
Parent Connection: Enlisting Parents in Career Counselling

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Abstract

Counsellors have long been aware of the influence of parents on the career development and decisions of their children, as has been documented in the literature. Although the potential impact of parental influence is recognized, attempts to enlist parents in positive ways often appear haphazard, rather than purposeful. Further, the literature shows parental aspirations to be gender specific, also varying according to cultural and socioeconomic factors. Herein, the authors offer numerous strategies to maximize the positive aspects of parental involvement in children's career development, by offering concrete steps to strengthen the parent-child partnership.

Résumé

Les conseillers en orientation en sont bien conscients : l'influence des parents sur les choix et le déroulement de carrière de leurs enfants est incontestable, comme en fait foi la documentation. Cependant, bien que l'influence potentielle des parents soit reconnue, les efforts pour engager le concours positif des parents semblent souvent résulter du hasard plutôt que d'une volonté déterminée. De plus, la littérature scientifique démontre que les aspirations parentales sont influencées par le sexe de l'enfant ainsi que par divers facteurs culturels ou socio-économiques. Afin de maximiser les aspects positifs de l'influence parentale sur le déroulement de carrière de leurs enfants, les auteurs offrent, dans cet article, plusieurs stratégies comportant des démarches concrètes pour renforcer le partenariat parent-enfant.

Counsellors have long been aware of the influence of parents on the career development and decisions of their children, and this has been widely documented in the literature (Dick & Rallis, 1991; Eccles, Jacobs, & Harold, 1990; Young, Friesen, & Borycki, 1994; Young, Friesen, & Dillabough, 1991). Interestingly, even though the potential impact of parental influence is recognized, counsellors' and educators' attempts to enlist parents in positive ways too often appear haphazard or incidental, rather than planned and purposeful. At the same time, many parents persist in the notion that career counselling only becomes pertinent when their children reach high school age and begin to explore post-secondary education. Such a belief underestimates the importance of parental influence to either enhance or inhibit their children's career decisions throughout childhood and adolescence.

Parental influence may be tacit, explicit, or some combination of both. A close relationship with one's parent is one such tacit influence; in this vein, Hoffman, Hofacker, and Goldsmith (1992) report that young people who feel very "close" to their parents may opt for careers to satisfy their parents rather than themselves. On the other hand, parents

may explicitly influence career choices through their expression of specific expectations in this regard (Middleton & Loughead, 1993). Parental expectations sometimes emerge from careful observation of a child's aptitudes and abilities, but may also arise from a desire for their children to attain "something better," to have more opportunities than they had for themselves (Isaacson & Brown, 1993). In addition, it has been found that parental aspirations (a) are gender specific (Eccles, Jacobs, & Harold, 1990); Sandberg, Ehrhardt, Mellins, Ince, & Meyer-Bahlburg, 1987), (b) vary according to cultural background (Evanoski & Wu Tse, 1989); and (c) vary according to socioeconomic factors (Jeffrey, Lehr, Hache, & Campbell, 1992).

Parental influence is not necessarily negative; in fact, it may act in ways that enhance career development (see Middleton & Loughead, 1993). Research has found that parents exercise more influence on the vocational and educational choices of their children than do any other adults (Isaacson & Brown, 1993), although the potency of parental influence might not be recognized until many years later (Sharf, 1992). Thus, the tacit and explicit messages they communicate about occupations and the world of work affect children from a very early age (Gettys & Cann, 1981). Unfortunately, well-meaning parents, although motivated to facilitate their child's career development, often lack the tools, direction, and information necessary to maximize the positive effects that they can have on their child's career development. Therefore, the career counsellor plays an important role in helping parents develop an awareness of their influence on their children's career development. Further, counsellors and parents can be partners in the career counselling process. The role of counsellors in educating parents and providing them with strategies and information to enable them to become more facilitative of their child's career development is fairly well understood. However, parents, too, can provide a useful perspective regarding their children for both the counsellor and the child to consider in career exploration and planning.

The importance of parental influence as a factor in career development is becoming increasingly apparent, but the literature lacks a discussion of the ways in which counsellors might deliberately include parents in the career counselling process. Herein, the authors offer numerous strategies and rationales to assist counsellors in maximizing the positive aspects of parental involvement in their children's career development, by offering concrete steps to strengthen the parent-child partnership and enhance this process. Clearly, the type of involvement parents can offer in their child's career development must take into account the latter's age, and developmental and educational levels. With this in mind, counsellor interventions that can involve parents will be discussed according to age and general level of education.

JUNIOR AND MIDDLE SCHOOL [AGES 5-13]

With the birth of every child, parents have dreams and expectations. As children grow and develop their own particular interests and strengths, parents tend to apply these expectations to a career. Thus, a young girl who loves to dance might elicit a comment from her parents such as, "When my daughter grows up, she'll be a ballerina." Although typically viewed as harmless, such observations and expectations can and do influence a child's career development (Isaacson & Brown, 1993). The first step in enlisting parents in the career development process is to increase their awareness of the tremendous impact of their attitudes and comments about the world of work, and the occupational choices within that world, on their child's career development. This can be achieved through offering workshops or seminars as early as kindergarten, where counsellors talk with parents about their influence, perhaps introducing exercises to bring into awareness parental work values and attitudes. Counsellors can then discuss with them how such attitudes might facilitate or discourage a child's exploration of certain occupations. Through this process counsellors can help parents understand the messages they bring home about work (both positive and negative), and how to help their children understand the advantages of work in their lives.

The second step is to help parents work directly with their child. A natural place to begin is through capitalizing on children's insatiable curiosity. Curiosity is among the most basic of all human needs and drives (Sharf, 1992), and is a primary factor in the career development of children. Curiosity about their world, and the objects and persons in it, lead children to exploration and information-seeking. Super's (1990) career maturity model stresses the importance of encouraging curiosity, since curiosity leads to various exploratory behaviours, to the acquisition of information, and eventually, to the development of interests. Research (as reported in Betz, 1994) has indicated that children discuss occupational fantasies as early as four years old. Thus, since curiosity is a primary factor in the development of interests and interests are a primary factor in career decision-making (Super, 1990), then it is logical to suggest that encouraging a child's natural curiosity will enhance his or her career development.

While curiosity can enrich a child's life, parents and teachers know that curiosity is not always expressed in the most opportune ways. For example, boredom, or a wish for excitement or stimulation, may produce curiosity (Sharf, 1992), which may be manifested in ways which are disruptive for other children. Parents, teachers, and counsellors face the challenge of finding ways to positively reinforce curiosity while discouraging disruptive behaviour. What must be kept in mind is that

curiosity leads to exploratory behaviours, some of which will help children obtain information and learn about their world. Therefore, counsellors can work with teachers and parents to develop strategies to make use of a child's natural curiosity and to obtain information about the world of work.

Numerous strategies are available in this regard. First, parents can be encouraged to act as educators with regard to their occupation. Parents can be invited to a question-and-answer exercise in the classroom where they can discuss their occupation, or an occupational guessing game can occur where children are given hints and are encouraged to ask questions of the parent with the ultimate goal of guessing the occupation. Such activities develop exploratory skills that are essential for career development. Second, counsellors can work with teachers to develop special career activities where children and parents can work together. For example, parents could be asked to write an occupational story with their child; this could be in the form of a picture book, short essay, or puppet show (Sharf, 1992). This not only facilitates understanding of occupations but can be tied to language arts as well. Such early and creative involvement of parents in the career development process of their children can be facilitated by counsellors who act as the impetus for that involvement.

Effects of Gender Role Socialization on Career Choice

It is well known that adults tend to stereotype occupations as appropriate for males or females, but children also appear to learn these stereotypes at a very early age. Gettys and Cann (1981) discovered that children as young as 2½ years old are able to distinguish stereotypically masculine from feminine occupations, and that occupational stereotypes are consistently found among elementary school children. In fact, children's occupational preferences tend in large part to be consistent with the occupational stereotypes they hold.

Early childhood socialization, which is reinforced by teachers, parents, religion, and the media, still implicitly teaches girls to emphasize home and family, to bear the main responsibility for childrearing, and to defer to the career priorities of their mates (Betz, 1994). Boys, on the other hand, learn of the primacy of their careers, and to expect their mates to be facilitators in this regard. At the same time, boys are expected to develop personality characteristics associated with achievement, instrumentality, and competence, whereas the qualities valued for girls are warmth, nurturance, sensitivity, and expressiveness (Betz, 1994).

Unfortunately, it would appear that such sex-role stereotypes often result in rigid views of which occupations are appropriate for males and females. Gottfredson's (1981) theory of circumscription and compo-

mise in career choice posits that an individual's occupational aspirations become circumscribed within a limited range of accepted sex-typed alternatives, with the acceptable range set as early as ages six to eight. Numerous studies have supported this contention (see MacKay & Miller, 1982; Zuckerman & Sayre, 1982) with respect to sex-typed occupational choices in early childhood. Since beliefs about gender-related abilities and the relative value of specific occupational aspirations develop in this early stage, it is essential to challenge these attitudes before they circumscribe the direction of career exploration. In so doing, a child's range of occupational possibilities may be expanded before educational directions leading to clear career choices have been made.

School boards across the provinces have made concerted efforts to counter this tendency from early on in childhood. For example, the Vancouver School Board (1995) has developed a Career and Personal Planning program whose goals are threefold. Its primary objective is for students to become more aware of their uniqueness and to attain their full potential. Second, it enables students to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to become responsible members of society. Third, it assists students in development of realistic career goals. In group exercises, students identify behaviours and descriptions they typically associate with belonging to a male or female. To increase their awareness of the tendency to stereotype, they are encouraged to collect magazine pictures or record examples of stereotyping behaviours from television programs. Class discussion of such examples challenges the implicit meaning of such stereotyping, thereby widening students' viewpoints as to appropriate behaviours and activities for men and women.

A study of some 7062 Michigan elementary, middle school, and secondary students (Office for Sex Equity in Education, Michigan Board of Education, 1992) highlighted the extent to which many students remain severely bound by restrictive stereotypes and bias based on gender. Gender communication workshops, wherein student attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and choices based on gender and stereotypes can be challenged, may also result in expanded career and educational opportunities for both boys and girls.

In order to address gender stereotyping, some schools have attempted to infuse self concept, career development and technological awareness activities into the curriculum. For example, some activities address the role of family members both on the job and at home and help students to develop a broader understanding of these roles beyond being linked to a person's gender. In addition, some schools have developed single sex math and science classes to capitalize on the notion that girls learn better in a single sex environment. It is important to encourage both girls and boys to have strong technological skills and to try to reverse the notion that technology is a male area. Finally, providing both girls

and boys with role models from non-traditional occupations and having discussions about alternative careers schools encourage both boys and girls to expand their horizon of gender beliefs.

Parents may inadvertently reinforce the notion of male and female occupations (Isaacson & Brown, 1993). Once again, counsellors working with parents can point out these attitudes and discuss the limitations these set on their child. Some of the previously mentioned activities could in fact be used to increase parents' awareness of the kinds of attitudes they communicate about work, thus allowing both children and parents to broaden their perceptions of possible career choices. In addition, there is now a fairly wide range of children's books depicting both men and women in nontraditional careers, thereby serving as non-stereotypical role models. Parents who read these books with their children can then explore their children's — and their own — perceptions of careers, so as to keep their children's options open.

School and Occupational Choices

In addition to transmission of social and cognitive skills, the educational system also plays an important part in sex role socialization through its communication of messages regarding appropriate behaviours for girls and boys. Unfortunately, from the very beginning of their scholastic careers, gender-based content mirroring the gender biases that characterize society as a whole (see Ehrhart & Sandler, 1987; Hall & Sandler, 1982; Klein & Simonson, 1984) may still be found in some textbooks and reference books. At the same time, the key figures to whom children are exposed in school tend to tacitly reinforce dominant views of sex role stereotypes, since most teachers are women, and most administrators and principals are men (Betz, 1994). In addition, it would appear that boys receive more encouragement, attention, and approval than girls (American Association of University Women, 1991; Sadker & Sadker, 1985). All of these factors potentially restrict the educational and occupational aspirations of both boys and girls. However, local school boards and provincial departments of education have made significant strides to ensure that textbooks, reference materials and curricula be gender-fair. Further, programs such as the Vancouver School Board's (1995) Career and Personal Planning program assist students in identifying how occupations and careers tend to be stereotyped as male and female, through examination and challenge of the values underlying such tendencies.

Both Gottfredson's (1981) and Super's (1990) models of career development stress the importance of career exploration unrestricted by sex role stereotyping. It is important, therefore, that educational systems seek to provide information free of sex role bias, thereby providing an atmosphere in which wide varieties of interests can develop,

regardless of gender (Sharf, 1992). A child's self-efficacy can also be affected by the attitudes imparted by parents vis-à-vis specific areas of study (Lopez & Lent, 1992) such as math or sciences (Eccles & Jacobs, 1986); if parents are made aware of this, the influence they choose to exert may take a different direction. Recognizing children's emerging interests while encouraging them to keep their options open may result in children's consideration and validation of alternative interests and activities (Sharf, 1992). A child's career development may be further facilitated by a parent's helping him or her to understand and appreciate the career implications of the subject matter presented through assigned homework. Students are more motivated when they understand that what they are required to learn is related to survival skills in the real world (Drummond & Ryan, 1995). In so doing, a child's self-awareness and occupational awareness may be enhanced.

Integrating Cultural Variables in Career Interventions

Along with gender, numerous other cultural variables may exert a powerful effect on a child's career development path, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the full impact of each of these variables individually, it is important for career counsellors to attend to the complex interplay of these variables in career development.

For career counselling to be effective and culturally appropriate, it must attend to culturally specific variables during assessment and intervention, through collaborating with students and parents in a culturally sensitive way (Fouad & Bingham, 1995). Familiarity with the social, cultural, and economic issues affecting career development will enable counsellors to have a greater understanding of how demographic variables and restrictive social conditions such as discrimination can impede educational and occupational choice, and eventually, career attainment (Hotchkiss & Borow, 1996).

In the past, it would appear that minority and economically disadvantaged students have had somewhat limited access to the types of resources and information networks which would enable them to fully develop their abilities and talents, leading to career planning and meaningful employment (Dawis, 1996; Glover & Marshall, 1993). Families that lack a tradition of higher education may even devalue education (Hotchkiss & Borow, 1996). In addition, these programs can be used as a way to educate both students and parents about alternative careers and the requirements of those careers.

Some families that lack a tradition of higher education may devalue education (Hotchkiss & Borow, 1996). Thus, the use of computer programs can help to educate individuals from non-western or non-North American cultures as to the requirements within the North American

job market. Thus, the programs can be used to help students to become exposed to careers not available to them in their culture of origin as well as assist them to get access to information about careers familiar to them but that may have different entry requirements. As such, it is critical that counsellors convey the importance of formal education to future job opportunity, thus assisting both the students and their parents to deal with the realities of the North American job market.

Most career development theories highlight the individualistic values of Western cultures, whereas for many minority group students, group and family-oriented value systems are predominant (Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994). In some cultures, preservation of the family and culture of origin will be the goal of occupational choice, rather than the implementation of one's self-concept (Leong, 1985). It is important for counsellors to collaborate with their clients and parents so that their career interventions may take into account their clients' cultural value systems. To this end, students may be encouraged to identify the cultural and personal values that influence them (Misener & Kearns, 1993), so that the impact of these values on both their educational and career decisions may be discussed.

Across all cultures, families are important transmitters of cultural values and norms (Young, Friesen, & Dillabough, 1994); counsellors also need to understand the domain of parental influence in which students' career guidance programs are tacitly embedded. Facilitating discussion with parents and students can enable counsellors to discern the particular needs and values of different cultures, including Native Indians, immigrants, and new Canadians. Often, parents do not know how to be involved in the career development of their children. Thus, the counsellor's role is key in creating a partnership with the student's family (Storey, 1996) so that students' career and educational opportunities are broadened, while remaining both informed and realistic.

Redirecting Grandiosity and Fantasy

Some research has suggested a connection between professional achievement and grandiose fantasy regarding careers (Humphrey & Lenham, 1984; Robinson & Cooper, 1988). In one study investigating students' views about their futures, Humphrey & Lenham (1984) reported that boys were more likely than girls to express grandiosity in their visions of their futures, whereas girls tended to express more realistic depictions which focused on family and more traditional careers for women. In addition, the ability to employ fantasy has been linked with problem-solving abilities later in life, particularly regarding career satisfaction and the ability to adapt to career change. Considering today's job market where individuals may expect to change careers at least once in their work experience (Johnson-Maas, 1990), this ability might be fostered by parents encouraging work-oriented fantasy.

Integrating Play

Not only does curiosity lead to fantasized thinking; it also inspires play. Children can utilize play to explore their fantasies with respect to the world of work, and to learn about work in a more realistic way (Meyer, 1984; Wilson, 1983). School curricula can incorporate these goals through group activities such as writing a skit using terms from the world of work, or crossword puzzles using occupational terms (Sharf, 1992). In addition, when engaging in a family activity, parents might encourage games such as listing the number of people whose jobs were involved in their activity, or proposing "Who am I?" games during car trips, giving clues regarding a particular job and having the children guess at the occupation (Meyer, 1984). Having children stage a play for their parents about different careers is another enjoyable way to involve children in career exploration (Wilson, 1983).

Children are influenced by the messages they receive from their parents concerning their own work lives, and the work experiences of others (Trice, Hughes, Odom, Woods, & McClellan, 1995). Even in this age group (5-13), children tend to express relatively stable career plans, often strongly related to the careers of their parents (Trice & King, 1991). Counsellors should sensitize parents as to the power of their influence so that they can reflect upon what messages they communicate to their children, along with alternative messages they may like to communicate to them. In addition, counsellors and educators can broaden children's exposure to people in careers by taking students out of the classroom and into the community, increasing their opportunity for modeling behaviour, since children will have more exposure to key figures (Sharf, 1992). This may be particularly important for girls and members of ethnic minorities, for whom there is a lack of role models throughout the educational system (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

It is vitally important to involve the family in the career decision-making process of children. To arrive at this goal, the family must gain an understanding of their child's interests, abilities, and achievement (Drummond & Ryan, 1995). In order to increase parental involvement at this stage, counsellors may wish to arrange parent information sessions to address such issues as the dreams parents have for their children's career, and the extent to which they may be willing to allow their children to discover their own areas of competency and strength to build their own career aspirations. In addition, occupational gender stereotypes can be challenged, and erroneous and enduring popular stereotypes such as that of boys' superior mathematical ability can be confronted. Counsellors must also be aware of their own biases with respect to racial and other minorities, so as not to collude with the societal stereotypes that exist.

SECONDARY SCHOOL [AGES 13-17]

In secondary school, students' educational choices generally become more streamlined and geared to specific occupational or academic paths. Critical attention must be paid during this period to the intersection of gender issues and academic achievement. Studies as early as 1929 have consistently shown that girls perform better academically than boys, starting in elementary school and continuing through college (see Hyde, 1985; Rosser, 1989). In comparison to males, females start out as higher achievers and as more likely to use their abilities in educational pursuits. Girls' school progress is also generally superior to that of boys; girls are less likely than boys to repeat a grade, and more likely than boys to be accelerated and promoted (Hyde, 1985). Rosser (1989) reported that college women consistently receive higher grades than men across a variety of fields including the humanities and social sciences, engineering, sciences, and even mathematics, achieving grade-point averages of one-half to one full point higher than those of men. However, the strong academic performance of girls and women is generally not reflected in their occupational achievements (Betz, 1994). It appears that somewhere along the educational and career development path, there is a significant waste of female intellectual talent.

The Importance of Mathematics and Sciences to Career Development

In spite of the fact that women thrive in many areas of schooling, they often endure lesser outcomes than men (Steele, 1997), especially in the physical sciences, math, and engineering. A meta-analysis involving more than 3 million participants (Hyde, Fennema, & Lamon, 1990) found virtually no differences between boys and girls in performance on standardized math tests through elementary and middle school, but reported a steadily increasing trend toward men doing better from high school throughout college and into adulthood.

A mathematics background is seen as vitally important for entrance to numerous attractive career opportunities, including engineering, medicine, sciences, business, and the skilled trades, yet during their high school years, females tend to avoid math coursework (Betz, 1994). Such a decision becomes costly, because it limits females' available career options, thereby constituting a major barrier to women's career development. Steele (1997) uses domain identification theory to explain the achievement barriers still faced by women in school. This theory assumes that to sustain school success, one must be identified with school achievement in that it is part of one's self-definition, or personal identity. However, women's identification with certain domains of schooling may be threatened by societal stereotypes (e.g., that women are poor in math). Over the short term, such a threat can imperil achievement by depress-

ing academic performance. Over the long term, such pressures have more serious consequences, since they undermine identity through frustration of this identification and reduce their sense of belonging and value within the domain. Thus, for women to continue in math, they must overcome the low expectations of teachers, family, and societal gender roles which view math as unfeminine, as well as anticipate spending their entire working lives in a male-dominated world. According to Steele, such harshly imposed social realities may so reduce a woman's "sense of good prospects in math as to make identifying with it difficult" (p. 615). It becomes vitally important for parents and counsellors to assist girls and other minority students to transcend such societal stereotypes, so that their career choices may be broadened (Betz, 1994). Since lack of mathematics and science courses limits career choice in many areas, counsellors need to work with parents, teachers and students to help girls and other minority students develop more positive attitudes (Drummond & Ryan, 1995).

As children develop into adolescence, they develop their own set of interests and hobbies. If they are exposed to a broad repertoire of activities they will have the opportunity to test out many of their interests. Nonetheless, at this time their interests often change or progress into new and more complex activities, since adolescence is a period for exploring the world and testing new ideas and behaviours. Once again, parents need to be a continual part of the career development process, and although many of the ideas previously discussed with regard to Junior and Middle school-age children may still apply to parents of adolescents, parents can be employed as collaborators in the counselling process.

Counsellors often encounter clients seemingly caught in the crossfire of parents' competing occupational aspirations for them. It is not uncommon for a counsellor to hear a young client complain that: "My father wants me to become a doctor, my mother wants me to become a lawyer, but I'd rather be an actor." Such divergent aspirations often leave clients confused about what to do. As a result and not surprisingly, adolescents often regard parents as adversaries in the career decision-making process, rather than potential allies and supports (Otto, 1984).

Counsellors can easily fall into the trap of promoting the distancing of parents from their children's career development. This results from a somewhat skewed view that parents pressure or interfere in the career development process versus a view that parents are trying to involve themselves and have the best interests of their children at heart (Jeffery, Lehr, Hache, & Campbell, 1992). Research indicates that when parents understand the reasons behind a specific career preparation itinerary, they may be more willing to provide their son or daughter with both the much-needed concrete support and emotional encouragement neces-

sary for career development (Middleton & Loughhead, 1993). Thus, if parents are given information about career development and are educated with regard to how they can help their son or daughter, the counselling process may be enhanced.

Palmer and Cochran (1988) investigated the feasibility of enlisting parents as agents of career development through employment of a structured program. These authors found that parental involvement in a manner designed to crystallize, specify, and implement a vocational preference (Super, 1980) was indeed beneficial to the career development of their adolescent. This approach, which encourages flexibility and reciprocity in achieving career development goals, also fosters positive parent-adolescent interaction that extends to all areas of their shared experience. A framework for exploring the world of work can be distributed to parents by counsellors, and small group feedback sessions can be scheduled to discuss any problems along the way.

Meyer (1984) and Hoyt (1984) advocate a less structured form of parental involvement, while simultaneously teaching them specific interventions that they may utilize to help facilitate their adolescents' career development. Meyer (1984) suggests that career awareness and career exploration experiences be incorporated into family leisure time. During such times, parents can learn about their adolescent with a heightened knowledge of and attention to career. Thus, parents can assist their adolescent to gauge and identify their own strengths, talents, and potential and the kinds of activities that provide satisfaction to them. All such information may then be used to aid the adolescent in exploring career options.

In addition, counsellors can work with clients and parents through information sessions. Many of the ideas previously discussed can be shared during these sessions. Miller (1987) stressed that pressures from parents need to be addressed, through individual or group counselling sessions. He suggested asking whether adolescents feel constrained by family values, and what and how much pressure they experience from the family with respect to their career decisions. Clients who feel that their parents do not understand their ideas and who express frustration as a result can be encouraged by their counsellors to include their parents in career counselling sessions in order to clarify ways in which the adolescent and parents can work together.

Cultural Factors

When career counsellors are raised in the majority culture and trained in counsellor education programs reflecting majority cultural values and norms, they may mistakenly assume that their clients embrace these same values (Subich & Taylor, 1994). Such an assumption not only ignores the influence of cultural factors on an individual's career development,

but also underestimates the influence of social, political, and other contextual realities faced by minority youth in making effective life decisions (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). Minority youth are well aware of the discrimination and ethnic biases that exist in the job market. Unfortunately, some youths internalize societal stereotypes, which then become self-perpetuating barriers, effectively preventing them from reaching their potential.

The Counsellor's Role and Strategies

At this stage of a student's academic life, a career counsellor may choose to employ the strategy of joint student-parent counselling sessions. Such sessions can serve three purposes: a) sharing information; b) providing mediation; and c) education.

Sharing Information. These sessions can be used for the sharing of feedback about vocational testing and for provision of information regarding career development. Counsellors can help parents to understand multiple career paths so that they do not inadvertently encourage a particular career without being aware of the possible ramifications of following that path for their son or daughter.

Mediation. A second goal of joint sessions would be to provide a neutral ground enabling young adults to share with their parents their career aspirations of which they fear their parents may disapprove. The counsellor may act as mediator so that both parents and young adults can understand each other's point of view. Where strong discrepancies exist between parental wishes and a son's or daughter's career directions, the counsellor can inform the parent about current career realities that may differ from their understanding of the job market. If it is not feasible to have parents come to these sessions, clients may benefit from role-playing and other practice activities so that they learn to present such material to their parents in a non-confrontative manner.

Finally, the counsellor can encourage the parents to express their pride and belief in their young adult, which may have hitherto been unexpressed, leaving the young adult feeling unappreciated and undervalued. Such a show of faith by a parent may constitute the necessary extra push needed for an individual to have the courage to make choices, thereby risking making mistakes.

Education. The third purpose of joint counselling sessions is education. Parents sometimes lack the information they may need to facilitate their young adult's pursuit of a successful career. For example, the reality of the changing job market, wherein young people may undergo several career changes throughout their lifetime, may stand in stark con-

trast to some parents' experiences of following one career path all through their employment years. However, this may be equally true of some counsellors—and in such a case, parents who have personally experienced the effects of changing labour markets may serve as an important source of information for counsellors. In any case, such information can help parents and their children realize the need to acquire a wide range of skills that can be transferred from one job or career to another. In addition, parents need to be informed of how prospective job opportunities in various fields have shifted over the years, current trends in the job market, and the influence of technology. Finally, the counsellor can provide information for parents regarding how to go about being aware of the aspects or characteristics of their son or daughter that may be relevant to making career choices.

Counselling Strategies with Minority Youth

It is especially important that students from minority groups gain increased access to teachers, counsellors, and successful role models from similar backgrounds, as these can be potent factors in behaviour change. Further, counsellors should be encouraged to enlist the assistance of resources beyond those of the classroom and the counselling office to raise students' educational aspirations. Since both peers and parents can have an impact on students' educational expectations, counsellors must systematically use social support networks and role models as strategies (Hotchkiss & Borow, 1996). Finally, counsellors must be sensitive to the cultural variables that are most salient for their clients—and their clients' families—to facilitate the career development process of students experiencing bicultural struggles.

Hotchkiss and Borow (1996) have identified three main counselling approaches with the goal of assisting minority youth with career decision-making — although these strategies would in fact assist youths from both minority and majority groups. They are: (a) optimizing the chances of completion of schooling; (b) strengthening work-related attitudes, skills, and information; and (c) directly aiding clients to contact and use any available and relevant community resources. Such strategies might bolster students' self-images, lessen their feelings of inadequacy as future workers, and enable them to perceive future employment as pleasant and psychologically rewarding.

Work Values and Habits

Parents can also imbue their adolescent with good work habits that translate into good job-finding and job-holding skills in the future. As Worthington and Juntunen (1997) state, work-related attitudes and values such as eagerness to learn, motivation to be productive, respect,

integrity, and initiative are valued across cultures. This can be achieved by rewarding and praising promptness, initiative, courtesy, and industriousness in one's adolescent. Promotion of presentable appearance, enthusiasm, and reliability by parents can be very beneficial in maximizing a young person's chances of success in the work force, as these aspects of work are transferable to all work situations. Miller (1987) suggests volunteer work as a way to increase knowledge of career possibilities; sometimes volunteering can lead to part-time work during the school year and full-time summer opportunities. However, club memberships, extra-curricular activities and part-time jobs also accord adolescents the opportunity to develop both work-related skills and work values, and allow them to test how these values fit with their lifestyle values. Career choices are more likely to be satisfying when such values are taken into consideration. Parents can benefit from receiving information from school counsellors informing them about how to provide and support these opportunities for their adolescent.

As adolescents mature and become young adults they gain a stronger sense of self-awareness. At this time parents can assist their son's or daughter's career exploration by helping provide opportunities for exposure to various careers and work settings. This can be done through their own, their friends' and/or their colleagues' work (McDaniels & Hummel, 1984).

Parents need to be made aware that they are still powerful role models for their sons and daughters, and that their influence, expressed in a variety of ways, may yet be the most potent influence in shaping their careers. Some of the factors that contribute to positive career development also improve parent-child relations. Thus, there may be positive "spill-over" effects when parents are involved in assisting in their son's or daughter's career choice process. In seeking to understand their young adults' career development, parents can be encouraged to: a) observe the activities which are most satisfying to their son or daughter; b) assess where his or her strengths and abilities lie; and c) applaud efforts to explore careers and to make good career choices.

CONCLUSION

Parental influence is one of the most potent influences affecting their children's career development activities and decisions. Counsellors should be encouraged to involve parents in career counselling, starting from the earliest years of schooling. Children tend to make initial career decisions during early childhood, due to influences of their environment, community, socioeconomic status, family situation, and the significant adults in their lives. For this reason, it is important that coun-

sellors expand the realm of career counselling in order to implement career decision concepts within the home and family structure. Social and sex-role stereotypes are deeply ingrained in both our society and our educational systems, and unless these attitudes are challenged and transcended, they may result in circumscription of career options.

Enlisting parents in the career counselling process may be particularly useful when children are torn between their own desires and those of their parents. Parents are the primary forces in shaping their children's careers, and counsellors can be of great service to their clients by involving parents, thereby helping build support for their clients outside the counselling room, while at the same time helping parents and children find a common ground for collaboration. This is especially important during the teenage years, when movement towards individuation of adolescents often causes confusion with respect to the roles that parents can continue to play in their lives.

Overall, counsellors will want to provide as many broad avenues as possible for students to make good career decisions. The present article sought to present ways to augment counsellors' appreciation of the value of actively involving parents in their children's career development, and the potential they have, in their capacity as counsellors, to ensure that this involvement be positive.

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