
A Counselling Model for Young Women in the United Arab Emirates: Cultural Considerations

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ABSTRACT

Although all modalities of therapy work equally well, some models are better suited to work with specific populations. This article outlines a rationale for a counselling model used for female college students in the United Arab Emirates where the concept of counselling is not well known, and where the social and cultural organizations demand a more flexible and informal approach to helping. Two cases are presented using a systemic and solution-focused approach that accommodates culture, religion, and the gender and social hierarchy in this society through the use of family members and intermediaries.

RÉSUMÉ

Quoique chaque modalité de thérapie soit aussi efficace que les autres, il y en a certaines qui sont plus appropriées pour certaines populations. Cet article considère le modèle utilisé pour les jeunes collégiennes aux Émirats arabes unis où l'idée de counselling est moins connue et où l'organisation sociale et culturelle demande une approche plus flexible et informelle envers la relation d'aide. Deux cas démontrent une approche systémique visant des solutions qui accommodent la culture, la religion, et l'hierarchie sociale du genre dans cette société à travers la présence de membres de famille et d'intermédiaires.

There are many models of counselling that fit different populations, cultures, ages and presenting issues. Practitioners must explore the population's characteristics, such as the level of social development, gender roles, constructions of the self and family, religion, familiarity with counselling, and cultural context, to devise culturally appropriate counselling. Appropriateness is defined as being responsive to the client's cultural framework—accepted structural values like family, religion, and social organization. It must address immediate problems by understanding the opportunities and limitations of the environment and be mindful of cultural and social changes that impact solution generation.

Culture is considered because it shapes the meaning of mental illness, how distress is shown, and what is expected of treatment (Bussema & Nemeč, 2006). For practitioners in another country or at home with a different cultural group than their own, considerations must include the client's worldview so that the reality presented to them matches their own, and the behavioural and affective practices and beliefs congruent with it. Without this, counselling loses the opportunity to provide critical help to others and potentially loses credibility in the community.

Counsellors in Canada will likely interact with an increasing Arab population, and this may require adjusting their perspectives and interventions to be

less psychologically monocultural. Given how the Arab-Muslim population has been vilified and stereotyped in the media since the September 11, 2001, attacks, increased understanding of this population is necessary in changing Canadian perceptions. The counselling field is just as vulnerable as the media to seeing Arab women as victimized and oppressed, which is no more accurate than it would be for Western women nor for millions of Arab women themselves. In fact, Sue and Sue (2003) state that Western-derived counselling models have caused harm to non-dominant clients by invalidating their life experiences. In this respect, the media have helped to invalidate both the Arab cultures and Islam. As individuals who consume media, practitioners are subject to this influence and are vulnerable to invalidating others, perhaps without an awareness of doing so.

If this article meets its aims, readers who are asked to contextualize their own practice, should consider the words of Albert Ellis (1973), who stated that “all psychology is, at bottom, a value system.” If culture is paralleled as a moral vision (see Christopher, 1996) where the assumptions about the nature of reality and the moral prescriptions about what reality—especially human reality—should be or become, it is evident that a counsellor’s and client’s worldviews may come into conflict. Without at least an awareness of Western psychology’s moral vision, counsellors may believe that they can interact professionally with clients in a neutral manner, when many of our Western values operate implicitly. Counselling rests on theoretical concepts that may betray our ethical values of doing no harm and respecting diversity, such as those outlined by Christopher: autonomy, assertiveness, internal locus of control, and separation-individuation, to name a few. Our Western worldview further rests on assumptions of self-promotion, freedom from social restraint, self-development, and extolling our uniqueness as indicators of mental health. Yet these are often regarded as signs of immaturity and selfishness in collectivist cultures.

This article speaks to those ideas by highlighting the immersion experience of a Caucasian female Canadian psychologist practicing in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the context of a female Emirati state college counselling centre. It is of particular interest to practitioners who work with clients with cultural identities different than their own. Those who work with First Nations communities, for example, may find resemblance to the values described, such as the importance of family, collectivity, Elders as traditional authority, the centrality of spirituality, and particular ways of relating to helping professionals (Blue & Darou, 2005). As Canada becomes increasingly multicultural, the need for culturally responsive counselling will grow and practitioners will be asked to work in different ways to meet those needs.

Stretching the boundaries of counselling is possible and need not dilute its effectiveness, but does require a leap of creative faith and a desire to learn. It is hoped that this article generates ideas about approaching and building relationships between cultural groups in Canada or elsewhere. It may also stimulate practitioners to push past conventional applications to consider adaptations of practice models to fit our diverse society. Finally, an awareness of the inherent

moral visions in psychology and counselling helps us to situate our own theories and concepts by explicitly assessing how these visions influence our case conceptualization, diagnoses, diagnostic systems, treatment goals, and interventions (Christopher, 1996).

Ethical practice with diverse populations requires that practitioners “be aware of one’s cultural, moral, and social beliefs” (Canadian Psychological Association, 2001, p. 4) and to consider that “theories . . . developed to describe people from the dominant culture may apply differently to people from non-dominant cultures” (Canadian Psychological Association, p. 4). These responsibilities are reflected in the model provided and, while keeping practitioners accountable for their professional development, also send the message that any ethical practice must recognize diversity regardless of stated cultural differences.

From a business model as discussed in Arthur and Collins (2005), providing culturally responsive counselling in an ethical manner is providing excellence in customer service that meets clients’ needs and demands. Assuring the field’s cultural professional development assures continued return business and reinforces the counselling field’s credibility. In the UAE, the need for cultural responsiveness is even more critical, as the field is in the early stages of establishing itself in the public domain and attaining its professional status with government authority.

This article outlines a rationale for the counselling model used for female college students in the United Arab Emirates where the concept of counselling is not familiar, and where the social and cultural organizations demand a different approach to helping. The national context is briefly described to set the scene for understanding the concerns of young Emirati women. Two cases are presented using a systemic and solution-focused approach that accommodates culture, religion, and the gender and social hierarchy in this society through the use of family members and intermediaries. Finally, the idea of a moral vision will be revisited with counsel to practitioners who wish to make themselves more responsive to their clientele and, most importantly, who wish to understand themselves and their profession at a deeper level in these times of sociopolitical change right here in Canada.

THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The UAE is located in the Arabian Gulf and was established in 1971 by His Excellency Sheikh Zayed. Compared to other Arab countries, social attitudes are more conservative in the UAE (Hijab, 1994). Emirati society is described as a mix of modernity, technological sophistication, and retaining traditional conservatism (Findlow, 2000). The quality of life is substantial, with the gross national income per capita at USD \$24,090 (2005 figures, World Health Organization [WHO], 2007), although anecdotal reports state that when only the national population is included, the national income is closer to USD \$100,000 per person as a result of oil wealth turning a traditional society to affluence in less than a generation.

The UAE derives its legitimacy from a paternalistic, traditional authority that manages and redistributes oil revenues (Eifert, Gelb, & Borje-Tallroth, 2003).

Yet, the Arab Human Development Report (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2003, 2004) states that this management has been unable to translate oil investments into self-sustainable economic growth. The result has been overgrown public institutions, overdependence on government jobs, and distorted incentives to work (Braide, 2003). The UAE has the highest global rate of expatriates who work within its borders—close to 80% of its population (UNDP, 2004)—placing a strain on the indigenous population who, despite dominating the social hierarchy, remain a minority. This creates a state of alienation and lost identity for many Emiratis, whose coping consists of adopting traditional and non-traditional behaviours, often with mixed success (Bebbington, Ghubash, & Hamdi, 1993).

Ouis (2002) reports that UAE citizenship implies belonging to an elite and has certain status and privileges that non-nationals do not enjoy as a result of the significant wealth and the extensive “wasta” system. Wasta is a strategy of using one’s (or someone else’s) reputation to achieve certain privileges or favours (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1994). While the consequences of patronage encourage short-term individual interest and harm the collective interest, patronage is also tied to respectable historical and cultural roots where intermediaries resolve disputes, speak positively on behalf of others, and keep peace between families and groups. It continues to be how marriages are arranged, business deals completed, and peace restored within society.

Traditionally, the community is predominantly collectivist where individuals experience little geographical mobility and live as members of extended families (Weinfurt & Moghaddam, 2001). Although this is changing, almost all contacts and friendships are made through the family with limited interactions between strangers. Barakat (1993) states that changes in the family structure result from the challenges posed by the state, economy, and urbanization. Khattab (2005) adds that neither traditional norms nor the application of religious doctrines nowadays are as before and, as a result, social norms are changing. However, structural social changes far outpace individual attitudinal and behavioural changes (Ghubash, Daradkeh, Al-Muzafari, Al-Mansori, & Abou-Saleh, 2001).

The younger generation find themselves caught between emerging liberality and established tradition and tend to be more liberal than their predecessors (Ghubash et al., 2001). Yet, these socio-cultural changes have resulted in some students becoming more traditional and conservative in an attempt to assert and protect a cultural identity different than the West, a trend also seen in other Arab countries (Al-Krenawi, Graham, Dean, & Eltaiba, 2004). Other individuals more easily adopt a mix of the old and new without apparent dissonance. Young women in particular show higher liberality in attitudes than young men, despite acting more conservatively (Ghubash et al., 2001). This social instability, experienced by all, is demonstrated by increases in chronic illnesses like diabetes and heart disease, as well as by increases in psychiatric disorders (Ghubash et al., 2001; Ghubash, Hamdi, & Bebbington, 1992) and eating disorders (Eapen, Mabrouk, & Bin-Othman, 2005).

The majority of marriages are still traditionally arranged between extended cousins or through other forms of kinship. With respect to the choice of marital partners in the UAE, Abbott (2002) concludes that wealth, education, and exposure to Western culture are becoming catalysts of change. The UAE, as with other Arab-Muslim countries, remains strongly gender identified, with the social structure being male dominant (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004).

CONCERNS OF FEMALE EMIRATI COLLEGE STUDENTS

The female Emirati College students described here are very traditional in comparison to others of the same age in the neighbouring city of Dubai (Ghubash et al., 2001); religion and culture play a major role in the formation of their worldviews, along with the gender roles to which they ascribe. As is expected of Muslims, the students pray two of their five daily prayers at the college. Religion forms the basis of their opinions, decisions, and behaviour. In response to major life events, students rely heavily on Islam for support and guidance. Even in minor circumstances, when a student falls ill at the college, others gather around and whisper Qur'anic verses to coax her back to health. Female students are clear about their rights as women in Islam, but have less practice at exercising them against cultural constraints.

Abu-Hilal and Bahri (2000) find that the way Arab children are socialized does not help them to be independent and responsible. The parenting styles of autocracy and protectionism do not encourage independence, and neither does the autocratic school system. World knowledge is often limited as a result of socialization and gender segregation that limits the freedom of movement and opportunity for females. Students are unfamiliar working within a system of uniformly applicable rules, and most familiar operating in an environment of benefaction, partiality, and *wasta*.

When a father reaches an age that his eldest son remaining in the home can assume responsibility in his place, day-to-day authority is abdicated to him. From then on, brothers are decisive in their sisters' interests. For the most part, the role changeover is smooth and without upset, but for others, the freedoms once permitted by fathers are now restricted. Choice of marital partners, however, remains the father's domain as it concerns family status.

Caretaking and domestic responsibilities in the home fall to the eldest, unmarried female. If a family member is ill, the eldest female attends, even if the eldest, unmarried brother has no significant duties outside the home. If the eldest female is in school or employed she may have to take a leave of absence, a forced withdrawal, or terminate her employment. The same applies to travelling members of the family: the eldest will be required to either join the group or stay at home to take care of remaining siblings. Decisions are based on what is best for the family unit and may not necessarily prioritize an individual's wishes. When this occurs, students are unhappy at leaving the college but accept the family's decision over their own preferences. Family responsibilities, along with

being a wife and child-bearer, are considered a natural responsibility (Ghubash et al., 2001).

A significant number of students are married or likely to get married while at the college. Young adults are expected to have children within the first two years of marriage, due to cultural values of fertility and government policies that give economic incentives to nationals to increase the Emirati birthrate. This creates stress as young women attempt to balance childcare, school, domestic, familial, and marital duties simultaneously. Some defer childbearing or marriage in favour of education (Wilkins-Winslow, Honein, & Elzubeir, 2002), but face pressure from their partners, whose role as husbands and heads of families depend on their wives' reproductive capabilities. If childbearing is deferred, the extended family may also suspect marital or sexual difficulties and begin to interfere.

The transition from girl to adult happens through marriage (described by Bebbington et al., 1993). A girl may often become a wife with little preparation or forewarning, never having seen her husband until the wedding night or at best having talked on the phone beforehand. This is congruent with cultural expectations and is supported by the students themselves, who consider it improper to converse with an unrelated male outside of marriage. Women gain social status from marriage and rearing children, hence the rigidity of their own adherence to social rules that determine their chances of success in marital selection.

The realities of marriage do not always compare to the ideas about romance and love, given the social taboo of discussing sexual relations and other private affairs. Students report that their partners can be supportive friends who protect them and take their interests to heart, encouraging them to attend college even when they themselves want to give up. They discover love and mutual respect that comes from two families knowing each other and watching over them. For many young brides, entering their husband's family means a simple change of residence, as the extended family often inhabits the same compound or area featuring the same security and familiarity. Marriage imposes little additional restrictions, as women's freedom is treated the same whether they are single or married (Ghubash et al., 1992).

It is common to see students divorce within the first six months of matrimony; in fact, 46% of marriages end in divorce (Gulf News, 2005), with the rate highest among young couples. Those from supportive families expose abusive situations by asking their fathers or brothers to intervene with a message to the husband that his behaviour does not uphold the bi-party agreement. Family mediation and shame is often enough to resolve the problem; for others, it has no effect. The woman will consider tradition, family honour and marital duty, deciding to fulfill her role in the eyes of God, although holy texts clearly state that maltreatment is an acceptable reason for divorce. She may consider the social and financial importance of the family and the shame that leaving may cause. Others decide to enforce their rights and divorce. How these numerous and varied factors influence and shape the counselling approach is critical to review in the following section.

AN EMIC APPROACH

Sue (1998) describes three elements in defining cultural competence, only one of which will be discussed here: the importance of culture-specific expertise. Practitioners are culturally skilled when they have good knowledge and understanding of their own worldviews, have a depth of information about the culture in which they work, understand sociopolitical influences, and possess specific skills and strategies to work with these groups. Similarly, Campinha-Bacote (2002) describes cultural competence as an integrational process of cultural awareness, knowledge, skills, encounters, and desire. All of these are reflected in an emic approach presented here (Table 1) for the Emirati young adult female population in a post-secondary college setting.

Table 1
Culture-Specific Expertise

Considerations	Description
North American worldview	Individual, secular, liberal, freedom-focused, heterogeneous, participatory democracy, malleable fate by individuals, direct communication, future-focused
Emirati worldview	Collective, nonsecular, traditional, responsibility-focused, homogeneous indigenous society, tribal representation, predetermined fate by God, indirect communication, present-focused
Sociopolitical influences	Changing social and cultural norms, globalization, Westernization, occupation of Palestinian territories and Iraq as regional influences, rapid economic development of UAE and Gulf region
Session strategies	Drop-in services, use family systems, directive problem solving, brief and informal, flexible boundaries, silence and metaphors, educative, insight to religion, highlight responsibilities and rights; accept unclear problem definition to save face, downplay "therapy," monitor personal judgements
Increase credibility	Interest in culture; participate in non-counselling activities, home visits, attend female weddings; learn Arabic; mimic language style, body language, and dress patterns; use of personal relationships; respect and deference for traditional authority; self-respect

Most students are unfamiliar with the concept of counselling and see it as a foreign and often unnecessary service. Disclosure to non-family members is perceived as shameful and disloyal, as it demands individual action against a collective entity (Al-Darmaki, 2003). A disclosure of family business exposes their status and the client's status in that system (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004). Seeking professional help is not well accepted, and more traditional means are relied upon, such as talking with family or a religious person or reading the Qur'an. Seeking psychological help is considered a sign of weakness or insanity in Arab culture (Coker, 2005; Monar, 2005), and for women may damage their marital prospects or success. The role and activity of counselling is minimized and reoriented toward more acceptable interventions of mediation and guidance to support students in their maturation through cultural and social developments.

Al-Krenawi and Graham (2000) explain that Western models of therapy are based on self-development and self-realization, both culture-bound concepts that stem from democratic ideals not necessarily present or as salient in Arab countries. Certain counselling models, developed in Western countries, are infused with values and indicators of success that are not fully congruent with Arab settings. These models may fail as they rely on individual responsibility and self-efficacy where autonomy is seen as a virtue toward which we should all aspire. Autonomy in an Arab context is seen as isolating, burdensome, lonely, and rejecting of family love and support.

Confidentiality is of particular concern to students. With only one million Emiratis spread across seven emirates, the chances of disclosing to a relation are high. Family privacy has also been noted as a major concern in other settings, such as healthcare (Wilkins-Winslow et al., 2002). Many students state they would not seek services from an Emirati counsellor and welcomed non-nationals in these positions, despite language difficulties. Some often felt they had to work harder in personal communication with national practitioners, to prove their trustworthiness.

Counselling provides life experiences at school and supports experiences in the student's home life, rather than developing the individual to become independent. Fieldtrips are arranged to locations such as the mall, airport, bank, stock exchange, career fairs, zoo, activities put on by other institutions, as well as club involvement, like public speaking, parenting groups, and cultural events like female dances and National days. Roles are necessarily not limited to counselling and resemble that of a sister, chaperone, mediator, advocate, arbitrator, and facilitator, while therapeutic relationships are built and used to create and support transitions.

Al-Krenawi and Graham (2000) state that it is difficult for Arab clients in a counselling relationship to accept the formal distance between the practitioner and client as seen in the West. It appears more important to build a relationship than to solve a problem, inviting practitioners to bend principles, relax formalities, and take on multiple roles (Pope-Davis, Liu, Toporek, & Brittan-Powell, 2001). In this way, meeting the client's expectations of the counsellor and counselling process establishes credibility.

Insight, often a tool of counselling in the West, is less favoured, as the origins of a problem rest in an external locus of control and solutions are also forcibly external. As Al-Krenawi and Graham (2000) discuss, conformity (rather than independence) and respecting those in authority and who are older are the norm. Wisdom is transmitted in a unidirectional manner, from old to young. This externality fits with a solution-focused approach where an external authority, under the guise of information gathering, elicits solutions and dispenses them back as guidance to the person seeking answers (Al-Krenawi & Graham). Helping in Arab societies is more instructional and contains assertions of right and wrong based on religion and culture. Arab clients expect practitioners to be like teachers, hence the need to know what is considered a do and a don't in this society.

As the extended family remains the most common social structure within the UAE (Bebbington et al., 1993), the smallest unit can only be the immediate family.

Al-Krenawi and Graham (2000) recommend that interventions with Arab clients be done within the context of the family. When practitioners ask young women for their opinions, a frustrating experience for a Westerner used to opinionated individuals, a dismissive stare or a deflective “I don’t know” is often received. Focusing at the individual level is counterintuitive, as the individual does not typically separate from her parents or form an autonomous identity as it occurs in the West. While using an individual approach would fit with Western models of therapy that link healthy development to separation from the group, healthy development in an Arab context is linked to successful and enduring attachments with a primary group. Not surprisingly, personal self-disclosure and individual affect are difficult to obtain as they invite independence and separation.

Finally, Crigger and Holcomb (2007) state that it can be harmful for cultures to adopt external ideas too quickly or without consideration of how these ideas fit with tradition. This idea was repeatedly stressed throughout the development of the practice model as behavioural incidents in the college (while rare) show internalization of Westernized behaviours stereotyped on television, such as mimicking disrespect to authority, smoking, having a secret boyfriend, pre-marital relations, and so on.

Practitioners constantly balance their clients’ needs for solutions against forcing cultural change or threatening the existing social structure. Given that an indigenous base of knowledge in the psychological field is limited (Sayed, 2002), and that mental health is perceived to be dismissive of or a replacement for religious values (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000), Western interventions that undermine the social and cultural structure would not only be ineffective in helping clients, but would also quickly discredit the field. To this effect, the following section briefly considers to which counselling models these considerations are best suited.

INTEGRATIVE COUNSELLING MODEL

The Ecological Model based on Bronfenbrenner’s work (1979) is the overarching framework under which the model operates. It is informed by an integration of ecological thinking with models of social, cognitive, and affective development. This model stresses an understanding of the client by considering how the family and community, as well as social, cultural, and religious influences, relate to presenting concerns. It is related to an ethnographic approach that uses a narrative story line to understand how clients construct their worldviews and how practitioners make sense of the worldviews to which they are exposed (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005). This means considering the consequences that changes from any direction can have on interrelated systems. For example, encouraging a student to be more assertive might benefit her academic life and personal development, yet might not benefit her marital or family life.

The Brief Therapy Model inspired by Berg and Miller (1992) and DeJong and Berg (1998) reconciles the gap between Western-style multi-session therapy and single-visit approaches preferred by students not accustomed to counselling, who

seek immediate solutions without extensive insight. This model obliges a determination of the most salient points of the complaint in order to generate solutions from within the family, extended family, religion, and culture for support, and locating intermediaries for advocacy (see Table 2). The term “culture-infused counselling” (Arthur & Collins, 2005) is often used to describe a part of this purposeful strategy where culture is directly acknowledged and used as a resource.

Table 2
Brief Solution Oriented Questions

Questions

Who else in your family has had this problem?
 How did they solve it?
 What does your father (husband, sister, mother) think about the problem?
 Who in your family could help you with this problem?
 What do others normally do in this situation?
 What does the Qur'an say you should do?
 Would that work in this situation? Why or why not?
 Who could help with the barriers you've identified?
 What strategy could help make this change?
 What (or who) makes you feel better when this happens?

The use of this integrative counselling model will be demonstrated within the following cases and is reflected in the use of questions that call upon religion, family structure, norms, and cultural expectations. All names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

CASES

Fatima

A 23-year-old student came to counselling with her teacher. The student was crying in class, and in the past three weeks her marks had fallen significantly. She explained that her father had arranged a marriage without her consent. She categorically refused it. Arguments with her father prevented her from doing homework and sleeping. She needed a solution immediately, as the wedding contract was scheduled in the coming weeks. Her father wanted her to quit college since her future husband saw no value in her working or studying. She persisted in coming to school, but her father responded by ripping up her textbooks and assignments. Fatima was in her final year, there were only two weeks of college remaining, and, to make things worse, the college was no longer offering this degree next year.

Fatima was desperate for a solution and needed one by the end of the day, it being the start of the weekend. During the next two hours, Fatima and I worked together to identify all of the men in her extended family who could influence her father about the marriage. We identified her eldest and younger brothers currently studying in England, as well as a sympathetic uncle who would intervene on her behalf. We identified women who could influence their husbands, brothers, or

fathers through Fatima's father. Fatima was asked to consider any other person who had leverage in the family.

When these were identified, we set a plan in place for how, when, and what would be said to these persons. The argument of religion was used with the uncle, as he was pious and would defend the Islamic argument of Fatima's right to decline a marital partner. The remaining men were thought more likely to respond to arguments based on family name and culture. Forcing Fatima to marry this man would bring shame to the family, as Fatima would do what she could to force the man to divorce her and the family would have to take her back, conceding that they had cheated the man and his family for offering such an impertinent partner. The family took a risk in forcing Fatima to marry by counting on her passive behaviour.

The next area where Fatima could be effective was in dealing with her future husband's mother-in-law who was coming for a visit to see her for the first time. Women select and approve the appropriateness of the desired spouse for the single men of the family through these visits. Fatima knew she would be appraised on her actions and demeanour. If the mother was not pleased, she would not allow her son to marry. Fatima related that some young women discreetly smirked, were late, dropped teacups, spoke loudly, wore too much makeup, or otherwise won the disfavour of the females, hoping to be rejected as a potential wife.

Fatima remembered that one of her brothers had a common friend with the future husband, and he was recruited as a source of influence, albeit unknowingly. This brother was in favour of the marriage but was unaware of the future husband's desire to have Fatima end her school and employment prospects. The brother was educated and wished his sisters to be as well. The brother would be told instead that his help was needed in influencing the husband in favour of his sister by telling the common friend about his sister's educational and employment successes and future plans, knowing the information would be related to the future husband, who would be distressed and likely change his mind.

Because of the gender segregation and extensive use of intermediaries, a direct approach is not the cultural norm, nor does it respect the lineage of authority or gender construction. Addressing her father directly had aggravated the situation, and Fatima knew that her forceful remonstrations had only reinforced her father's position about the marriage. She decided to opt for silent resistance by moping, sleeping, being unresponsive, staring into space, and speaking little, until her father relented and might reconsider his decision.

Finally, the last item to consider was how Fatima would finish her assignments for credit. The minimum credits required to pass were assessed and, with the help of her teachers who were informed of the situation, she was given leniency in submitting her work well past the due date.

Fatima knew the strategy demanded care, but was prepared to accept the consequences should the plan be discovered, believing it better to create a scene now than be unhappy later. Together, we briefly discussed a secondary plan in case the marriage proceeded. Many young women marry to satisfy their families and then

quickly find ways to obtain divorces through the courts. Although the Sharia-based court of law is not always sympathetic towards these cases, if the woman is assertive enough, she can build her case and make her rights to employment and education heard.

After our session, Fatima did not return to college. Five days later, Fatima called, explaining that she had put everyone to work on her case but things were not yet resolved. Her father had taken everything away from her (laptop, books, pens, paper, etc.), and she was calling from a mall bathroom, having borrowed a mobile phone. Two weeks went by and word was sent from Fatima through her friends that her work was on its way. Term had finished, and there was no further word. Finally, she came in the day before the start of summer. Her brother was waiting in the car; she had lied and said the college needed her signature to confirm her withdrawal. She was not getting married; the prospective family backed down from the proposal and the issue was closed. Her paper received an "A" and she graduated.

This case speaks to the ways in which the short-term solution-focused approach is used, and demonstrates the ways in which the extended family system and intermediaries are a strength and resource. The direct approach, which many counsellors might advocate, is rarely used, would have been unsuccessful within this context, and is inconsistent with the traditional ways of doing things. Assertiveness, especially in a situation where there is violence, is foolish and incongruent with how this culture operates.

Moza

Moza, 19, was caught by her brother talking to a boy on her mobile phone. Her sister came to counselling for help with how to proceed and to inform us of the event because the brother would be calling to withdraw his sister from college as punishment. Moza was already at home, and if she withdrew, her mark would reflect a fail. Given the policy of only allowing new graduates into first-year programs, she would lose her chance to continue in college. Moza no longer had access to her mobile phone, and therefore direct contact was thwarted. Her sister, 21, explained that their 18-year-old brother had recently been granted guardianship and had become very strict. The father was not aware of the infraction and the sisters did not want his intervention because, although he supported their education, his discovery of the event would be worse. The brother was also eager not to have their father informed, as it would reflect his inability to control his sister and he would lose face.

As we spoke, Moza's brother telephoned to tell me that Moza had gone to England to sit with her sick mother and would not be returning. I explained that only the student can withdraw herself (to prevent this occurrence) and that a direct phone number for her was necessary. He stated that this was not possible. Surely she had a contact number in England? No. If this were true, a student who does not return for valid reasons would be granted an exception. He was asked to provide us with documentation so that this status, rather than a fail, could be granted.

When he arrived, I immediately congratulated him on his excellent role as a guardian and said that Moza showed moral responsibility that surely came from him and his father. He was taken aback that I did not ask for documentation and was uninterested in discussing Moza's presence in England. I continued by relaying how difficult it must be in his position to assure the moral upbringing of his sisters. I discussed the exaggeration of some brothers who withdrew their sisters from education as punishment, and, in doing so, ignored obligations of providing moral guidance, adding that punishment absolved this responsibility from the guardian. Guidance rather than punishment was the preferred means of solving family problems as discussed by the Prophet Mohammed.

I commented that he was young to have such a big responsibility and that he should be proud that his father chose him. I stated that Moza would benefit from his benevolent approach, and when she returned to college she could count on him to help her. Moza was not back in school the following day, but her sister informed me that he was punishing her by having her stay at home for the rest of the week and that she would be forced to return next week.

By using myself as the advocate and intermediary, Moza was able to return to school in a way that allowed her brother to save face. Urging Moza or her sister to advocate for them would have reinforced the brother's decision, since he saw any advocacy as an excuse to avoid punishment. Inviting the brother to speak was respectful of the family hierarchy by addressing the head of the family rather than urging the sister to act against the brother. While Western counsellors might have spoken directly about the issue, in this context the brother would have been offended by family exposure. Furthermore, two students rather than one might have been withdrawn. Working with the system and calling the brother to his religious and cultural accountability proved more successful than changing the system itself.

CONCLUSION

This article discussed some of the issues that female Emirati students face in college, and also outlined the counselling model utilized to highlight the short-term approach to counselling, its systemic orientation, and the use of existing cultural resources, like intermediaries and family members. While this society is developmentally in a phase of great change and is significantly influenced by modernization and globalization, certain approaches to counselling may still be more appropriate in meeting the needs of young Emirati women.

The biggest critique will be from counsellors who see their roles as cultural change agents and feel that this approach avoids the issue of systemic discrimination against women. The temptation to change certain aspects of the culture, especially when it has so many strengths, is likely counterproductive; helping the client remove barriers so that changes are possible and in the manner she chooses may be more helpful. Working within the social system reinforces the client's worldview and maintains existing relationships, critical for survival in a collective traditional society. Our advocacy need not be loud but only effective. This can be done through gentle diplomacy focused on solutions within the so-

ciety's biggest resource, the family. It is not up to Western counsellors to impose changes based on an assumption that the defined role for Western women is an ideal that other societies should emulate, when our own society is continually developing.

Christopher (1996) advocates for a professional stance that helps in grappling with these very personal issues that practitioners face when questioning their own assumptions. He advocates for practitioners to continually clarify and question the moral visions that motivate us, to realize how our moral visions affect our work, and to regularly engage in public discourse on the appropriateness of our moral visions. And so, counsellors must be willing to sit with the discomfort of relearning about themselves, their previously accepted truths about the world, and the people in it through ongoing reflexive practice. They must put on different lenses to see themselves and their own culture differently, processes that cause anxiety and shame. Yet, Pitner and Sakamoto (2005) add that it is this critical consciousness that makes it less likely that practitioners will impose their beliefs as they become more proficient at working with their cultural counter-transference. As a means to raise cultural sensitivity and competency, counsellors may also consider a personal and professional immersion in another culture to understand and experience these complexities (Wood & Atkins, 2006). Our ability to understand others is greatly improved when we experience ourselves without our familiar attitudes, expectations, and behavioural norms to fall back upon.

Cultures continually change in response to environmental demands, and the struggles seen in these students' lives are evidence of the social transformations influenced and modified by the women themselves. Practitioners can play a positive role by learning about and adapting their own worldviews and practice models of counselling toward others. In this way, interventions, support, and guidance can be provided in a truly culturally appropriate, non-harmful, and beneficial manner toward client well-being and, just as importantly, toward our own professional and personal growth.

The field of psychology, also, can and must change in response to environmental demands. While our professional proclivities may give us an advantage in focusing on and understanding the worldview of others, it may be more difficult for us to question our own moral visions. As the media continue to vilify and build momentum against the popular "other," it is a critical time to exercise restraint in our assumptions of human nature, to consider that our theories are just theories, and to evaluate how our moral visions have come to take root in colouring our own worldviews.

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