
Canadian University Counsellors: A Survey of Theoretical Orientations and other Related Descriptors

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Abstract

This study gathered data on Canadian university counsellors' preferred theoretical orientation and their ranking of the three most influential counsellors/psychotherapists. Data was also collected on primary emphasis in graduate school, years of counselling experience, highest degree, gender and age. Results indicated that the sample was predominantly eclectic in theoretical orientation, with person-centred and cognitive-behavioural orientations in second and third places respectively. The ranking of the most influential counsellors/psychotherapists were Carl Rogers, Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis. Comparisons were made with the preferences of both Canadian and American psychologists.

Résumé

Cette étude cumule des données concernant l'orientation théorique préférées des conseillers dans les universités canadiennes ainsi que l'ordre de préférence des trois conseillers/psychothérapeutes ayant le plus d'influence. Les données retenues mettent particulièrement l'emphase sur les études avancées, le nombre d'années d'expérience en counseling, le plus haut diplôme, le sexe et l'âge. Les résultats indiquent que l'échantillon est de façon prédominante éclectique dans son orientation théorique, avec en deuxième et troisième places l'approche centrée sur la personne et l'approche cognitive-behavioriste. Le classement des conseillers/psychothérapeutes ayant le plus d'influence sont Carl Rogers, Aaron Beck et Albert Ellis. Des comparaisons sont faites en ce qui a trait aux préférences entre les psychologues canadiens et américains.

In the early 1960s less than one third of Canadian universities offered a professional counselling service (Appley, 1967). Two decades later, however, almost every university employed professional counsellors as a service to students (Warner, 1984). Since a major function of a university and college counsellor is the provision of student individual counselling, how counsellors function in the counselling role, particularly with regard to personal counselling, and the specific interventions utilized, will likely be influenced by their philosophical framework or theoretical orientation. However, little is known about Canadian post-secondary counsellor orientations, and what factors may have contributed to these orientations. Such data could provide a better understanding of these professionals, as well as act as a future basis for comparison with counsellors in other settings. In accordance to the position taken by the Canadian University and College Association (Wine 1985), the terms "personal counselling" and "psychotherapy" are not distinguished in this paper.

While much is known about the theoretical orientations of psychologists in a variety of settings, little has been published about the university and college counsellor. A Canadian investigation by Appley (1967) re-

ported on the educational background of university counsellors and found that of the 49 universities responding, the degrees of the 161 counsellors were reported as follows: PhD 17%, other doctorates 10%, masters 30%, MEd/EdD 5%, other advanced degrees 4%, bachelors 9%, and not specified 22%.

The second source of information was the 1978 Directory (later directories have not provided detailed information) of the Canadian University and College Counselling Association, which listed 115 educational institutions (38% university and 62% college) and 415 counsellors including directors. The educational background of the 300 counsellors were as follows: bachelors 24%, masters 46%, and doctorates 18% (12% did not indicate their education). The background of the directors was very similar.

One of the headings in the 1978 directory was, "Therapeutic Orientation of Staff," and 56% of the institutions indicated a single orientation. Of those institutions that named only one choice, eclecticism was chosen 78% of the time, and then followed gestalt (9.37%), developmental (6.25%), behavioural (3.12%), and humanistic and Rogerian approaches (both with less than 2%). Among the institutions that selected more than one orientation, eclecticism was chosen by 67%, but the overall order changed little.

The purpose of the present study was to gather data on counsellors working in Canadian universities, particularly theoretical orientation and most influential practitioners; and is intended only as a first step towards a better understanding of the professionals in this relatively new and quickly expanded field of employment.

METHOD

A one-page questionnaire, based on Smith's (1982) American survey, was employed. The multiple-choice format obtained data on primary emphasis in graduate school, years of counselling experience, highest degree, gender, age and theoretical orientation; and whether the majority of counselling time was spent on personal or career issues. Another question asked the respondents to rank order the three most influential counsellors or psychotherapists today. One question concerned the practice of recommending self-help books to clients during treatment, and the results are reported elsewhere (Warner, 1990a). The postmarks on the returned envelopes were used to determine the province of the respondents.

The sample came from the membership list of the Canadian University and College Counsellors Association (CUCCA). Of the 155 members of CUCCA (1988), 86% were employed at universities, 11% at colleges (non-degree granting institutions), and 3% "other" employment. The geographical distribution of membership was as follows: western prov-

inces (including NWT) 31%, Ontario 57%, Quebec 4%, and the Maritimes 8%.

The questionnaire was sent to all 155 members of CUCCA with a self-addressed return label, and 67 members responded. An additional 13 respondents were recruited from a subsequent annual convention of CUCCA (1989). (The responses of the latter group differed little from the larger sample.)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Subjects

The 80 responses were received from eight provinces (PEI and NFL not represented) and the Northwest Territories. The percentage of distribution was as follows: west (including NWT) 36.5, Ontario 42.5, Quebec 2.5, and the Maritimes 17.6. The province of origin was not identifiable for 1.3%.

The percentage of male and female respondents was 42 and 52 respectively (with almost 6% not indicating gender) in contrast to the Canadian psychologists (Warner, 1990) where a large majority were male. The majority of this sample of counsellors (53%) was between 30 and 45 years of age, with 40 percent being over 45 years of age. With regard to counselling experience, 38%, the largest group, had 17 or more years of work experience, 22% had 6 to 10 years, 21% had 1 to 5 years, and 14% had 11 to 16 years. The Canadian psychologists (Warner, 1990) were similar in age and years of counselling/therapy experience. The majority of the counselling time was personal (73%) and career counselling accounted for 21% with 6% indicating "other."

The majority of the sample (60%) held the master's degree and 23% and 11% held the Ph.D. and Ed.D. degrees respectively. (The remaining 6% selected the "other" category.) Compared with the education of the counsellors reported by Appley (1967), this represents an almost double improvement rate in the numbers of practitioners holding masters' degrees.

With regard to primary emphasis in graduate school, half (52.5%) indicated counselling psychology, 16.3% clinical, and 17.5% counsellor education. A less common emphasis in graduate school was experimental (1.3%), and the category of "other" accounted for 12.5% of counsellor choices. Among the psychologists, in contrast, the Ph.D. degree in clinical psychology prevailed.

Theoretical Orientations

The theoretical orientations used in this survey were those employed by Smith (1982). The frequencies of orientations of the university counsellors, along with a comparison of Canadian (Warner, 1990) and American

psychologists (Smith, 1982), are displayed in Table 1. Almost half of the counsellors (47.5%) selected the eclectic orientation which is more comparable to the American psychologists (41.2) than the Canadians (33.2%). The second most dominant orientation among the counsellors, person-centred, ranked fourth with the Americans and fifth with the Canadian psychologists. Table 1 shows that the counsellors adhere to a narrower range of orientations than the psychologists: the top three ranking orientations (such as eclectic, person-centred, and cognitive-behavioural) accounted for 85% of the choices of the counsellors compared to the Canadian and American psychologists where the top three orientations accounted for 71% and 62% respectively. The present finding of 5% of the counsellors selecting the psychoanalytic orientation indicates that this orientation is considerably more popular among psychologists.

TABLE 1
*Percentage Comparison of Theoretical Orientations of
Counsellors and Psychologists*

| <i>Orientation</i> | <i>Counsellors</i> | <i>Psychologists</i> | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| | % | <i>Canadian*</i> % | <i>American**</i> % |
| Eclectic | 47.5 | 33.2 | 41.2 |
| Person-centred | 20.0 | 5.3 | 8.7 |
| Cognitive Behavioural | 17.5 | 28.3 | 10.4 |
| Psychoanalytic | 5.0 | 9.5 | 10.8 |
| Behavioural | 2.5 | 8.4 | 6.7 |
| Systemic-strategic | 2.5 | 2.7 | na |
| Existential | 1.3 | 2.3 | 2.2 |
| Family Systems | 1.3 | 1.5 | 2.7 |
| Gestalt | 0 | 2.3 | 1.7 |
| Adlerian | 0 | 1.1 | 2.9 |
| Transactional | 0 | .8 | 1.0 |
| Other | 0 | 5.0 | 10.0 |
| Total N | 80 | 263 | 415 |

* Warner, 1990.

** Smith, 1982.

Influential Counsellors

This item read, "In rank order, whom do you consider to be the three most influential counsellors or psychotherapists today?" The most influ-

ential counsellors were determined by employing weighted scores which were derived by awarding three points for first choice, two points for second, and one for each third choice citation. Carl Rogers was selected most frequently (score of 81 points), and then followed Aaron Beck (45 points), Albert Ellis (39 points), Donald Meichenbaum (25 points), Sigmund Freud (18 points), Carl Jung (14 points), Milton Erickson (11 points), and William Glasser (10 points). Approximately 22% of the sample did not select any counsellor/psychotherapists as most influential, and about 20% selected someone other than those mentioned. With regard to the ranking by Canadian psychologists (Warner, 1990), the order was Ellis, Rogers and Beck. Among the American psychologists (Smith, 1982), the ranking was Roger, Ellis and Freud.

In summary, the university counsellors sampled in this study are considerably different in educational background, theoretical orientation, and in the preferences of the most influential practitioners, than Canadian and American psychologists. A more relevant comparison for university counsellors, however, is counsellors from other areas of employment rather than psychologists. The benefits of further research on counsellors would not only cast light on the issue of whether there are differences among practitioners, but more important, contribute to our understanding of the characteristics and uniqueness of Canadian counsellors.

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The author wishes to thank Dr. Eugene Bannerman of the Ryerson Psychology Department for his assistance in revising the final draft.

This study was assisted by a grant from the Office of Research and Innovation of Ryerson Polytechnical Institute.

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