

Needs of Non-Caucasian Students in Vocational Education: A Special Minority Group

Lee J. Richmond
John Johnson
Margie Downs
Annette Ellinghaus

For the past decade and a half, professional counseling literature has focused on racial and ethnic minority populations (Vontress, 1976; Sue, 1977; Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1979; Copeland, 1982). In general, the literature focuses on characteristics of minority populations, their special counseling needs, and utilization of services (Korchen, 1980), or on alternative counseling methods and relevant training modes (Copeland, 1982; McDavis & Parker, 1977). Few, if any studies, have been conducted to ascertain the special counseling needs of particular minority students in specific educational settings.

This study was designed to fill in part of that gap by focusing on the differences in reported help needs between non-Caucasian and White students in vocational education programs.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

There have been few large scale studies of vocational education, but those that exist suggest that vocational graduates get their first full-time jobs after graduation more quickly than academic graduates, enjoy better employment security, and accumulate more earnings (Herr & Evans, 1978). Because employment statistics are favorable, it is feared that guidance personnel may not recognize the need to expand choices and to extend the range of opportunity to students in vocational education, or to teach skills in decision making, personal management, and interpersonal communication. Fur-

thermore, the needs of minorities may remain relatively unaddressed. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to discover the guidance and counseling needs of all students in vocational education and additionally to ascertain any particular needs of non-Caucasian students.

METHOD

A survey was conceptualized to ascertain the help needs of vocational education students. Blacks and Whites were then compared to ascertain the degree of similarity and difference of the perceived help needs of the two groups.

Participants

A representative sample of 2,390 high school students studying vocational education in Maryland was selected from urban, rural, and suburban settings. The students were all classified as voc-ed but in fact attended four types of high schools: vocational technical, comprehensive with special vocational programs, combination of vocational technical and comprehensive, and general vocational. Of the 2,390 students, 1,169 (50%) were Black, 1,101 (46%) were White, and 120 (4%) were other, such as Asian or Hispanic. For this study, the latter category was classified as non-Caucasian.

Procedure

A written survey was administered to students to ascertain their perceived needs for counseling. Students were also queried with regard to other student-counselor variables. Finally, vocational identity was examined, and the races were compared on all items.

Instruments

The instruments administered were the Love-Richmond Vocational Students' Inventory (L-RSI), a 12-item survey questionnaire devised for this study that asked students whether they needed help with (1) personal relationships with friends, (2) school courses and grades, (3) family situations and problems, (4) rules and regulations, (5) feelings about self, (6) physical appearance, (7) drugs and alcohol, (8) financial matters, (9) health information, (10) recreation, (11) job placement, and (12) college selection. Responses to these 12 items were coded 3 = yes, 2 = maybe, and 1 = no. The average response rating was then computed for each sex and race, and the average values compared by analysis of variance.

A second questionnaire was administered to determine (a) how satisfied students were with their program, (b) how satisfied they were with their

job choice, (c) whether they received enough help making their career choice, (d) whether their counselors gave them enough help choosing their courses, (e) whether their counselors have enough time for them, and (f) how well their counselors are able to help them make decisions. Finally, sex and race differences for students were examined with respect to nine items from John Holland's Vocational Identity Scale (1979).

Results

In terms of counseling needs, non-Whites expressed a greater need for help with personal relationships, courses and grades, rules and regulations,

TABLE 1
Racial Differences Between Caucasian and Non-Caucasian Students on the L-RSI

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Dev.	<i>F</i> -ratio	<i>P</i>
Would you like help with (1 = no, 2 = maybe, 3 = yes)					
1-a Personal relationships with friends					
Non-white	1240	1.49	.77	16.10	.001
White	1090	1.37	.70		
1-b Courses and grades					
Non-white	1245	2.37	.84	69.92	.0001
White	1094	2.09	.91		
1-d Rules and regulations					
Non-white	1239	1.66	.85	8.24	.01
White	1092	1.56	.82		
1-e Feelings about self					
Non-white	1233	1.49	.80	8.53	.01
White	1093	1.40	.74		
1-h Financial matters					
Non-white	1240	1.94	.92	35.86	.0001
White	1091	1.71	.89		
1-i Health information					
Non-white	1233	1.84	.92	75.55	.001
White	1092	1.53	.80		
1-j Recreation					
Non-white	1231	1.78	.90	52.21	.0001
White	1089	1.52	.80		
1-k Job placement					
Non-white	1239	2.54	.78	65.56	.0001
White	1090	2.26	.89		
1-l College selection					
Non-white	1206	2.18	.90	203.39	.0001
White	1086	1.65	.87		

feelings about self, financial matters, health information, recreation, job placement, and college selection. Table 1 shows the actual difference between the races on the L-RSI.

Non-Whites also expressed less satisfaction with their program and with their job choice, gave lower ratings of getting enough help with their job choice and with the amount of help their counselors gave them choosing their courses, showed a lower rating on whether their counselor had enough time for them, and gave the counselors a lower rating on their ability to help make decisions. Table 2 indicates racial differences between Caucasian and non-Caucasian on select student-counselor variables.

TABLE 2

Racial Differences Between Caucasian and Non-Caucasian Students on the L-RSI

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Dev.	<i>F</i> -ratio	<i>P</i>
Are you satisfied with your vocational skills program? (1 = no, 2 = maybe, 3 = yes)					
Non-white	1172	2.66	.75	19.40	.0001
White	1071	2.79	.61		
Are you satisfied with your job choice? (1 = no, 2 = maybe, 3 = yes)					
Non-white	1186	2.69	.72	16.75	.001
White	1044	2.80	.59		
Did your counselor give you enough help choosing your courses? (1 = no, 2 = don't know, 3 = yes)					
Non-white	1246	2.09	.88	10.65	.01
White	1097	2.21	.84		
Did you receive enough help in making the choice of your job skill? (1 = no, 2 = maybe, 3 = yes)					
Non-white	1249	2.37	.75	34.63	.0001
White	1093	2.55	.69		
Does your counselor have enough time for you? (1 = no, 2 = maybe, 3 = yes)					
Non-white	1256	1.84	.84	46.80	.0001
White	1099	2.08	.86		
How well do you think your counselor is able to help you make decisions? (1 = poor, 2 = average, 3 = good)					
Non-white	1256	2.10	.64	4.81	.05
White	1096	2.16	.64		

On the Holland items, non-Whites expressed a greater need for reassurance about their job choice, a greater need to find out what kind of career to follow, and less ability to understand how people can be certain about occupational choices. Table 3 illustrates student responses to the Holland items.

Interpretation

Great caution should be used in interpreting these results. With a total sample size of over 2,000, a difference between 2.6 and 2.7 on a 3-point scale can be statistically significant without being meaningfully different in real life. The overall trend, however, of all the statistically significant differences discussed above, only one—non-White's greater need for college counseling—definitely seems to be a meaningful difference (mean rating = 2.18 compared to 1.65 for Whites). Furthermore, the overall trend cannot be overlooked. Non-White minority students have delineated the need for more help than White students. Black students tend to be less satisfied with the help that they are receiving than are White students. They are also both less satisfied and less assured about program and job choice than are Caucasian vocational education students.

We should not accept simplistic reasons for these differences. Though vocational education students are not generally viewed as college bound by their counselors, 39% of those in a Maryland case study indicated in-

TABLE 3

Comparative Responses of Non-White and White Students on Select Items from My Vocational Situation

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Dev.	<i>F</i> -ratio	<i>P</i>
Holland Items (1 = no, 2 = yes)					
I need assurance that I have made the right choice of occupation.					
Non-white	1241	1.53	.50	42.29	.0001
White	1095	1.40	.49		
I need to find out what kind of career I should follow.					
Non-white	1244	1.56	.50	52.77	.0001
White	1095	1.41	.49		
I can't understand how some people can be so set about what they want to do.					
Non-white	1245	1.38	.49	8.98	.01
White	1094	1.32	.47		

tentions in that direction. Furthermore, 28% of the 1,065 Blacks in the same study had professional aspirations as compared to 17% of the 1,065 Caucasians (Richmond, Downs, & Ellinghaus, 1980). It is conceivable that many Black students select vocational education as a means to an end—a job that will provide the wherewithal for further education and upward mobility. It is also probable that these students do not get enough information to exercise all of their options and make transitions smoothly.

It is quite possible that the non-White vocational education student poses some specific minority concerns for counselors. Further research is certainly desirable, but in the interim it is important that the help needs indicated here not be overlooked.

REFERENCES

- Atkinson, D.R., Morten, G., & Sue, D.W. (1979). *Counseling American minorities: A cross cultural perspective*. Iowa City, IA: William C. Brown.
- Copeland, E.J. (1982). Minority populations and traditional counseling programs: Some alternatives. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 21, 187-193.
- Herr, E.L., & Evans, R.N. (1978). *Foundations of vocational education*. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.
- Holland, J., Power, P.G., & Daiger, D.C. (1979). *My vocational situation, John Holland's Vocational Identity Scale*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Korchen, S.J. (1980). Clinical psychology and minority concerns. *American Psychologist*, 35, 262-269.
- McDavis, R.J., & Parker, M. (1977). A course on counseling ethnic minorities: A model. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 17, 146-149.
- Richmond, L.J., Downs, M., & Ellinghaus, A. (1980). *Meeting guidance needs of vocational education students*. (Final Report). Maryland State Department of Education.
- Sue, D.W. (1977). Counseling the culturally different: A conceptual analysis. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 55, 422-425.
- Vontress, C.E. (1976). Cultural differences: Implications for counseling. *Journal of Negro Education*, 8, 266-278.