The current article provides an overview to the cultural accommodation model (CAM) of counseling (Leong & Lee, 2006) that may help guide employment counselors’ work. The integrative multidimensional model of cross-cultural counseling (Leong, 1996), a precursor to the CAM, is also reviewed.

The workforce in the United States has become increasingly diversified in recent decades (U.S. Department of Labor, 2001), yet the field of counseling has not kept pace in the development of theoretical models to guide counseling practice with such a diverse clientele. To date, there has been only one major comprehensive theoretical model offered to the field (Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996).

CULTURAL ACCOMMODATION MODEL (CAM)

As one small step in addressing this gap, the purpose of the current article is to provide an overview of the CAM of psychotherapy (Leong & Lee, 2006), which can be adapted for employment counselors to assist them in their work. As Lewin (1951) indicated, “there is nothing so practical as a good theory” (p. 169). Early components of the CAM were presented in a chapter by Leong and Tang (2002) and then further articulated in an article by Leong and Lee (2006).

Leong (1996) presented a multidimensional and integrative model of cross-cultural counseling and psychotherapy based on Kluckhohn and Murray’s (1950) tripartite framework. He proposed that cross-cultural therapists need to attend to all three major dimensions of human personality and identity, namely, the universal (U), the group (G), and the individual (I) dimensions. The U dimension is based on the knowledge base generated by mainstream psychology and the universal laws of human behavior that have been supported by substantial bodies of research. The G dimension has been the domain of cross-cultural psychology as well as ethnic minority psychology and the study of gender differences. The third dimension is concerned with unique I characteristics. The I dimension is more often covered by behavioral and existential theories in which individual learning histories and personal phenomenology are proposed as critical elements in the understanding of human behavior. Leong’s (1996) integrative model proposes that all three (U, G, and I) dimensions are equally important in understanding human experiences and should be attended to by the counselor in an integrative fashion.

In developing his integrative model, Leong (1996) used a famous quote from Kluckhohn and Murray’s (1950) influential article. As the beginning point for his model, Kluckhohn and Murray indicated that “every man is in certain respects: (a) like all other men, (b) like some other men, and (c) like no other man” (as cited in Leong, 1996, p. 190). Kluckhohn and Murray’s contention was that some of the determinants of personality are common features found in the makeup of all people. This could be interpreted as addressing the biological aspect of the biopsychosocial model generally used in today’s medical sciences. For certain other
features of personality, however, Kluckhohn and Murray stated that most individuals are like some other individuals, suggesting the importance of social grouping, whether that grouping is based on culture, race, ethnicity, gender, or social class. Finally, Kluckhohn and Murray (1950) said that “each individual’s modes of perceiving, feeling, needing, and behaving have characteristic patterns which are not precisely duplicated by those of any other individual” (p. 37). Each person’s individuality, often the focus of social learning theories and models, is thus implied. Individuality suggests that all persons have distinct social learning experiences that can influence their values, beliefs, and cognitive schemas.

Traditional Western models of counseling tend to focus on the U dimension and completely ignore the G and I components that are necessary for a complete understanding of human behavior. Although the U dimension in counseling is very important to the integrative model, it is necessary but not sufficient for understanding and is often misguided for intervening (Leong, 1996).

According to Leong (1996), the G component of human personality is as important as the U component. These groupings may be based on culture, race, ethnicity, social class, occupation, religion, or gender. All persons in a social group share some type of bond with other members of the group, and this bond will distinguish the group members from members of other groups. Important constructs related to the G dimension are racial/ethnic identity, acculturation, and value preferences. A culturally competent counselor must be able to consider all of these variables from the standpoint of the client, especially if the client is a member of a different cultural group. Not doing so would make it impossible to accurately conceptualize the client’s psychological state, which in turn would make effective counseling difficult at best. As noted by Leong and Tang (2002), there are many dynamics that must be taken into consideration in counseling situations involving a client and therapist of different cultural backgrounds. Each person must have some awareness of the experiences of the other in order to be able to form a relationship. A counselor operating only at the U level may alienate the client. Although the two may not have shared group-level experiences in their backgrounds, the counselor must be able to address issues that involve groups other than his or her own (e.g., see Leong & Lee, 2006).

Finally, there is the I component of human personality within Leong’s (1996) integrative CAM model. Although it is true that we as individuals all share some commonalities, as reflected by the U component, no two persons are identical in every way. Kluckhohn and Murray (1950) said, “Each individual’s modes of perceiving, feeling, needing, and behaving have characteristic patterns which are not precisely duplicated by those of any other individual” (p. 37). Kluckhohn and Murray seemed to be referring to an idea akin to the concept of the “psychological environment” (Lewin, 1951), which refers to the idea that although two people may share the same physical space, they may not share the same psychological space. To neglect the I component would be to run the danger of stereotyping persons from various cultural groups due to overgeneralizations from the G dimension.

The CAM, based on this integrative model, is proposed to be additive to both the universalist and the culture assimilation approaches to psychological theories of counseling. Leong and Lee (2006) identified three steps in the proposed cultural accommodation approach: (a) identifying the cultural gaps or cultural blind spots in an existing theory that may restrict the cultural validity of the theory, (b) selecting current culturally specific concepts and models from cross-cultural and ethnic minority psychology to fill in the cultural gaps and accommodate the theory to racial and ethnic minorities, and (c) testing the culturally accommodated theory to determine if it has incremental validity above and beyond the culturally unaccommodated theory.
For the first step of the cultural accommodation process, we counselors need to examine which aspects of the counseling model or theory in question can be considered culture-general and be extended to other cultural groups beyond the dominant culture (e.g., Whites/European Americans). We also need to consider which aspects of the theory are culture-specific to the dominant culture and should not be generalized or imposed on other cultural groups. Furthermore, are there experiences of racial and ethnic minority groups represented as culture-specific constructs that are not captured within the theory? These questions of cultural validity and cultural specificity will need to be examined in the cultural context of the environment. Once the theory has been evaluated, we can move toward identifying its culture gaps and blind spots (Leong & Lee, 2006).

Having reviewed the commonly used Western models of counseling with regard to their cross-cultural validity and degree of cultural loading, culture-specific constructs need to be identified in order to fill the gaps. This constitutes the second step in the CAM. It is essentially an incremental validity model whereby the universal or culture-general aspects of these Western models need to be supplemented with culture-specific information. It is proposed that adding culture-specific elements to the Western models in order to consider the cultural dynamics of racial and ethnic minority clients will produce a more effective and relevant approach to counseling with these clients when universalistic models are not confirmed to be equally valid in the other cultures. When accommodation is needed, the question then becomes which cultural variables should be used for this process.

There are likely a myriad of cultural variables that may be implicated in the cross-cultural counseling triad (i.e., counselor, client, and the employers) and, as such, are inherently more complex than those that constitute the dyadic cross-cultural psychotherapy encounter. Leong and Lee (2006) have proposed that the selection of the culture-specific variables for accommodation be guided by the evidence-based practice approach. Therefore, counselors using the CAM need to undertake a review of the scientific literature with regard to the most critical and salient culture-specific variables to add to their counseling model. Finally, research is needed to test the value of the culturally accommodated model to determine if it has incremental validity above and beyond the culturally unaccommodated theory.

REFERENCES