. Therefore, identifying which parent influenced career development is important. Family is an often overlooked aspect of career development, but we suggest its inclusion in the career counseling process.

Participants in our study spoke of being encouraged by family members to generally explore careers or to choose what would make them happy. As with career knowledge, family influences career exploration and academic achieve-

ment. Therefore, understanding and talking about the role that family plays and has played in an individual's career development can increase his or her insight and awareness. These conversations can then lead to discussions about support systems and perceived barriers, topics often considered in modern career theories such as social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) and life design (Savickas et al., 2009). Additionally, this information can aid counselors in developing appropriate career interventions based on the individual's needs.

Participants tended to focus on education when asked about cultural influences. We suggest that participants may believe either a lack of education or support for education affected their careers. Levine and Sutherland (2013) interviewed young adults about the educational expectations of their parents and learned that those who left school described their parents as passive, uninterested, or negative about their education. Fouad et al. (2012) noted that some dislocated workers discussed educational barriers and lack of educational advising as related to career struggles. Inquiring about cultural background may be one way to elicit this information more broadly than simply asking about school experiences.

Finally, religion or spirituality affected participants' careers. Participants described the influence of spirituality related to affecting how one acts at work, creating a sense of community, and directly influencing career choice. Similarly, Constantine, Milville, Warren, Gainor, and Lewis-Coles (2006) interviewed African American college students about religion and career development and found a link between spirituality and work ethic. In his literature review on this topic, Duffy (2006) also identified spirituality and religion as linked to career development, including as a way to provide supportive relationships and coping skills. Our participants seemed to note this link as well. Since religion and spirituality seem to have a clear influence on career choices, career counselors may want to include this topic in work with clients.

Based on the interviews, cultural background seems influential in the career development of individuals from varying backgrounds. Traditionally, career interviews and assessments do not consider this influence. However, culture is clearly important in career choices, career beliefs, and career support. Counselors can build on these connections to help clients process their career choices and consider how future decisions might also include their cultural beliefs.

Knowledge About Careers

One of the interview questions focused on occupations that participants were aware of as a child. Participants responded with careers that family members held and careers they assumed everyone knew. Additionally, many participants felt that they had limited exposure to careers as children. In general, it seems that exposure to a variety of careers is important for individuals of all backgrounds. These findings relate to those of Fouad et al. (2012), who interviewed dislocated workers and noted that most mentioned their parents' occupations as related to their own career choices. Most also described how their level of parental support directly influenced their career decisions. Career education during the growing-up years can be used to introduce children to different careers early in their career development. However, based on our findings, individuals from very different backgrounds did not receive or retain career education from school. It may be that adults need to revisit this topic to discover what they know and do not know about careers.

As adults, individuals may need to receive basic career information and be introduced to different careers. Counselors can inquire about early career knowledge and how this knowledge, or lack of it, affected their career decisions. Then, counselors can intentionally connect prior knowledge gaps to current career issues and provide concrete information about the world of work within a cultural context. Doing so helps counselors move beyond a trait-and-factor-matching strategy to a more holistic career counseling perspective.

CONCLUSION

As with any study, limitations do exist. Although we selected participants to represent a broad range of cultural backgrounds, we found each through word-of-mouth and referrals. It may be that these participants do not represent the perspectives of others. In addition, qualitative analyses are always subject to the personal biases of the researchers. Although we tried to maintain rigor in our analysis, it is possible that others may have identified different themes in these same interviews. The interviews themselves may also have limitations. We used a semistructured interview protocol, which may not have identified all cultural influences on participants' career development. It may also be that participants felt unwilling to share certain influences, even if we asked about them in the interview. Finally, a major limitation is the length of our interviews. Some interviews were short whereas others were lengthy. Responding to a structured interview protocol can limit response length and affect the amount of shared information, but multiple interviews can help increase the variety of evidence collected (Morrow, 2005). Complexity of data in CCM relates to the amount of interviews and the diversity of participants (Boeije, 2002), both of which are evident in this study. Therefore, we suggest readers view all results within the frame of these limitations.

This study explored the importance of cultural influence on career development, and participants described the multifaceted ways that culture affected their current career status. Counselors can use these results to help frame their work with clients, remembering to broadly inquire about culture as they learn about their clients. Considered within the context of adult and career development, cultural discussions can be used to highlight the careers needs of adults, going beyond traditional assessment to take into account life stories and career influences. Interview protocols such as the CiCI (Ponterotto et al., 2000) may be avenues for this exploration and help counselors consider a more holistic perspective in their counseling work.

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