

The Ethnic Matrix: Implications for Human Service Practitioners¹

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Most human services practitioners at one time or another must confront cultural issues which in many ways have a direct impact on their role and effectiveness as helping professionals. This article links the phenomenon of ethnic identity to problems, practices, and policies encountered in the field of human services. Although most of the theoretical concepts presented here are related to counseling psychology and education, other practitioners with culturally diverse client populations will also find the information applicable to their work. The social scientist, teacher and researcher, who is often the disseminator of theoretical and methodological paradigms, should also find these observations useful. The professor of applied and theoretical humanistic studies in many instances is the one who lays the foundation for an understanding of how sociological, cultural, and political phenomena interact with the psychological. The primary purpose of this article, therefore, is to present a psycho-social model (*the ethnic matrix*) for understanding ethnicity and the ethnic process in American society, and show how this model can be used by practitioners and researchers to further expand their own work.

Historical and Societal Perspectives on Ethnic Identity

While the America of the 1980s has adopted a language which on the surface reflects an urbane ethnic diversity and awareness, the traditional xenophobia and home grown ethno-racial stereotypes are still very much intact and rooted in the American cultural consciousness. Ethnic and racial jokes seem to be more frequently heard and repeated in open public places without fear of ostracism or any kind of social sanction. The awareness of the 1960s has given way to a kind of ultra-chic license to parody the black or latino vernacular with impunity. The core of our racial and ethnic images, fantasies, and behavior on the whole seem to have remained unaltered by the ethnic awakenings of the 1960s and 1970s.

Those who are caught between two cultural worlds share more or less a common core of psycho-social crises, conflicts, uncertainties as well as a healthy amount of tenacity and determination in their struggle to sustain an ethnic identity in contemporary American society. One dynamic often neglected in the writing and research about ethnic identity is in the formulation of how the larger societal context shapes, directs, and influences intellectual priorities as well as how it affects the subjects of projected intellectual or social scientific curiosity.

The 1960s and early 1970s provided the climate for a profound challenge to social and political institutions in the U.S. This period made it possible for psychologists, educators, and other human services workers to consider radically altering their perceptions of themselves as well as their professionally predetermined perceptions of their clients, patients, and students. At the same time, the subjects of studies and consumers of services were being radicalized by this same social movement.

Although the strength and power of the “American dream” has created nearly impossible odds against continuity and maintenance of most culturally distinct groups in contemporary society, the civil rights struggles of the 1960s gave birth to a movement which was eventually to develop into a broad based *cultural preservation revolution*. Black Americans effectively launched a movement for ethnic pride and maintenance of cultural heritage through a declaration of a positive and unambiguous self-identification. Naturally, many in psychology, counseling, and education were directly affected by these public and private affirmations concerning issues of race, ethnicity, class, culture, and language. In effect, the work of scholars and practitioners began to reflect a response to many of the challenges hurled at the professional establishment by a disenfranchised community.²

When the need for ethnic power was articulated by Chicano, Native American, black, and Puerto Rican professionals, many in the professional world—black, Anglo, Hispanic and Native American—began to listen. The collective response during the last twenty years, in some cases, began to transform, re-direct, and re-shape curriculum in professional training programs, introduce ethnic studies programs in the university, and test advanced pedagogical theory and practice in bilingual education. In general, an attempt to make professional human service practitioners sensitive and responsive to the realities and complexities of the role of race, culture, and language in the counseling, educational, and social service processes was encouraged.

A widely accepted notion is that acculturation is part of the ultimate process of assimilation. Ethnics in America “have become acculturated,

though not assimilated,” as Andrew Greely pointed out.³ Greely, Milton Gordon and others support the notion that acculturation is indeed a sub-process in the larger process of assimilation. Gordon, in his earlier work and again in his most recent book, created a broadly accepted model of the phenomenon of ethnicity and how he believed the assimilation process worked in American life.⁴

A close inspection of Gordon’s assimilation variables and the paradigm presented reveals a theoretical construct that is fundamentally *static* in form and substance.⁵ The reader is left with the impression that if a specific ethnic group “successfully” checks off all the sub-types of assimilation, then it can be said that this particular group has indeed assimilated into the American core society. In effect, his model suggests that the non-ethnically identifiable individual will be a likely candidate for the ultimate and inevitable form of assimilation: structural assimilation. Gordon’s theory suggests that people must divest themselves of their cultural garb, both intrinsic and extrinsic traits or characteristics, before they can be wholly assimilated into the core society. The facts, however, suggest that this end-point in the acculturation process is: (1) rare enough to be considered mythical, and (2) that white, Anglo or European ethnicity in America should be viewed as a significant variant of the ethnic phenomenon experienced by racial minorities (Chicano, black, Puerto Rican, Native American, and Asian).

Gordon mistakenly presents the example of the emerging black middle class as *prima facie* evidence that blacks have only been “delayed” in their eventual assimilation as a result of 300 years of discrimination. This is not delayed assimilation, this is simply the rule that demonstrates how the assimilation sub-processes, as he suggests, are not really part of an inevitable move towards structural assimilation—at least not for the black American. Native Americans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans are yet other exceptions. Social, economic, and racial factors prevent these groups from moving as easily as their white ethnic counterparts. A study in New York State revealed that Hispanics continue to be “poorer, less educated and more prone to serious health and social problems than any other segment of the population, white or black.”⁶ Furthermore, Puerto Ricans, the oldest and most populous Hispanic migrants in the Northeast representing at least sixty percent of the Hispanic population, tend to lag behind in almost every index. According to Gordon’s analysis one would expect this older settlement of Hispanics to be the most assimilated. Not so, according to the evidence.

Gordon also presents class as a necessary correlate or variable of the assimilation process. And indeed “ethclass,” as he puts it, is a most important factor in an analysis of ethnicity. The black middle class,

however, is notably different, and will continue to distinguish itself from the white ethnic middle class in America, as will be the case in the emerging middle class Puerto Rican, Chicano, Native American, Asian American, and indeed other white ethnic communities. For example, Erick Rosenthal's study of a Chicago Jewish community points out that while class mobility contributes to a change in residential patterns, there is a voluntary segregation and an attempt to restore ethnicity through modest forms of Jewish education.⁷

The recent resurgence on the part of both secular and religious groups to maintain Jewish traditions and beliefs seems to provide further evidence of the persistence of ethnic identity in the America of the 1980s. Young Jewish parents, for example, have recently re-established Yiddish language schools in New York City to carry on what is believed to be a most important part of Jewish history, culture, and identity. For many, from groups of varying degrees of orthodoxy, the question of intermarriage between Jews and gentiles has become a source of potential threat to the larger Jewish identity. Class mobility does not seem to be a necessary correlate or precursor to structural assimilation. Although the changing social climate may now make it easier for some ethnic groups to move up economically, cultural encapsulation sometimes becomes a direct by-product of that same economic mobility.

A model which assigns a fixed identity to a group or an individual member of a particular ethnic group is of little use or value. Far too many new issues have disturbed the uni-dimensional or static model traditionally used for understanding and analyzing ethnicity in contemporary American society.

Shifts in Ethnic Consciousness

Some people are increasingly aware of how their membership in a particular ethnic group brings with it a complex set of social, psychological, political, and cultural realities. With this heightened awareness, there is a sense about choices one could make about one's own ethnicity. Twenty five years ago this awareness was repressed or talked about in hushed tones; so, naturally the choices made and actions taken about personal ethnic identity were limited and quite private.

First, the racial minorities, those ethnic groups usually perceived and who perceive themselves as "people of color" in the United States, have taken on the call to ethnic revival with a marked urgency. For example, Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics see themselves as non-white in a racial sense—a descriptive perception which places them in a non-Anglo category. This differentiation must be understood within the context of this perceived non-white category which has much more to do with

ethnicity or culture than with the traditional methods used for determining racial designation. This ethnically expressed sense of self, coupled with racial descriptors is a significant one, and one that is often misinterpreted by out-group observers. This is particularly true for Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and other Hispanics, some of whom may be perceived as phenotypically white. This ethno-racial identification is particularly important as specific ethnic groups begin to establish their own objectives for social, political and cultural cohesion.

The second stream of ethnics now participating fully and competing for a rather perplexing kind of ethnic equality through the new ethnicity is the category of the white ethnic. The interpreters of the new ethnicity, most notably Michael Novak, challenged the notion of "legitimate" and "illegitimate" minorities.⁸ They argued that the Southern and Eastern European have as much right to preserve and maintain their own cultural heritage and ethnic connections as the non-white ethnics. Interestingly, the issue of discrimination and racism once perceived by the racial minorities to have been in part perpetrated and perpetuated by the economically mobile, and slightly more economically advantaged white ethnics, now begins to get hazy and vague.

What was once experienced as a clear line between whites and ethnic racial minorities has become somewhat blurred. The factors of race, class, and ethnicity as significant barriers in the struggle for economic and social equality have now entered a kind of limbo or gray zone. If, for example, the Irish-American Catholics are victimized ethnically, then who is doing the victimizing? Similarly, if the Jews and Italians are registering complaints of discrimination, then who is doing the discriminating? The new ethnicity has introduced some confounding variables into an already complex web of ethnic and race relations. These confused perceptions are most apparent in the claims and counter-claims surrounding affirmative action policies. The purpose of these observations is to shed some light on the new dynamics emerging from the new ethnicity; they are not intended to suggest or promote a "more ethnic than thou" polemic.

Blacks, Native Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Asians in America recognize their ethnic and racial differences have always been a significant factor in the expected quality of life or indeed their chances for survival in American society. Historically, these differences have set them apart, and these same differences have traditionally served as a means to conveniently separate the "haves" from the "have nots." Perhaps in a somewhat inverted fashion, the social isolation and setting off into ghettos, tribal reservations, and barrios has served to preserve whatever has survived of the language and traditions. The racial

minorities seeking to reify their cultural experience, find that the process of re-assertion of the ethnic self and group is intimately tied to issues of survival on an economic, social, political and psychological level. On the other hand, the Anglo—or the white ethnic who is perceived as socially white in American society—can and does enter the dominant society with greater ease. This does not mean, however, that the Irish, Italian Americans, and other white ethnics do not face varied forms of discrimination. They most certainly do. Their ability to disconnect and enter the mainstream American society, however, is greatly facilitated by their perceived racial identity. The resulting ethnic disassociation, while sometimes superficial, sometimes facile, is often accompanied by painful and disorienting experiences. Unfortunately, this creates the kind of psychological stress and confusion which leads many to assume a marginal social identity. Ethnotherapy, or traditional psychotherapy with a concentrated focus on issues of culture, now allows many the opportunity to understand the profound impact of culture on the psychological development of the individual in society. Such a focus also serves to clarify the interaction between social rejection, ethnicity, interpersonal, and intergenerational conflict.⁹

Conscious articulation and recognition of cultural maintenance as a desired goal will inevitably alter the classic movement for eventual assimilation. The forces underlying the desire to retain group cohesion for political, cultural, social, economic, or psychological reasons will retard and sometimes reverse the assimilation process. White ethnics who explore their conflicts in an *ethnic oriented therapy* will begin to develop a greater sense of self in connection with their cultural values, beliefs, traditions and ceremonies or rituals. They will, no doubt, be more open to accept or re-ignite their cultural beliefs. This dynamic may differ somewhat for racial minorities who, with few exceptions, have never been able to separate themselves from membership in a group that has been socially and economically marginal, precisely because of cultural and racial identity.

In an effort to assert itself ethnically, the white ethnic community seems to have gone directly to the heart of concerns formerly within the exclusive domain of non-white ethnic communities. Now, however, as the “new ethnicity” emerges and takes root in institutions and in social consciousness, the white ethnic continues to lay claim to minority demands—an insistence upon a variety of economic and social reparations. The presence of white ethnic studies programs in the university alongside minority ethnic studies programs is as common in the 1980s as an affirmative action program which has lengthened its list of aggrieved parties. As a matter of course, the notion of cultural pluralism which on

the surface seems to be far more acceptable than the melting pot concept, has been used in many instances to defuse the social and economic demands and concerns of the minorities in the university. In effect, the public relations angle of cultural variety and diversity, the sharing of budgetary allocations equally, the big push for a "global" social studies curriculum are all techniques which have served to move the hard core social and economic realities of some ethnic groups to the back burner. The best way to render a movement impotent is to suggest that everyone is desperately in need of and entitled to exploration and restoration of their cultural heritage. The focus, therefore, becomes the superficial examination of culture and ethnicity of all groups, while concomitantly down-playing how ethnicity and race interact with other factors to produce devastatingly negative economic and social consequences for select ethnic groups in American society.¹⁰

The public debate was gradually transformed by those who make public policy: educators introduced new curriculum offerings; social service agencies, in some instances, attempted to re-vamp their programs and personnel practices; legislators wrote new laws and funded new programs. Those who produce social science research to support or challenge the changes in public institutions are also participants in the debate.

Richard Rodriguez, for example, through his paradigm of the public and private society of language and culture, extends the debate about ethnicity in American life to one of the most controversial and politically volatile issues in the public domain: bilingual education.¹¹ In his evocative account of his childhood, Rodriguez, through a most eloquent remembrance of the complexities of language and a confused cultural identity, serves as a kind of spokesperson for those staunchly opposed to bilingual education. Here we have an academically-credentialed Chicano, an articulate university professor from a poor background who expresses strong anti-bilingual education sentiments. The press, opponents of bilingual education, and those who believe all assimilation to be not only good but necessary could not miss this golden opportunity to promote their position. Rodriguez's pronouncements served to fan the flames. Ultimately, the public society which Rodriguez claims to have finally accepted as his very own turns out to be only another group's ethnic core—somebody else's extrinsic and intrinsic set of values and beliefs.

The Rodriguez position is only one example of an intellectual struggle and heated climate surrounding the public debate about the place and role of ethnicity and language in this society. On another level, however, the debate itself reflects the struggle for political power, class re-

alignments, and racial and cultural hegemony in American society.

The Ethnic Matrix-Ethnicity as a Dynamic Phenomenon

The most commonly held belief on ethnic change suggests that individuals and groups move from a traditional point of reference—identity or orientation—to an Anglo-American point of reference: an inevitable uni-directional process to assimilation. For most, social scientist and lay public alike, the premise upon which ethnic change theory is based is the notion that time and continuous contact with the dominant society will eventually wash away all traces of cultural differences. Again, the assumption is that the movement is one-way, and occasional reversals and returns to the ethnic community are to be viewed as romantic excursions into an innocent past; nothing to be taken seriously. The process of the ethnic matrix is much more complex than these simplistic assertions may suggest. If the ethnic process moves one way for some, it does not necessarily mean that all ethnic groups can be fit into narrow bands of typologies or stages of acculturation or assimilation.

The political and social changes of the 1960s and 1970s served to give most ethnic Americans an alternative to total absorption into the mainstream; one could now be a part of the larger national social context while at the same time continue membership in a distinct ethnic community. In other words, the public debate on ethnicity gave people greater impetus to do what they had been doing all along; maintain ethnic membership on their own terms, and recognize that the road to becoming an assimilated American was indeed a costly journey. Instead of believing that any acculturative act will inevitably lead to total assimilation, most ethnic groups today, at least those interested in sustaining their cultural core and identity, subscribe to a far more dynamic ethnic process.

If one were to consider varying degrees of assimilation as points on opposite poles of a continuum, and the movements towards or away from either pole as an ebb and flow process, then we might begin to envision an added dimension in the acculturative process. This process is characterized by a time and movement dimension whose shifts or changes are determined by a highly complex set of social interactions producing a larger web or *ethnic matrix* finding expression in individual and group behavior. This movement, this ebb and flow, is largely determined by pieces of behavior experienced by each member of the ethnic group, and collectively on a broader societal scale will be seen as patterns or culture shifts taking place in the group itself.

The ethnic behavioral patterns can be viewed as choices—some forced,

others voluntary— and decisions or preferences expressed or acted upon in the course of a lifetime, a year, a month or a day. These discrete choices or preferences will move the individual to either one end of that continuum or the other. In so doing, the choice or posture assumed in response to a particular event or activity will either support the group's traditional mode of culturally determined behavior or the choice will support a preference for an Anglo-American oriented pattern. The choice, on the other hand, may be one which represents an acceptable modification or a *mixed mode* expressive of a blending of the two cultural behaviors. These ethnic choice points are legion. Some examples may include the following: choice of residential neighborhood, choice of spouse, naming of a child, foods eaten, music listened to, ritual celebration, use of mother tongue, involvement in ethnic politics, support of bilingual education or of ethnic studies programs. These are acts and choices which re-affirm the individual's identification with particular ethnic interests, associations, and commitments.

The daily choices ultimately define for that individual an *ethnic orientation* rather than that which is usually presented or perceived as a fixed ethnic identity. In effect, the components or elements are in constant flux and have the potential for a directional change. Yet the overall movement or orientation does allow for the development of broader patterns of behavior. Viewing ethnicity as a dynamic and changeable phenomenon on a continuum, expressive of preferences pushing towards or away from either mode, allows for a greater degree of flexibility and refinement in developing an understanding of the ethnic process. In effect, ethnicity is as complex as the myriad decisions that define it as a portion of human behavior. Attempts to measure ethnic identity and ethnicity have proven to be a difficult and less than valid and reliable process. Abstractions of what we believe ethnicity to be is in large measure determined by abstracted methodologies.

If we consider the ethnic continuum once again, we have before us a visual model for what may be occurring in the acculturation and assimilation process. The modes, while existing only in the abstract sense, do provide polar opposites which allow us the opportunity to envision movement towards or away from either end of the continuum. This phenomenon is experienced most profoundly by first and second generation immigrants, and continues to be part of the psycho-cultural process as long as that particular group is considered "different" in this society. Ethnics perceived as phenotypically "white" tend to move much more quickly towards an assimilative mode than those ethnics perceived as "non-white." Black Americans, for example, continue to be keenly aware of their differences in U.S. society. In daily life choices they are

caught between the Afroamerican mode and the assimilated mode where one may choose total denial of race and cultural heritage. This also holds true for other minorities who, because of their marginal social economic conditions, are forced to adhere closely to their traditional modes of behavior in isolated ethnic communities.

The large scale rejection by the dominant society, not only as a result of racial distinction but also because of other indicators of ethnic difference (i.e., language and culture), sometimes paradoxically reinforces the ethnic group's sense of peoplehood. However, this kind of negative reinforcement of ethnicity is not always experienced as an affirmation of the group's positive traditional patterns of behavior. The message received and often internalized is that they are different and clearly inferior to the members of the dominant group; their language and culture are not worth maintaining, and in order to become "real" Americans they must abandon their traditional cultural patterns. This resounding message comes through in every aspect of their lives. The most immediate result is poor self-esteem, as well as hatred or shame of one's ethnic or racial group.

The most pervasive and profound form of cultural repression comes from public schools. The primary function of educational institutions is to socialize and to Americanize all children. Although there is much ado about the need for "global" education, the controversy still rages over the efficacy or value of bilingual education programs. The efforts to diversify the language and cultural curriculum of schools represent an exceedingly small part of educational practice. A look at the history of education in this country demonstrates that the prevailing thrust has been in favor of a pedagogical philosophy which is not about the business of preserving culture. Look closely at those programs which on the surface seem to be culturally radicalizing institutions. What may be occurring, under the guise of cultural pluralism, bilingual and multi-cultural education, is the same old brand of Americanization. Guidance counselors and educators must be schooled in the dynamics of their own ethnicity, and know that the messages they bring with them to their clients and students can either affirm a way of life or denigrate it.¹²

The message from schools, the media, and other sectors of society is persistent: language, culture, and traditions must yield in order to gain full and direct admission into the larger society. The "unmeltable" must melt. The price of admission is your ethnic identity; who you think you are must be abandoned, given up, discarded; your sense of cultural continuity must be terminated. What remains of strong rich cultures sometimes is only evident in the vestigial pap of annual traditions so commonly expressed in the American ethnic parade.

Nature of Choice—Simple to Complex

The flow and direction of life are guided by countless choices. We are faced continuously with certain choices which involve a facet or an aspect of our ethnicity: our ethnic selves. This ethnic self is functionally inseparable from other aspects of our psycho-social selves. These ethnic choices operate on many levels and carry with them varying degrees of psychological and social meaning and consequence. At times, these choices may be quite mundane, routine, and of little consequence. At other times, the choice may produce a deeply significant impact on our ethnicity and ultimately result in a push towards an acculturative life pattern. The choices, whether petty or profound, build upon a lifetime of options which ultimately enhance our ethnic associations (psychologically and socially), or reduce ethnicity in a cumulative sense. New patterns emerge from the choices, and these patterns in turn create new sets of choices on the ethnic continuum.

One choice alone does not cause an individual to drop membership in a particular ethnic group. But a long series of interconnected choice points will eventually have an impact on one's sense of ethnic orientation. For example, Richard Rodriguez's observations are more than a commentary on the efficacy of bilingual education; they reflect an individual's personal struggle with self and his ethnic community. Ultimately, the string of choices made by Rodriguez have moved him away from one end of the ethnic continuum towards the other, where he experienced his newly formed identity as his personal epiphany:

Thus it happened for me. Only when I was able to think of myself as an American, no longer alien in gringo society, could I seek the rights and opportunities necessary for full public individuality. The social and political advantages I enjoy as a man began on the day I came to believe that my name is indeed Rich-heard Road-ree-guess.¹³

Rodriguez's revelation came with the acceptance of the Anglicized sound of his name, for others it comes with an awareness, acceptance, and an affirmation of who they are by asserting their ethnic identity in public society.

Unfortunately, the controversy surrounding Rodriguez's work focused on his pedagogical preferences rather than on the internal individual struggle as an expression of only one kind of journey towards assimilation. Other ethnic minorities, finding themselves in this same struggle, have taken their private intimate world and thrust it into the public domain; and in so doing, risked rejection and prejudice. Many, however, have met with an acceptance of who they are; if not by others, they accepted themselves for who and what they are with the same kind of equanimity expressed by Rodriguez.

Not only is this ethnic choice made between two poles on the

continuum represented as a horizontal movement but each choice also carries with it a degree of intensity which could be conceptualized as a vertical or hierarchical system denoting the *degree of impact* of that particular ethnic choice. The interaction between a vertical and a horizontal continuum forms the essence of the *ethnic matrix*. Therefore, the ethnic matrix can be defined as that point where one moves towards or away from a traditional ethnic mode of behavior on a horizontal continuum, and at the same time this choice carries with it a property which can be seen as an intensity factor on a vertical continuum. Matrix in this sense is defined as "... a place or medium in which something is bred, produced or developed; or, a place or point of origin and growth."¹⁴

The intensity or impact of choice on the individual's ethnic lifestyle follows: First, some choices are simple and have no significant impact on the individual's degree of ethnicity. Second, some choices mark significant points in a person's life where the movement away from the traditional mode is experienced as a critical departure from established ethnic patterns or norms. This kind of shift can be experienced as a cultural breach. Third, many choices present a serious conflict in values and belief systems, which are not experienced on a conscious level. As these conflicts remain unresolved or go unrecognized, they will continue to produce stress and some degree of psycho-social dysfunction for the individual. This is precisely what counselors and others must attend to in their work. A counseling process which addresses the dynamics of ethnicity would enable a client to move to a healthier more integrated level of acceptance of self and community. Many ethnic individuals face social and psychic oppression through a variety of contacts and confrontations with the dominant society. Many others, however, re-direct their stress and transform conflict into positive artistic, social, familial, political or literary forms of expression, and in so doing regain or reaffirm a more assured sense of self and community.

One of the fundamental purposes of cross cultural counseling or co-ethnic counseling is to focus attention on issues related to culture and cultural adaptation. Those who carry their culture pretty much intact, while making appropriate shifts in their approach to a new culture, are those who will experience the least amount of conflict. Conversely, the individual or family experiencing the greatest degree of cultural dissonance, and believing their cultural matrix is entirely useless in the new surroundings, are the ones who will experience the greatest dysfunction and will need the kind of counseling and therapy which openly acknowledges and addresses the complexities of the ethnic process. Counselors and therapists must have some self-knowledge of their own ethnicities, some working knowledge of the client's or patient's ethnicity,

and finally a sensitivity about how the two will interact in the counseling process to either enhance communication and trust or reduce it. In addition to gender, age, speech, warmth, and a dozen other physical, psychological, and social traits communicated by practitioners, they are also members of an ethnic group.

The study conducted by Fernandez-Marina *et al.* demonstrated that college students in the University of Puerto Rico most in need of counseling were those who were beginning to disengagethemselves from the traditional Latin family belief system:

. . . our non-neurotics were significantly more accepting of traditional Latin-American family beliefs than were our neurotics. Apparently here in Puerto Rico those who are moving too rapidly away from the traditional family values of the society are encountering more inter-personal problems than those who are holding on to, or moving slowly from, traditional family beliefs.¹⁵

The findings demonstrate how both major and minor choices move us towards one end of the ethnic continuum or the other. The complexity of the ethnic matrix accounts for a host of ethnic choices and decisions, both conscious and unconscious. Little is known about the profound cohesive factors which bind certain ethnic groups. At the same time, little is known about those who find themselves in the throes of virtual cultural dissolution or absorption as marginal members in an ethnically neutered American society.

Does the traditional ethnic group provide a centrality and sense of focus in life for the individual? Or do we know too well that the powerfully attractive mass American culture lurks constantly in the shadows and competes with one's strong desire for identity and rootedness in the ethnic community? A greater sense of ambivalence is much more evident and perhaps more stressful in the individual who actively seeks a greater degree of socio-economic mobility. In this same individual there may be a profound need for community or for centrality. But the cultural abyss, and the lure and the prizes offered by mass culture all seem to exist outside the gates of the ethnic community, and the acquisition of these seem to require the renunciation of membership from the primary group. Indeed, what more does this mass culture provide beyond the seeming material comfort and imagined status and acceptability that comes with social mobility?

Once again, Rodriguez's words illustrate his personal leap into the public society and describes the loss of a certain kind of intimacy. He states:

It is true that my public society today is often impersonal, in fact, my public society today is usually mass society. But despite the anonymity of the crowd, and despite the fact that the individuality I achieve in public is often tenuous—because it depends on my being one in a crowd—I celebrate the day I acquired my new name.¹⁶

The point here is not to focus on how far Rodriguez has assimilated into

mainstream core society but to recognize his experience for what it is: a point in a long series of events and choices he has made throughout his life. His personal journal is an excellent example of the ethnic process in flux as suggested by the ethnic matrix. The choices he has made in his life, and those he continues to make, may move him along the ethnic continuum towards the Anglo mode or they may move him back to the traditional Hispanic mode. Yet today Rodriguez might remember the sounds of his Spanish childhood, and these, he said, were a part of the "golden age of [my] childhood."¹⁷

These comments are not only nostalgic recollections but reflections of what he is and what he feels today. Psychologically, his approach to words, sounds, images and imaginings of intimacies of his heart are only a reflection of this process; and Rodriguez will continue to call upon these memories, experiences, and ways of looking at the world today as he writes or teaches. Rodriguez is far from the assimilated American. The Chicano child in him continues to shape the perception of his adult world.

Rodriguez may have stepped into a pedagogical hornets' nest by expressing his views on the uses of language and culture in the classroom, but his most important contribution lies in his presentation of his thoughts and feelings as he moves through the shifts in ethnic identity. His account is an excellent case study of the ethnic matrix at work. In fact, Rodriguez has not stopped making choices on the ethnic continuum. Most recently, to the chagrin of the Anglo-establishment press and others eagerly looking for his support on the matter of bilingualism, he has taken a public stand against the proposed constitutional amendment that would declare English the official language of the United States. He states: "Our government has no business elevating one language above all others, no business implying the supremacy of Anglo culture."¹⁸ On this particular issue, if we apply the ethnic matrix, Rodriguez would move towards the Hispanic end of the continuum. The point here is that the many options taken offer the potential for moving us towards or away from either end of the ethnic continuum.

Implications for Training and Research

Each academic area developed its own strategies which are based on a set of beliefs about what role ethnicity or ethnic identity plays in that particular field. Anthropologists have been engaged in cross-cultural research and what the implications and applications of their findings might be for human relations. Psychologists, interested in broadening their theoretical perspectives and clinical effectiveness, started to seriously consider the role of culture in the counseling or psycho-

therapeutic process in the 1960s. The absence of ethnic content and concern with ethnic issues in professional training programs was seriously questioned. This significant void seemed to limit the applicability of some of the “non-ethnic” concepts in psychology and education to a small sector of the population: namely, white middle class Americans. The widely accepted belief in the melting pot seemed to push away all references to the ethnically or linguistically different client. Although movement away from the non-ethnic approach in counseling and other human services has occurred in some small measure, the best way to systematically include ethnicity in the training repertoire remains problematical. Progress in this area has been hampered by a number of factors, not the least of which is a basic inability to confront the realities and complexities of the role of ethnicity in the larger societal structure. Furthermore, naive perceptions of the significance of racial and ethnic differences, on one level, buttressed by most American’s fundamental racist thinking and fears on another level, have created a kind of Disneyworld view of what culture, language, and race represent in the America of the 1980s. Most pre-professionals and professionals enter their training and practice with their views virtually untouched and unchallenged. Add to this uniform thinking the diversity of perceptions and methodologies of humanistic studies researchers, and what results is a profoundly confusing picture of ethnicity and ethnic relations in American society. How we study what we study, more often than not, adds to the confusion of what we know or think we know about a particular social phenomenon.

Once the dynamic and complex nature of ethnicity and ethnic identity is fully recognized, we can then begin to focus on the impact it may have on individual development and group interaction. The process, however, is sometimes difficult to grasp in the classic social scientific sense. Understanding the process requires a broad-spectrum analysis—an interdisciplinary approach, if you will. The nature of ethnic identity is such that it produces the kinds of methodological obstacles which often prevent the researcher from fully appreciating and numerically documenting its every nuance.

Those proposing the broader, less rigid, qualitative or ethnographic definitions and descriptions of ethnicity may be on the right track in terms of theory building in human and social behavior. On the other hand, researchers who have restricted their work to finite social questions within even more restrictive methodologies may have too easily allowed themselves to get bogged down in amassing quantitative minutia. They seem to be perpetuating the empirical style described and cautioned against by C. W. Mills:

What all this amounts to is the use of statistics to illustrate general points and the use of general points to illustrate statistics. The general points are neither tested nor made specific. They are adapted to the figures, as the arrangement of the figures is adapted to them. The general points and explanations can be used with other figures too; and the figures can be used with other general points. The logical tricks are used to give apparent structural and historical and psychological meaning to studies which by their very style of abstraction have eliminated such meanings.¹⁹

Although this does not mean all quantitative studies and approaches are totally devoid of meaning, what does seem to happen frequently is that the central idea or thrust of a study is not made apparent. Too often the study is embedded or lost in the tables, charts, correlation comparisons, and frequency distributions abstracted from census tapes or exquisitely refined data.

The essence of the ethnic experience seems to be absent in most of the quantitative studies: the quality of time and space between individuals and groups is never fully captured, examined or reported. Gregory Bateson, in discussing the problems of scientific measurement, suggested that "behavioral scientists are in the habit of looking for quantities, and so miss the patterns that really matter."²⁰ In our zeal to count frequencies and determine validity and reliability, we submit to the tyranny of the measuring instrument, and somehow in the final analysis, we "miss the patterns" which tell of the experience itself.

This suggested perspective on ethnicity as a dynamic, moving, and constantly changing phenomenon will take us away from the fixed perceptions which developed and have come to be accepted about ethnicity in the social sciences. Counselors, psychologists, and other human services practitioners should begin to look at the ethnic factor with renewed interest and commitment. The more counseling services extend into the poorer sectors of the society, the more frequent our encounter will be with cultural systems that are markedly different from those of the provider of the service. Training programs, through an expanded curriculum, must openly address ethnicity as readily as other dynamics in human behavior are discussed. While the public debate around ethnicity continues to have political, social, and economic significance, the practitioners and trainers of our practitioners cannot simply dismiss the ethnic factor in counseling, education, or social work as a phenomenon that might have been fashionable and politically expedient in the 1960s and early 1970s, but is now passe.

Notes

¹A version of this paper was presented at the *First Eastern Regional Meeting of the National Association for Ethnic Studies: Ethnic Identity-Visions and Revisions*. Pace University, New York, Friday, October 25, 1985. I would like to express my appreciation to William A. Proefriedt for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

²J. A. Vazquez and C. Gold. *Counseling and Minorities: A Bibliography*. National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education and InterAmerica Research Associates, Inc. 1981. This collection is reflective of the growing interest in this area of research.

³Andrew M. Greeley. *Why Can't They Be Like Us? Facts and Fallacies About Ethnic Differences and Group Conflicts in America*. (New York: Institute of Human Relations Press, 1969) 69.

⁴Milton M. Gordon. *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965); Milton M. Gordon. *Human Nature, Class and Ethnicity*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁵*Ibid.*, 71, 76.

⁶Larry Rohter. "Hispanics in State in Worst Poverty." *New York Times*. (Monday, August 26, 1985) 1.

⁷Erick Rosenthal. "Acculturation Without Assimilation? The Jewish Community of Chicago, Illinois." *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 66, (1960) 275-288.

⁸Michael Novak. *Further Reflections on Ethnicity*. (Middletown, Pa.: Jednota Press, 1977) 8.

⁹M. McGoldrick, J. Pearce, and J. Giordano. *Ethnicity and Family Therapy* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1982).

¹⁰J. Nieves, J. Canino, S. Gorelick, H. Ortiz, C. Rodriguez, and J. M. Vazquez. "Puerto Rican Studies—Roots and Challenges." Paper presented at the *First International Conference for Puerto Rican Studies*. Brooklyn College-CUNY, New York, April 3, 1981. A section of this paper takes a closer look at the concept of cultural pluralism and its potentially negative impact on the progress of minorities in the university.

¹¹Richard Rodriguez. "Memories of a Bilingual Childhood." *American Educator*. Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1981) 12-21.

¹²Jesse M. Vazquez. "Exploring the Ethnic Self of the Bilingual Teacher in Training." *Journal of the New York State Association for Bilingual Education*. Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring, 1985), 26-36.

¹³Rodriguez, 18.

¹⁴*Oxford English Dictionary*. The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. Vol. I. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹⁵R. Fernandez-Marina, E. Maldonado Sierra, and R. D. Trent. "Neurosis and Traditional Family Beliefs in Puerto Rico." *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*. Vol. 6, Nos. 3 & 4 (Autumn, 1960) 244.

¹⁶Rodriguez, p. 18.

¹⁷Rodriguez, p. 17.

¹⁸George Will. "In Defense of the Mother Tongue." *Newsweek*. (July 8, 1985) 78.

¹⁹C. Wright Mills. *The Sociological Imagination*. (New York: Grove Press 1959) 71.

²⁰Daniel Goldman. "Interview with Gregory Bateson: Breaking out of the Double Bind." *Psychology Today*. Vol. 12, No. 3 (August, 1978) 47.

Critique

Vazquez brings to the fore a number of elements which should be of concern to educators as well as counselors today. His article is primarily concerned with the intertwining of cultures in the United States as ethnic minority groups increase in numbers.

Although the author illustrates how Gordon's theory is one which suggests foreigners divest themselves of their cultural garb in order to be assimilated by this society, many graduate counseling programs with cross cultural components are urging American professionals who will be cross cultural counselors to not only accept but encourage their foreign clients to retain their cultural garb. American counselors and educators are being encouraged to take advantage of the enrichment which would come from learning about a different culture and seeing things from a different perspective.