NJMR NORDIC JOURNAL OF MIGRATION RESEARCH

Student-Initiated Discussion Topics in Career Counselling of Adult Immigrants

RESEARCH

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HUP HELSINKI UNIVERSITY PRESS

ABSTRACT

Through thematic analysis, this article examines how career counsellors working in an integration training programme for adult immigrants use power in their work with their counselees by influencing the content of career counselling discussions. The theoretical framework applied in this article is the non-decision-making theory by Bachrach and Baratz. This article draws on empirical data collected by video-recording career counselling discussions between counsellors and students. The findings show how career counsellors tend to limit discussion topics to those belonging to their pre-formulated structure and how the topics suggested by students tend to be dismissed, treated with less depth and accuracy, or ignored. The focus of the discussion is primarily on which educational or employment choices would best suit the student instead of worries or interests that the students also find relevant. This work discusses how the counsellor's values appear to direct the discussions and what implications this may have for career counselling practices with migrants.

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KEYWORDS:

Integration; Immigrants; Power; Non-decision-making; Career counselling

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Kekki, M. 2022. Student-Initiated Discussion Topics in Career Counselling of Adult Immigrants. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 12(2), pp. 206–222. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.413

DOI: 10.33134/njmr.413

INTRODUCTION

Career counselling, referred to hereafter as counselling, is often regarded as either neutral or positively loaded activity. However, as in any human endeavour, there are also undercurrents, tensions and conflicts involved (Bergmo-Prvulovic 2018; Kurki 2018). Generally, counselling can be described as a process based on the cooperative and dialogic interaction between career counsellors (hereafter, counsellors) and their students (Vehviläinen 2014). Here, individuals are encouraged, supported and guided to think about and act in their lives (Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen 2018), and the encounters serve as a forum to investigate individual life processes (Vehviläinen & Souto 2021). Ribeiro (2021) has argued that when counselling takes place in the context of migration, it means bringing cultural perspectives or lived experiences from the Global South to counselling, whereas the mainstream counselling theories and approaches used by counsellors have developed in the Global North. This has also led counselling practices to face new challenges when aiming to support immigrants (Sultana, in press). Counselling has also been argued to contribute to social justice and experiences of well-being, belonging and autonomy (Hertzberg & Sundelin 2014; Sultana 2014), which can be seen as central for the process of integration. In this process, counsellors play an important role, for example, by acting as facilitators (Magnano et al. 2021). Therefore, it is interesting to see counsellors interact with their counselees and consider what kinds of issues or elements related to power are present in their work, as well as who may decide which issues or topics end up being treated and discussed. Further, it is salient to investigate whether there are some topics that counsellors tend to avoid or do not want to discuss; in particular, how counsellors react when a counselee brings up a theme or topic of discussion is an important point. In this article, I examine how counsellors working in the context of the Finnish integration training programme for adult immigrants deal with these questions. The aim of this article is to better understand the power-related and power-reflecting approaches and practices in counselling.

COUNSELLING WITHIN THE FINNISH INTEGRATION TRAINING PROGRAMME

The concept of integration has been problematised by many scholars. In their research, Ryan and Mulholland (2015) have argued for the benefits of using the concept of 'embedding' instead of integration, because integration emphasises a more static outcome that can never be achieved, whereas embedding refers to a more dynamic process that does not end. Schinkel (2018) criticises immigrant integration as a neo-colonial practise that is wrongly targeted at individuals rather than societies and that focuses on problematic groups and never on 'natives' or 'whites'. Furthermore, Bhambra (2016) indicates how the very process of inclusion in a society is controversial because it is based on the prerequisite of exclusion.

In Finland, immigrants who are registered as unemployed jobseekers are required to attend a national integration training programme. This concerns foreign nationals who have a valid residence permit to live in Finland and who have had the right to enter the country to find work and become employed (FMEE 2010; FMEE 2012). According to legislation, the aim of integration is 'to provide immigrants with the knowledge and skills required in the society and working life and to provide them

DOI: 10.33134/njmr.413

with support' (FMEE 2012, Section 3). In this article, the notions of 'immigrant' and 'integration' refer to these definitions in the Finnish legislation. The implementation of the Finnish integration training programme is organised by public and private educational institutions, which are selected regionally via a tendering process. The main topics in the training programme are Finnish language and civic skills (FNBE 2012). The civic skills include information on educational opportunities, job seeking and entrepreneurship, as well as work tryout periods and counselling, which fall within the responsibility of counsellors.

In the context of Finnish integration policies, researchers have examined how integration practices produce exclusionary inclusion and integratable employees with an immigrant background (Masoud, Holm & Brunila 2021), as well as how integration policies and practices contribute to immigrant subjectivities, reinforcing their marginalisation and exclusion and creating racial and gendered segregation (Kurki 2018). Along the same lines, Kurki et al. (2018) discuss the circumstances where Finnish integration training for immigrants is organised according to market-oriented policies and practices, and furthermore, how this process produces certain subjectivities among both immigrants and professionals. Masoud, Kurki and Brunila (2020) consider the concept of employability within integration policies and training practices—specifically, how the discourses used contribute to creating a suitable, employable subjectivity among refugees. In terms of power research tradition, all the mentioned studies have examined the topic of immigrant integration from a Foucauldian governmentality perspective. The characteristics of the Finnish integration policy have also been studied from the perspective of conflicts between the needs of immigrants and structural conditions set by the society (Turtiainen, Kokkonen & Viitasalo 2018) and integration training programmes in the context of adult second language learning (Pöyhönen & Tarnanen 2015; Ronkainen & Suni 2019).

The counselling of immigrants has also been studied from different angles. However, research in this field has focused more on the immigrants themselves or on structural issues (Kurki 2018; Magnano et al. 2021; Masoud, Kurki & Brunila 2020; Udayar et al. 2021) than on the counsellors' work. Research has, for example, looked into how counsellors advise their students with immigrant backgrounds on career choices (Linde, Lindgren & Sundelin 2021) or support the inclusion of immigrants (Sundelin 2015). In a study related to this article's topic, Souto (2020) explores the concept of so-called evasive counselling of young people with immigrant backgrounds and how counsellors choose to address or not address certain topics during a counselling encounter. Furthermore, Svinhufvud, Voutilainen and Weiste (2017) study how counsellors in a university context deal with students' expressions of negative emotions, and Olry-Louis (2018) assesses how counsellors handle emotions with their adult counselees. There are also critical studies on how power is linked with intercultural counselling issues, but they focus more on theoretical aspects of the question (Chadderton 2019; Ribeiro 2021).

NON-DECISION-MAKING AS AN ANALYTICAL LENS

Power as a concept has been theorised in social sciences for a long time. One of the many debates around power has been about its nature: Is it a capacity, a possession or possibly a strategy, and does it exist in structures or in people's actions? One viewpoint is to consider power being related to decision-making (Dahl 1957; Lukes

DOI: 10.33134/njmr.413

2005). Another perspective is Bachrach and Baratz's (1970) definition of power as non-decision-making – a situation in which decisions are prevented from taking place on potential issues. Thus, power is exercised not only when a person participates in decision-making that affects another person but also when the first person chooses to limit the scope of decision-making to issues that are innocuous to them, preventing the other person from bringing forward any issues that might harm the first person's preferences (Bachrach & Baratz 1970: 7). I am interested in examining how the notion of non-decision-making can be applied in the context of counselling of immigrants, with the starting point that this includes power-related and power-reflecting approaches and practices. In particular, the research question in this article is as follows: What kinds of topics do the students in an integration training programme wish to bring up in their counselling discussions, and how do their counsellors react to those topics?

According to Rose and Davies (1994), non-decision-making is about the dominant values that influence a situation so that some alternatives are excluded from the agenda. In the context of this study, this can be interpreted as certain discussion topics being excluded because the values held by the counsellors direct the discussion and its contents. These values are linked to the institutional setting in which the counsellors operate. It can also be argued that it is a question of time and focus: Certain topics are deemed to 'belong' to the agenda of counselling.

Bachrach and Baratz further utilised the concept of 'mobilisation of bias' by Schattschneider (1960), which refers to a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures – rules of the game – that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others. In the context of the integration training programme, this refers to the rules for how counselling is implemented within the educational structure of the organisation responsible for the programme. It can be argued that those benefitting from the mobilisation of bias are the counsellors and other employees in charge of the programme and, ultimately, the organising institution, as it is responsible for running the integration training programme. Bachrach and Baratz (1970) further claim that the primary method for sustaining a given mobilisation of bias is precisely the act of non-decision-making. They define a *non-decision* as a decision that results in the suppression of a challenge to the values or interests of the decision maker.

Haugaard (2018) raises questions about the usefulness of non-decision-making theory by claiming that most structural biases are not a product of deliberate decisions but rather an outcome of a reproduction of social structures. Thus, he interprets Bachrach and Baratz's theory as focusing primarily on the structural aspects of power. Isaac (1987) also considers power as a socially structured phenomenon. Following this line of thought, I argue that it is interesting to examine precisely what kind of socially built and maintained structures within the counselling of immigrants, the non-decision-making elements bring to light. In other words, I am not interested in defining whether counsellors have conscious intentions or interest in using power (because this cannot be deduced from their actions or reactions), but, instead, I aim to examine the outcomes of their actions to determine whether this perspective may help to understand the practices of the counselling of immigrants. As power is an intangible notion, I argue that applying this concept to counselling allows one to examine this phenomenon from a fresh perspective and identify aspects that would otherwise remain elusive.

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DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data for this research were collected in 2019 from three organisations that run integration programme trainings for adult immigrants in Southern Finland. The data consist of 18 video-recorded counselling discussions between counsellors and their students. Four counsellors from these organisations were involved in the discussions. The counsellors had different educational backgrounds and had worked in the training programme for varying lengths of time. Three to seven counselling discussions from each counsellor were included in the data.

In most cases, the discussions occurred during the first face-to-face encounter between the student and the counsellor. The discussions followed an agenda set by the counsellor. In practice, using such an agenda means that the counsellor follows a set of topics and questions and asks the student to provide information related to them. The main purpose of the discussions was to address the student's future career plans and, more specifically, to discuss an approaching work tryout period.

The counsellors were asked to include, if possible, a varied set of students regarding gender, ethnic background, age and educational background for the recordings. In the end, it was the counsellors who made the final decision on which students were included, depending on the willingness and availability of the students. The students in question were adult immigrants (11 women and 7 men) from different parts of the world, with varied educational and employment backgrounds. Their education ranged from no formal education to a higher education degree, and their employment ranged from no work history to high-skilled workers. All the students were regular migrants, migrating to Finland via either forced migration or labour/economic migration (IOM 2019). At the time of the discussions, they were at different points in their integration training programme, and their Finnish language skills were also highly diverse. However, all the counselling discussions were conducted mainly in Finnish. Only in some discussions did either the student or the counsellor use English as an auxiliary language. These English parts are marked in *italics* in the discussion quotations later in this article. The Finnish language used by the students was translated into English in a manner that ensured that the translation respected the original meaning as much as possible while considering the intelligibility of the citations.

All the persons involved in this research volunteered to participate and provided their written consent. Both the students and counsellors were given some basic information about the research and its contents before they decided whether to participate. For the sake of their anonymity, a common pseudonym ('student') is used for all the students. All indications of their gender, home countries or other personal details have also been anonymised. Similarly, for all the counsellors, a common pseudonym ('counsellor') is used without an indication of their gender or employer. In this research, the ethical principles defined by the Finnish National Board of Research Integrity were followed. No ethical review was conducted because there were no research design elements that would require it. In my analysis, I was informed by my experiences as a counsellor in an integration training programme, which has helped me to identify the dynamics in a counselling encounter. Therefore, my position has been that of an insider, as defined by Berger (2015), with more direct access to the research target and shaping the researcher–researched relationship more favourably. However, this insider position also calls for a continuous critical reflection on the values and approaches within my research and the application of the reflective approach (Fook

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& Gardner 2007) on how my personal background contributes to my research. Next, I describe how the analysis was implemented.

FUTURE-ORIENTED INTERESTS AND A VARIETY OF GRIEVANCE POINTS

After being recorded, the discussions were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) by considering discursive procedures and elements in the counselling encounters. In other words, I coded the discussions by identifying and naming the topics included in them. Then, I further coded the topics according to who brought them up in the discussions – the counsellor or the student. Out of the 18 counselling discussions examined in my research, there were 15 discussions in which the student introduced one or several discussion topics. I further grouped them into several categories following Bachrach and Baratz's classification regarding non-decision-making elements – namely, those of interests, grievances and values. In this study, I defined an interest point as any topic that the student deemed relevant enough to be brought up in the discussion and that did not include an element of grievance. In most cases, there appeared to be a strong future-oriented emphasis in the topics, which would appear natural in a counselling context. However, the emphasis was also heavily on issues related to future employment and thus to the students' future employability, which agreed with the findings of Masoud, Kurki and Brunila (2020).

Next, I treated all instances where the student expressed some kind of worry, concern, anxiety, stress, fear or hesitation as grievance points. Those that were raised independently by the student, without a direct introductory question by a counsellor, seemed to be related to either the student's future or to experiences of stress or anxiety of some sort. In this category, the topics were also quite varied.

On only one occasion did a student bring a clearly value-related topic to the discussion: the importance of religion. Otherwise, the students did not make any clear or explicit attempts to discuss their values during the counselling encounters. There was no clear indication for why this happened, but one could speculate that the students may have been unwilling to discuss value-related issues with their counsellors or that there was simply no space for such topics in the counselling discussions.

From the transcriptions, I subsequently analysed how the counsellors reacted to the topics initiated by the students and categorised these reactions. When looking at the counsellors' reactions to student-initiated topics, two main categories were identified – those that included a non-decision-making element and those that excluded such an element. However, the latter category does comprise an element of discussion agenda management underneath a seemingly neutral overall reaction. In other words, they are reactions that may limit the students' opportunities to have their interest points discussed thoroughly during the counselling encounter or reactions that direct the conversation towards a topic that better suits the counsellor's agenda.

NON-DECISION-MAKING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INTEGRATION TRAINING PROGRAMME

I present the empirical findings of my research, starting with describing the non-decision-making in the context of the Finnish integration training programme and

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subsequently describing the discussion topics and the non-decision-making elements within the discussions. According to Bachrach and Baratz, the presence of a non-decision-making process can be identified by examining the position of a disfavoured group or person and whether they express either interests or values, other issues important to them, grievances related to the situation in question, or either overt or covert conflict. In this context, the adult immigrants can be said to form a disfavoured group because of the asymmetry of language skills between them and the counsellors, and their status as jobseekers. There is also cultural asymmetry involved, in that all the counsellors are native Finns and thus form a favoured group in comparison with the student counselees. There are no overt conflicts in the discussions, although I interpreted the notion of conflict in the context of my material to mean a conflict on deciding upon the structure and agenda of the counselling discussion. Thus, there is no conflict when the student is complying with the counsellor-driven discussion structure and agenda, but there is a conflict when the opposite occurs, and the student brings up a topic that takes the discussion in a new direction or otherwise disturbs the counsellor-driven dynamics of the discussion.

According to Bachrach and Baratz (1970), at the core of the non-decision-making process is a conflict of interests and preferences. It can be stated that in the context of my study, the counsellor's preference was to ensure a smooth counselling encounter and maintain the ability to address those issues that they had on the agenda for that meeting. Often, this would encompass the plans for the student's further education or employment or the concrete measures for the approaching work tryout period. These preferences are also strongly set by the counsellor's employing organisation or by the national legislation governing the employment administration and services.

In these discussions, Schattschneider's (1960) concept of mobilisation of bias would refer to a situation where the counsellor has either a conscious or an unconscious set of rules that include the overarching idea that it should be the counsellor who chooses the topics for discussion and decides for how long and how thoroughly each of them will be discussed. Although the discussion was constantly strongly led by the counsellor, in many cases, the student did try to suggest a new topic. This was often included in the student's answer to some initial question posed by the counsellor. Sometimes, the student-initiated topic could appear without any link to any of the counsellor's questions; however, in several cases, the counsellor did not follow up on the topic or treated it in a limited manner.

DISMISSALS AND DIVERSIONS AS TYPICAL REACTIONS

Upon closer examination, the reactions classified as including a non-decision-making element in relation to a topic initiated by the student can be characterised as expressing a dismissal of some sort of topic. Dismissal can mean ignoring the topic altogether or downplaying its importance. The dismissal can also mean the counsellor ending the topic proposed by the student and changing the subject according to the counsellor's priorities. To illustrate this phenomenon, some examples from the discussions are presented.

The first excerpt here is from a conversation in which the student expresses a wish to stop studying Finnish. This is clearly something the counsellor is not keen to hear

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and chooses to ignore the student's topic proposal before moving on to talk about language skills.

COUNSELLOR: Do you have some idea of what you will be doing in five years' time?
STUDENT: Well, I don't know, but I would like to, if it is possible, not to study this Finnish language, but I have to.
COUNSELLOR: I didn't ask that. At this moment, at home, do you speak Finnish or English or what language?

The counsellor's dominant values direct the discussion, and the student's expressed wish not to carry on studying Finnish is a challenge to these values. This situation represents a variety of legislative expertise (Sotkasiira 2018; see also Bauman 1987) in which the counsellors emphasise their roles. Simultaneously, the counsellor explicitly states how the student is expected to behave – to answer the counsellor's questions. Within integration practices, migrants are often required to act as expected of them, as other research shows (Haikkola 2019; Masoud, Kurki & Brunila 2020). The counsellor's reaction can be interpreted as an example of mobilisation of bias: The rule of the game here is set by the counsellor and involves answering the set questions and not changing the topic. Like Souto's (2020) findings, this excerpt also illustrates how the focus of the counselling is on the next step and not on the life course as a whole.

The next example is from a discussion where a student expresses wishes to make new professional plans. The counsellor apparently does not agree with these new plans and ends up downplaying them by emphasising their transient and wavering nature. Simultaneously, the counsellor directs the conversation to the exercises prepared for the student and to the form to be filled in during the conversation.

COUNSELLOR: You have told me that you wish now to be a cook.
STUDENT: Cook yeah, but now I want to be a practical nurse.
COUNSELLOR: Practical nurse?
STUDENT: Because a cook's job is difficult.
COUNSELLOR: Yes, I don't know, do you like cooking, do you cook a lot?
STUDENT: Mmm (nodding).
COUNSELLOR: Okay.
STUDENT: But now I want to be a practical nurse.
COUNSELLOR: Practical nurse.
STUDENT: To change.
COUNSELLOR: Is it important? Well, I give you an exercise, but let's have a look on this study plan form. We will write here and, erm, today, you think that practical nurse …

Again, it is the counsellor's dominant values that direct the conversation. The student is challenging these values by expressing own career wishes. The counsellor seems not to accept the student's perspective and potential reasons for making new plans. As shown elsewhere (Haikkola 2019), the primary aims of a student do not seem to receive attention in this kind of context. Turning the emphasis to an exercise acts as a diversion and enables the counsellor to avoid making any decisions on the topic. In addition, the counsellor conveys an idea of an adequate way of behaving in a counselling situation. Contrary to what could be expected from the counsellor (Sundelin 2015), this does not include addressing existential questions. The next quoted discussion is related to a student not feeling comfortable being in the training

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programme. The counsellor is not sure how to react and ends up evading the topic, although seemingly agreeing with the student and listening actively. In the end, the counsellor decides to move on to another topic:

STUDENT:	If I go to work, it is much better, I speak well, I understand. Because, excuse me, at school, the school is a bit to me (makes a sign showing that the school is not a good place for him).
COUNSELLOR:	Yeah, I see.
STUDENT:	If I speak to a friend, at my job.
COUNSELLOR:	Right
STUDENT:	I speak better.
COUNSELLOR:	So, like in a normal situation, using everyday language?
STUDENT:	Because at school and or at work, with a friend (there is a difference).
COUNSELLOR:	Yeah, well then that's good, so is it, is it so that out there, in town you have more courage to speak?
STUDENT:	Yeah.
COUNSELLOR:	At school, a little maybe, mmm mmm. Okay.
STUDENT:	If I am in class, then I am a little shy.
COUNSELLOR	Yeah. You have to know the grammar (laughs), yeah, and it doesn't matter if one doesn't know the grammar really well, but of course it is a really important thing. Yeah okay, well but then here's still one like this. Well, another exercise.

This example shows how the counsellor remains preoccupied with the actual language learning skills instead of addressing the student's experience of discomfort. This preoccupation with skills follows the findings of another study on the nature of Finnish integration training (Pöyhönen & Tarnanen 2015). It can also be seen as an act of normalising the experienced difficulties without topicalising them properly (Svinhufvud, Voutilainen & Weiste 2017).

In the following example, the student tries to initiate a discussion on fears about seeking a work tryout place in a restaurant. The student apparently emphasises nervousness by using English, the student's first language.

COUNSELLOR:	And Restaurant Z would be the most interesting place, have you contacted Z already?
STUDENT:	*I'm nervous.*
COUNSELLOR:	Yeah, okay. Do you still have this paper with you?

There seems to be a strong tendency to implement similar, system-based integration (see Turtiainen, Kokkonen & Viitasalo 2018) in Finnish integration training: Following the proper agenda is more important than facing the student's emotions, which again poses a challenge for the counsellor. This is also an example of evasive counselling (Souto 2020): A topic deemed too difficult is avoided. In more delicate terms, this example shows how the counsellor is conveying the right way to behave in a counselling session, where the focus needs to be on forms and following the prescribed agenda.

On some occasions, the counsellor contradicts the student's opinion or viewpoint or is puzzled by the student's input and does not know how to proceed. In the latter case, the counsellor may express disbelief in what the student is saying. In the

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next quotation, a student raises concerns regarding potential racism in a seniors' home where the student plans to do the upcoming work tryout. When saying this, the student switches to English, which appears to accentuate the sensitivity of the subject. This concern is met with a reaction that could be interpreted as a downplay of the original worry:

COUNSELLOR: And an old person if you have, say Alzheimer…Do you know Alzheimer?
STUDENT: Mmm…
COUNSELLOR: Can be very angry, hit and..
STUDENT: *But they like foreigner they think (unclear)?*
COUNSELLOR: Yes, yes. They want to speak and hear about you. You can tell about your home country. Of course, they want that someone speaks to them.
STUDENT: Mmm.
COUNSELLOR: Yeah, okay. Read that and think. Write to me what you know about that profession.

Racism or xenophobia is deemed too difficult a topic to be discussed in the counselling setting (see also Souto 2020). Here, it seems the counsellor implements an approach that centres on treating the individual detached from the context (Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen 2018) – the potentially racist or xenophobic working environment. The counsellor's choice of not talking more about the possibility of racism can be seen as a conscious one to limit the scope of decision-making, and thus, an act of power. It also reflects an attitude of valuing an idea of being a good immigrant and focusing on work and employment.

The earlier examples illustrate instances in counselling where, for one reason or another, the counsellor reacts by dismissing the discussion topic proposed by the student. This act seems to represent a mode of control in the integration training programme (Masoud, Kurki & Brunila 2020). As Masoud, Kurki and Brunila (2020: 116) indicate, this reflects a situation where potential discursive alternatives may be considered irrelevant or even threatening. Kurki et al. (2018: 240) refer to similar situations as places where immigrants learn appropriate behaviour – how to be an immigrant the 'right' way. Therefore, the act of dismissal can be interpreted as an educative moment where the counsellor instructs the student on which topics belong to the sphere of counselling and which do not, thereby building the correct subjectivity among the immigrant students. Furthermore, the counselling discussions are forums where students learn the appropriate cultural rules for talking about themselves, constructing their Finnish identities and navigating the new system and new practices. From this perspective, it seems disturbing that there is no space or place for topics that appear worrying or troubling to the students. This also goes against the ideal of counselling that is socially just.

COUNSELLORS' VALUES DIRECTING THE DISCUSSIONS

When looking at the counsellor reactions, one can also identify occasions that do not appear to include an apparent non-decision-making element. For instance, these involve cases where a student's point of interest is met with advice or information

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from the counsellor's side. In this sense, a special sub-category consists of discussions where the counsellor tries to enhance the attractiveness of a former plan – when the student makes a point of interest in changing plans or aiming for a new profession. This represents yet another example of how the socially dominant values make some alternatives impossible within the context.

In all the counselling discussions, the student-initiated topic was met with a fact-checking reaction from the counsellor's side. This fact-checking was often formulated so that the counsellor repeated or rephrased what the student said and always asked whether the counsellor had correctly understood the student's intended meaning. There often appeared to be no proper reaction from the counsellor's side to the student's interjection or any deeper discussion about it. Apparently, the counsellors deemed it important that they understand the student, but they often left the discussion there. In the following example, a student talks about the death of the student's whole family:

COUNSELLOR: You have a big family?
STUDENT: Yeah.
COUNSELLOR: Was it a big family (in your home country) right?
STUDENT: It was, but now no, it was.
COUNSELLOR: But not anymore. Yeah, yeah. Do you have any relatives (in your home country)?
STUDENT: No, no.
COUNSELLOR: No one to phone?
STUDENT: No.
COUNSELLOR: Yeah, yeah. Everybody in Finland?
STUDENT: Yeah, in Finland I have my child and wife.
COUNSELLOR: Child and wife yeah. Well then, let's see now. You are now… you have been well. You started in this course…

Here again, we see mobilisation of bias: The counsellor deems it more important to focus on topics on the agenda rather than on the student's topic. Furthermore, the counsellor accepts the student's emotions, does not deny them and, to some extent, also normalises the student's experience. Nevertheless, the emphasis is more on system-based integration and on limiting the scope of decision-making. Olry-Louis (2018) argues how such emotionally challenging situations as that quoted earlier illustrate the decisive role and consequently the power that lies within the counsellor who chooses how to react to difficult topics raised by counselees. Then, as Magnano et al. (2021) point out, paying attention to subjective experiences would support the integrative processes of an immigrant.

Another common reaction of counsellors to grievance points raised by students was responding to them with encouragement. This apparently served as a reaction by which the counsellor directed the focus away from the student's grievance point and which could be used as a bridge between the point of grievance and another topic that the counsellor wished to start. In one discussion, the student reports no longer wanting to pursue a former career – that of an academic – in Finland, commenting as follows:

STUDENT: I, erm, *my decision is to not to use it here.*
COUNSELLOR: Yes, I do understand. This plan is really good, so that now we can think that your three-week tryout is in the interior

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decoration business, so now we would have four places, could you go yourself (and see them)?

The counsellor bounces the discussion back to the plan of finding a good work tryout place after brief encouragement. Once more, the use of English indicates the importance of this topic to the student. The encouragement can also be seen as a tool to keep some distance from the student's grievance point and to play it down gently. The student's original grievance point disappears from the discussion, which seems similar to what Haikkola (2019) describes as the disappearing self.

On other occasions, the counsellor took a stance towards the student's point of interest: It could be a question of focusing on concrete plans in the near future or long term or providing the student with some other kind of perspective regarding the point of interest. The ensuing example is from such a discussion: The counsellor and the student have been talking about a bus driver profession as a suitable career choice when the student expresses a wish to pursue a different career option – that of a cleaner.

STUDENT: A cleaner.
COUNSELLOR: Cleaner? Perhaps, we can still reconsider it.
STUDENT: Because cleaner, perhaps, it's a good profession for me. I will go to work in the central hospital, for example, the central hospital.
COUNSELLOR: Mmm.
STUDENT: Or school or nursery (unclear).
COUNSELLOR: Yeah.
STUDENT: But, better for me perhaps a cleaner ('s job).
COUNSELLOR: Perhaps a cleaner.
STUDENT: A cleaner.
COUNSELLOR Perhaps well, yeah, then on the other hand, when I think that you are quite talkative, then when you would be a bus driver, then you could use your best...
STUDENT: Yeah, absolutely.
COUNSELLOR: ...side because you are really, you would be really good in customer service. As a cleaner one doesn't have to talk much.

What we see here is another variation of mobilisation of bias: The counsellor insists on knowing better what a good career option for the student would be instead of trying to find out the reasoning behind the student's idea. Here, however, there are more elements of negotiating with the student, and the expression of dominant values is less explicit. Discussing the student's skills happens here through appreciation and not through negation, as described in Krivonos' (2019) study. The dynamics present in the discussion potentially enable and constrain the student's opportunities at the same time (Sundelin 2015).

CONCLUSION

As seen from the preceding analysis, the counsellors in an integration training programme responded in various ways to discussion topics proposed by their students. The focus was primarily on discussing which educational or employment choices would best suit the student in question. The students did try to raise topics they wanted to discuss, but the counsellors appeared to be executing evasive counselling

DOI: 10.33134/njmr.413

and what could be interpreted as evidence for non-decision-making in terms of Bachrach and Baratz's proposed theory. In my data, the counsellors were consistent in avoiding certain types of topics – specifically, issues related to grievance points or topics of interest that students tried to bring to the discussion. The counsellors appeared to react to several of these topics with some sort of dismissal or by diverting the discussion to other topics that the counsellors chose. It appears that the subjects raised by the students, if not problematic for the counsellors, are at least a cause of disruption to the career discussion. The counsellors indicated that these topics did not fit well with their counselling agenda. There seemed to be more space for dealing with other kinds of topics initiated by the students, but generally, the counsellors tended to focus on topics that they proposed and directed the discussion back to them. The strict counsellor-driven pattern of the discussions seemingly emphasises this manifestation of the mobilisation of bias and reflects an aspect of power. It also underlines the overall ideology of how immigrants are expected to act correctly within the given structure.

As Masoud et al. (2021) argue, these reactions may indicate a clear focus on the employability and integratability of immigrants. If this is the case, one can also ask whether this explains why the discussions are so strongly focused on the counsellor-driven agenda, work tryout periods and the next steps within the system and less on the topics that the students deem important or relevant. The immigrant self seems to be pushed to the background in the discussions, contrary to what has been found relevant for successful integration (Haikkola 2019; Masoud, Kurki & Brunila 2020; Souto 2020; Udayar et al. 2021).

Another important question is whether the structure of counselling encounters is idealistic: Does following a strict pattern defined by the educational organisation push aside topics not belonging to this pattern? This would be an example of a structural bias, a concept discussed by Haugaard (2018), with the outcome being a counselling discussion narrowed down to only certain topics. The counsellors appeared to be quite cautious when dealing with themes that did not fit completely into their professional spheres. In this sense, they could be interpreted as being loyal and dutiful employees because they respect the policies and goals of their employers and of the employment administration in terms of implementing its integration ideals. This reflects a dual role the counsellors have as supporters and controllers (Haikkola 2019). The topics proposed by the students could also be interpreted as challenging the counsellors' authority: By suggesting a new topic, the student indicated that he or she wished to be an active partner in the interaction instead of submitting to the agenda proposed by the counsellor. In this way, the counselling discussion is also a space where the expertise of counsellors is being simultaneously produced and reconstructed. Therefore, the idea of legislative expertise as defining power seems to be confirmed by the data of the current study: The counsellors use power to accentuate their own position. Therefore, I argue that the current counselling services do not appear to fully agree with the ideas of social justice or promoting the well-being of immigrants. In contrast, they go against the principle of helping immigrants to strengthen their identity, although such an endeavour has been found to be important (Udayar et al. 2021). Rather, counselling in an integration training programme could be interpreted as a Foucauldian knowledge-based disciplinary practice where counsellors use their power to direct the discussions with their students. In addition, counselling reproduces practices of essentialisation and racialisation (Krivonos 2019) and potentially marginalises immigrants further (Kurki 2018). It appears that the language used in

the discussions can operate as an indication of a disfavoured position as well as a sign of importance: The students often switched from Finnish to English (if they knew it) when taking a stance on an important issue. Therefore, it might be relevant to use interpreters when discussing career-related issues with the students instead of forcing them to use elementary Finnish on all occasions. The prevalence of a fact-checking reaction from the counsellors undermines how important the topic might be for the students. Fact-checking appears as a way forward in the counselling situation, almost as the counsellors' professional 'red thread'. Therefore, one should ask whether it is more important to have the right facts in the student's records than to discuss the events behind them.

The cases of positive reactions fall within a grey zone: A reaction may appear positive only on the surface, because the action it disguises may be negative by nature. However, without having asked the counsellors about their intentions, we can only speculate as to whether this really is the case. Therefore, a natural next step would be to investigate the counsellors' perspectives and perceptions on this matter to acquire a potentially more extensive view on the subject. My data demonstrate that the act of counselling of immigrants is not neutral but includes, at the very least, various tensions and undercurrent elements; as such a strong mobilisation of bias is discernible in counselling interactions.

Utilising a theory-induced analysis may naturally include some inbuilt biases. Focusing on finding evidence to back up a concept derived from a theory often leads to finding such evidence. However, my data and data from other similar studies demonstrate that the phenomenon of counsellors not responding fully to discussion topics suggested by students does exist in counselling discussions. Looking at it with non-decision-making lenses directs thinking towards questions of power, but of course, there may be more fluid and intricate reasons for the phenomenon. This can be considered a step back from a so-called holistic counselling approach where the focus is on the counselee's situation as a whole. The current practices narrow down the scope of counselling to certain topics, such as educational and career choices, which are considered less problematic.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Kekki, M. 2022. Student-Initiated Discussion Topics in Career Counselling of Adult Immigrants. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 12(2), pp. 206–222. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.413

Submitted: 11 November 2020
Accepted: 02 November 2021
Published: 01 June 2022

Nordic Journal of Migration Research is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Helsinki University Press.

HUP HELSINKI UNIVERSITY PRESS NMR NORDIC MIGRATION RESEARCH VERTAISARVIOITU KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD PEER-REVIEWED www.tsv.fi/tunnus