
Students' Help-Seeking Behaviours by Gender, Racial Background, and Student Status

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, university counselling centres have been challenged to provide services that are accessible to an increasingly diverse student population. With this focus, this study examined students' help-seeking attitudes and behaviours in relation to their gender, racial background, and their student status (graduate or undergraduate). Based on findings of previous studies, the mitigating variables of self-concealment, social support, distress level, attitudes towards counselling, and intentions to seek counselling were included. Analyses indicated significant differences by gender, racial background, and student status for the outcome variable, help-seeking behaviour, and for some of the mitigating variables. Implications for ways to increase accessibility to university counselling centres for universities' diverse student populations are discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis quelques années, les centres de counseling universitaires doivent relever le défi de fournir des services accessibles à une variété de plus en plus grande de populations étudiantes. Axée sur cette réalité, cette étude a examiné les attitudes et comportements des étudiants à l'égard du recours aux services de counseling, selon le sexe des étudiants, leur origine raciale et leur catégorie d'étudiant de premier ou de deuxième cycle. En s'appuyant sur les résultats d'études antérieures, les auteurs ont choisi d'examiner, entre autres, les variables atténuantes que représentent la dissimulation de soi, le soutien social, le niveau de détresse, les attitudes à l'égard des services de counseling et l'intention d'y avoir recours. Les analyses ont révélé des différences importantes liées au sexe, à l'origine raciale et à la catégorie d'étudiant en ce qui concerne la variable résultat (le comportement à l'égard du recours aux services de counseling) et certaines variables atténuantes. Des suggestions sont présentées en vue d'améliorer l'accessibilité des centres de counseling universitaires aux différentes populations étudiantes.

University counselling services exist primarily to facilitate the success and development of university students and this function remains important as university students face increasing pressures and difficulties that could interfere with attainment of their educational and career goals (Gallagher, 1995; Heppner et al., 1994; Pledge, Lapan, Heppner, Kivlighan, & Roehlke, 1998; Turner & Berry, 2000). Unfortunately, despite the range of services available at university counselling centres, a relatively small percentage of students utilize them when experiencing difficulties (Deane & Chamberlain, 1994).

A variety of explanations have been offered to explain the under-utilization of counselling services by university students, including the finding that university

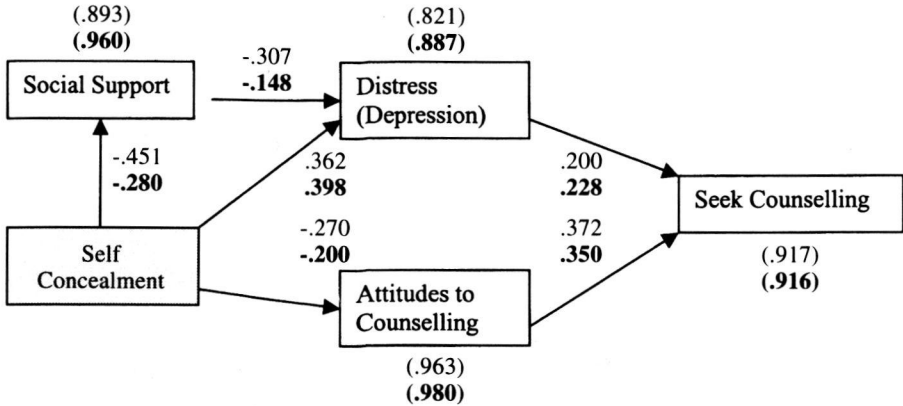
students prefer to talk about difficulties with family and friends rather than with counsellors (Oliver, Reed, Katz, & Haugh, 1999). Two significant studies have integrated the results of previous studies to identify four main variables related to students' intentions to seek counselling. In the first study, Kelly and Achter (1995) focused on the relationship between self-concealment and students' intentions to seek counselling. Self-concealment is defined as a personality trait that is "a predisposition to actively conceal from others personal information that one perceives as distressing or negative" (Larson & Chastain, 1990, p. 440). Kelly and Achter (1995) found that higher self-concealers were more likely to indicate that they would seek counselling, despite having less positive attitudes towards counselling. Social support and a measure of psychological distress (depression) were not significantly related to intentions to seek counselling.

The second study (Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998) reported different findings using a study design and variables similar to those used by Kelly and Achter (1995). In contrast to Kelly and Achter, Cepeda-Benito and Short found that higher levels of psychological distress, lower levels of social support, and positive attitudes towards counselling significantly predicted a greater intention to seek counselling. As well, the interaction between social support and self-concealment significantly predicted intentions to seek counselling, though self-concealment alone was not a significant predictor. One reason for the different results between these studies may be related to the inclusion of a wider variety of students' presenting issues in the Cepeda-Benito and Short study. The variables identified by Kelly and Achter (1995) and Cepeda-Benito and Short (1998) were analyzed by Cramer (1999) and integrated into a single path model (see Figure 1).

Cramer's model hypothesized that self-concealment is an exogenous variable that influences social support, distress, and attitudes towards counselling. Specifically, higher levels of self-concealment were related to lower social support, higher distress levels, and less positive attitudes towards counselling. In addition, social support was negatively related to levels of distress, and more positive attitudes toward counselling were related to higher intentions to seek counselling. The current study sought to extend this model by examining whether or not there are differences by gender, racial background, and student status for seeking counselling.

Previous research has identified gender differences for some of the mitigating variables in Cramer's model. For example, studies have reported that women are more likely to report higher distress levels and a higher level of social support than men (Rosenfield, 1999; Wiseman, Guttfreund, & Lurie, 1995). In addition, though there are some equivocal findings, in general, studies indicate that women are more likely to have positive attitudes towards counselling than are men (Johnson, 1988; Leong & Zachar, 1999). Also, stereotypically "masculine" attitudes, such as restricted emotionality and less confidence in professionals' abilities to help them, are negatively related to help-seeking attitudes and behaviours (Good & Wood, 1995; Wisch, Mahalik, Hayes, & Nutt, 1995). A further consistent finding is that women are more likely to use mental health services than men (Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994; Deane & Todd, 1996).

FIGURE 1
Cramer's (1999) model of help-seeking behaviour.



Note. Hypothesized model path coefficients. Loading and errors are identified by regular and boldface type for the Kelly and Achter (1995) and Cepeda-Benito and Short (1998) samples, respectively (error terms appear in parentheses; shaded box denotes exogenous variable).

Note. From “Psychological antecedents to help-seeking behavior: A reanalysis using path modeling structures,” by K. M. Cramer, 1999, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 46, p. 383. Copyright 1999 by the American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.

Studies have also reported differences in help-seeking attitudes and behaviours by racial background. For example, Asian students have been found to have less positive attitudes about seeking counselling than do Caucasian students (Sue, 1994), though higher levels of acculturation for Asian students are related to more positive attitudes towards counselling (Atkinson & Gim, 1989; Tata & Leong, 1994). As well, studies have consistently found that Asian-Americans under-utilize counselling services compared to Caucasians (Leong, Wagner, & Tata, 1995; Suan & Tyler, 1990; Sue & Sue, 1990). One explanation for these differences may be Asian students’ perception that counselling systems are racist and/or biased (Leong, Wagner, & Tata, 1995). Also, Asian students have a greater preference to seek “informal” helping resources such as family and friends (Suan & Tyler, 1990) and a tendency to be less likely to perceive their difficulties as sufficiently serious to warrant professional assistance than their Caucasian peers (Mau & Jepson, 1990). Finally, in community samples, Asian participants indicated that they preferred to seek assistance from a counsellor with the same racial background as theirs (Akutsu, Snowden, & Organista, 1996). However, other studies have reported that “ethnic/racial matching” may not be as important as other counsellor variables, such as “counsellor credibility” (Sue & Sue, 1990). Because Canadian universities currently reflect broad cultural and ethnic diversity, it is imperative that counsellors are aware of racial factors that may affect utilization of counselling services.

The third grouping variable that was included was student status (undergraduate or graduate). Many of the above-mentioned studies have limited their samples to undergraduate students (often students in introductory psychology courses) and therefore have not examined differences in help-seeking attitudes and behaviours between graduate and undergraduate students. Even when undergraduate and graduate are included in the study, differences in help-seeking attitudes and behaviour were not explored (Solberg, Ritsma, Davis, Tata, & Jolly, 1994). The present study included this variable to explore whether there would be differences in help-seeking behaviours between undergraduate and graduate students.

Current Study

The main goal of this study was to expand Cramer's model to determine if there were differences in help-seeking attitudes by gender, racial background, and student status. In addition, an outcome variable of help-seeking behaviour was added to Cramer's model for each of the three main path analyses. Based on the previous literature, the hypotheses were that women and Caucasian students would indicate higher intentions to seek counselling and would be more likely to have sought or received counselling than men and Asian students, respectively. There was no specific hypothesis for student status because it was included as an exploratory grouping variable.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred and seven students asked by staff at Student Affairs' offices (listed in the *Procedures* section) at a large western Canadian university completed a questionnaire package composed of seven separate instruments. Data from 13 participants were removed due to low response rate on the questionnaires and due to multivariate outliers that arose primarily from skewness of the "age" variable. Therefore, the final analyses included data from 194 participants.

For demographic information, 190 participants indicated their gender and 52.63% ($n = 100$) were women and 47.37% ($n = 90$) were men. Of the 189 participants who indicated their age, the range was 18 to 42 years, with a mean of 25.39 years ($SD = 6.02$). Of the 193 participants who indicated racial background, 36.79% ($n = 71$) indicated Asian, 35.75% ($n = 69$) indicated Caucasian, 9.33% ($n = 18$) indicated East Indian, 7.25% ($n = 14$) indicated African, 4.66% ($n = 9$) indicated Aboriginal, 2.07% ($n = 4$) indicated West Indian, 0.52% ($n = 1$) indicated Métis, and 3.63% ($n = 7$) indicated Other. Of the 188 participants who indicated student status, 62.77% ($n = 118$) were undergraduate students and 37.23% ($n = 70$) were graduate students.

As described below, the participants in this study were recruited from those students seeking service at a variety of Student Affairs' offices on campus. Approximately fifty-four percent ($n = 104$) were from the International Centre for

Students, 20.62% ($n = 40$) were from the Counselling Service, 18.56% ($n = 36$) from Housing and Student Life, 3.09% ($n = 6$) from the Aboriginal Centre for Students, 2.58% ($n = 5$) from Rainbow Pride Mosaic, 1.03% ($n = 2$) from the Womyn's Centre, and 0.52% ($n = 1$) from the Peer Advisors' office.

Approximately 48% ($n = 94$) of the respondents had sought or received counselling and 52% ($n = 100$) had not sought or received counselling.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire. Participants were asked to indicate their age, racial background, year at university, student status (undergraduate or graduate), and history of seeking counselling at this university's counselling service as well as at other counselling agencies.

Self-Concealment Scale (modified) (SCS; Larson & Chastain, 1990). This 10-item questionnaire measures respondents' "predisposition to actively conceal from others personal information that one perceives as distressing or negative" (Larson & Chastain, p. 440). Using a 5-point scale, respondents rate their level of agreement with the items. Responses were summed for a total score that could range from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating greater self-concealment. Test-retest reliability coefficients for this instrument ranged from .81 to .83 (Larson & Chastain, 1990; Cramer & Barry, 1999). For this sample, the internal consistency alpha coefficient was .88. Larson and Chastain (1990) also reported validity for the SCS with a significant positive correlation between the SCS and measures of distress after controlling for trauma experience and disclosure (Larson & Chastain, 1990). This scale was modified for the current study by changing the wording of two items ("backfires" was changed to "causes difficulties for me" and "lie" to "not disclose") to allow increased understanding of the phrasing.

Social Provisions Scale (SPS; Cutrona & Russell, 1987). This 24-item questionnaire measures level of perceived social support. Using a four-point Likert-type scale, respondents indicate their agreement with the items. Test-retest reliability values ranged from .84 to .92 for the six subscales (Russell & Cutrona, 1991). Although they calculated subscale scores, Russell and Cutrona (1991) recommended using an overall score, which was calculated for the present study. Participants' responses were summed with higher scores indicating stronger social support. For this sample, the alpha coefficient was .91. Validity was reported with significant positive correlations with other measures of social support (Cutrona and Russell, 1987).

Hopkins Symptom Checklist-21 (HSC; Green, Walkey, McCormick, & Taylor, 1988). This 21-item questionnaire is a shortened form of the original 58-item HSC (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974). Using a Likert scale from 1 to 4, respondents indicate for each item how they have felt in the previous seven days. Higher scores indicate higher levels of distress. The HSC-21 has been found to have a three-factor structure: General Feelings of Distress (GFD), Somatic Distress (SD), and Performance Difficulty (PD) (Green,

Walkey, McCormick, & Taylor, 1988; Snow-Turek & Finch, 1997). In previous studies, alpha coefficients ranged from .75 to .86 for the subscales and .90 for the total scale. In this sample, the alpha coefficients were .91, .88, .83, and .77 for the full scale, GFD, SD, and PD subscales, respectively. Two studies reported that the HSC-21 correlated significantly with other measures of distress, discriminated among clinical and non-clinical samples, and identified changes in distress levels during therapy (Deane, Leathem, & Spicer, 1992; Snow-Turek & Finch, 1997).

Attitudes toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale — Abbreviated (modified) (ATSPPHS-A; Fischer & Farina, 1995). This 10-item questionnaire is an abbreviated form of the original 29-item questionnaire and measures attitudes towards counselling. Respondents rate each item on a 4-point scale from 0 to 3 to indicate the extent of their agreement with the items. Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes towards counselling services. The 10-item scale had an alpha internal consistency coefficient of .84 (Fischer & Farina, 1995). For this sample, the alpha coefficient for the 10-item scale was .76. Validity for the 29-item questionnaire was shown when it discriminated among those who had and had not sought psychological help (Fischer & Turner, 1970; Surgenor, 1985). This scale was modified for the current study by changing the wording of several items (“mental breakdown” was changed to “serious psychological difficulties”; “professional attention” to “professional help”; “psychologist” to “counsellor”; and “psychotherapy” to “counselling”) to allow participants to more easily understand the phrasing.

Intentions to Seek Counselling Inventory (modified) (ISC; Cash, Begley, McCown, & Weise, 1975). This inventory was originally comprised of 17 items that indicated issues for which people would seek counselling. The authors modified this questionnaire to 15 items (based on the original 17 items) that are more reflective of issues for which university students would seek counselling at this time. Participants were asked to rate on a six-point scale how likely it would be for them to seek counselling at this university’s counselling centre for those items listed on the questionnaire. The internal consistency value for this sample was .88.

Counselling Service Qualitative Questionnaire. This qualitative questionnaire asked participants whether or not they had sought counselling for personal, academic, and/or career issues at this university’s counselling centre. As well, participants were asked to explain their reasoning for their decision to use or not use this university’s counselling centre.

Procedure

Students visiting any of the participating Student Affairs’ offices on campus (Counselling Service, International Centre for Students, Housing and Student Life, Peer Advisors, Aboriginal Student Centre, Womyn’s Centre, and the Rainbow Pride Mosaic) were given an information sheet on the current study that invited them to participate.

Students who volunteered to participate were provided with a consent form and the questionnaire package and were instructed to return these materials to the experimenters in a sealed envelope upon completion of the questionnaire. An immediate feedback sheet was provided to participants when the research package was returned and a written summary of the results of this study was mailed to those who had requested that information.

RESULTS

Initial analyses focused on comparing the original versions of the SCS and ATSPPHS-A with the modified versions used during this study. For the SCS, a factor analysis revealed a one-factor solution, which was the same result obtained by Cramer and Barry (1999). As well, an independent t test that compared the SCS mean of the Cramer and Barry (1999) sample and the mean from this sample was not significant, $t(392) = 0.01, p > 0.01$. For the ATSPPHS-A, an independent t test that compared the means between the Fischer and Farina (1995) sample and this sample was also not significant, $t(581) = 0.37, p > 0.01$.

Table 1 shows the intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations of the instruments used for the main variables in this study.

Three initial MANOVAs were performed to determine if there were significant differences by gender, racial background, and student status for the five main variables from Cramer's (1999) model before extensions of this model were tested. In the first MANOVA, gender was the independent variable, and self-concealment, social support, distress levels, attitudes about counselling, and intentions to seek counselling were the dependent variables. The MANOVA was

TABLE 1
Intercorrelations among the Measures, Means, and Standard Deviations

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. SCS (self-concealment)	—	-.45*	.46*	-.08	.06	28.21	8.55
2. SPS (social support)		—	-.34*	-.13	-.06	74.94	11.02
3. HSCL-21 (distress)			—	.14	.24*	38.72	10.84
4. ATSPPHS-A (attitudes)				—	.37*	17.26	5.55
5. ISCI (intentions to seek counselling)					—	45.63	16.55

Note. SCS = Self-Concealment Scale; SPS = Social Provisions Scale; HSCL-21 = Hopkins Symptom Checklist-21; ATTSPPHS-A = Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale – Abbreviated; ISCI = Intentions of Seeking Counseling Inventory.

* $p < 0.01$.

significant $F(6,184) = 5.08, p < 0.01$ and univariate analyses indicated that women had more social support, higher distress levels, more positive attitudes towards counselling, and indicated more intentions to seek counselling than did men.

In the second MANOVA, racial background (Asian or Caucasian) was the independent variable and self-concealment, social support, distress levels, attitudes about counselling, and intentions to seek counselling were the dependent variables. The MANOVA was significant $F(6,133) = 3.64, p < 0.01$ and univariate analyses indicated that Caucasian students had higher distress levels and more positive attitudes towards counselling than did Asian students.

In the third MANOVA, student status (undergraduate or graduate) was the independent variable and self-concealment, social support, distress levels, attitudes about counselling, and intentions to seek counselling were the dependent variables. The MANOVA was significant $F(6,182) = 6.60, p < 0.01$ and univariate analyses indicated that undergraduate students had higher levels of self-concealment and higher distress levels than did graduate students.

Extensions of Cramer's (1999) Model

Three separate analyses (see Table 2) were used to extend Cramer's (1999) model by adding gender, racial background, and student status as exogenous variables. Interpretation of the analyses followed the method outlined by Cramer (1999, p. 383).

For gender, the results were significant, $\chi^2(8) = 36.90, p < 0.01$, though the ratio between the goodness-of-fit test statistic and degree of freedom exceeded 3.0 (4.61) and the root-mean-square error of approximation exceeded 0.10 (0.14). All of the three indices met the criterion of exceeding the cut-off of .90. Please see Figure 2 for the extended model.

TABLE 2

Fit Indices of Cramer's (1999) Path Model with Gender, Racial Background, and Status

Exogenous Variable	χ^2	df	χ^2/df (<3.0)	NNFI (>.90)	CFI (>.90)	AGFI (>.90)	RMSEA (<.10)
1. Gender	36.90*	8	4.61	.98	.99	.97	.14
2. Racial Background	27.84*	8	3.48	.99	.99	.98	.11
3. Status	29.97*	8	3.75	.99	.99	.98	.12

Note. NNFI = nonnormed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation. Values in parentheses indicate the significance values.

* $p < 0.01$.

FIGURE 2

Extension of Cramer's (1999) model of help-seeking behaviour with gender.

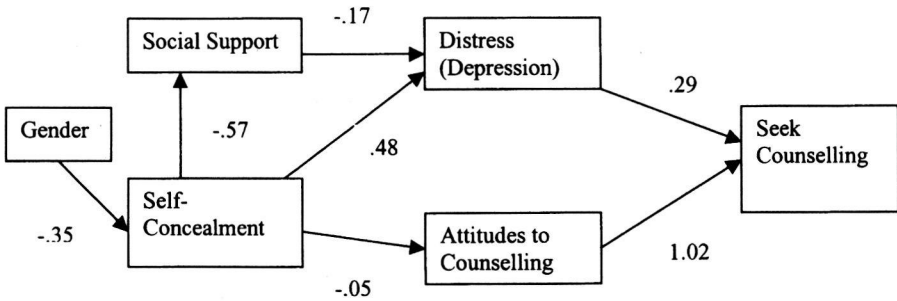
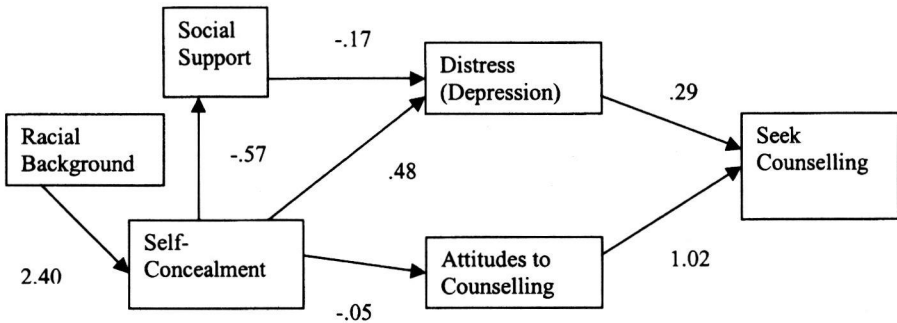


FIGURE 3

Extension of Cramer's (1999) model of help-seeking behaviour with racial background.

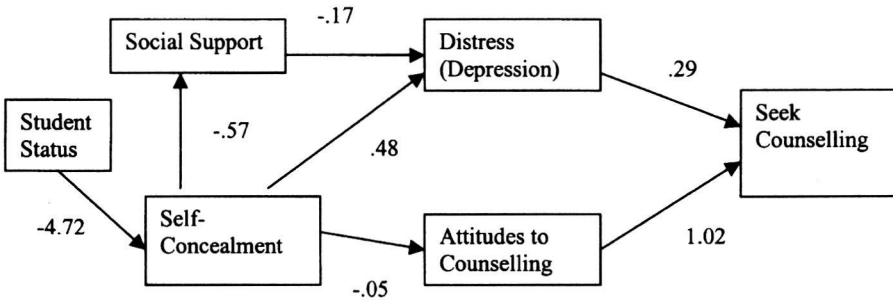


For racial background (Asian and Caucasian), the results were significant, $\chi^2(8) = 27.84, p < 0.01$, though the ratio between the goodness-of-fit test statistic and degree of freedom exceeded 3.0 (3.48) and the root-mean-square error of approximation exceeded 0.10 (0.11). All of the three indices met the criterion of exceeding the cut-off of .90. Please see Figure 3 for the extended model.

For student status (undergraduate and graduate), the results were significant, $\chi^2(8) = 29.97, p < 0.01$, though the ratio between the goodness-of-fit test statistic and degree of freedom exceeded 3.0 (3.75) and the root-mean-square error of approximation exceeded 0.10 (0.12). All of the three indices met the criterion of exceeding the cut-off of .90. Please see Figure 4 for the extended model.

Overall, these values were highly consistent with those reported by Cramer (1999) for his model. A further extension of Cramer's model involved adding the variable of whether or not participants had sought or received counselling. Because this variable is dichotomous, it was used as a dependent variable for several

FIGURE 4
Extension of Cramer's (1999) model of help-seeking behaviour with student status.



discriminant function analyses to determine if differences on gender, racial background, and student status, and the five main variables, discriminated those who had sought or received counselling from those who had not.

Sought or Received Counselling

The initial discriminant function analysis with the five main variables from Cramer's model as predictors was significant, $\chi^2(5) = 57.49, p < 0.01$, indicating that there were significant differences for those who sought counselling compared to those who did not. Specifically, those who sought or received counselling had higher self-concealment scores $\lambda = 0.94, p < 0.01$, higher distress levels, $\lambda = 0.89, p < 0.01$, more positive attitudes towards counselling, $\lambda = 0.86, p < 0.01$, and higher intentions to seek counselling, $\lambda = 0.91, p < 0.01$ compared to those who did not seek or receive counselling (social support was not a significant predictor).

Three other discriminant function analyses were performed with gender, racial background, and student status as additional predictor variables. For gender, the results were significant, $\chi^2(6) = 64.68, p < 0.01$ indicating that there were significant differences for those who sought or received counselling compared to those who did not. Specifically, those who sought or received counselling were women, $\lambda = 0.91, p < 0.01$, had higher self-concealment scores, $\lambda = 0.93, p < 0.01$, higher distress level, $\lambda = 0.89, p < 0.01$, more positive attitudes towards counselling, $\lambda = 0.87, p < 0.01$, and higher intentions to seek counselling, $\lambda = 0.90, p < 0.01$ than those who did not seek or receive counselling (social support was not a significant predictor).

For racial background (Asian and Caucasian), the results were significant, $\chi^2(6) = 39.40, p < 0.01$ indicating that there were significant differences for those who sought or received counselling compared to those who did not. Specifically, those had a Caucasian racial background, $\lambda = 0.90, p < 0.01$, higher distress level, $\lambda = 0.93, p < 0.01$, more positive attitudes towards counselling, $\lambda = 0.86,$

$p < 0.01$, and higher intentions to seek counselling, $\lambda = 0.92$, $p < 0.01$ were more likely to seek or receive counselling than those who did not (self-concealment and social support were not significant predictors).

For student status (undergraduate or graduate), the results were significant, $\chi^2(6) = 65.97$, $p < 0.01$ indicating that there were significant differences for those who sought or received counselling compared to those who did not. Specifically, those with undergraduate student status, $\lambda = 0.88$, $p < 0.01$, higher self-concealment scores, $\lambda = 0.94$, $p < 0.01$, higher distress level, $\lambda = 0.88$, $p < 0.01$, more positive attitudes towards counselling, $\lambda = 0.87$, $p < 0.01$, and higher intentions to seek counselling, $\lambda = 0.91$, $p < 0.01$, were more likely to seek or receive counselling than those who did not (social support was not a significant predictor).

Summary of Qualitative Responses

Participants were asked whether or not they would seek counselling at this university's counselling service if they were to experience personal, career, or academic issues. The participants were asked about these three types of counselling because services at this university's counselling centre are organized in these three areas. The frequencies of responses were categorized by participants' gender, racial background, and student status (see Table 3).

One consistent trend in the participants' responses, regardless of the grouping variable (i.e., gender, racial background, student status), was greater willingness

TABLE 3

Percentage of Participants Willing to Seek Counselling for Personal, Career and Academic Issues Based on Gender, Racial Background, and Student Status

Variable	Personal Counselling	Career Counselling	Academic Counselling
Gender			
Men	45% ($n = 37$)	56% ($n = 48$)	42% ($n = 36$)
Women	62% ($n = 61$)	65% ($n = 64$)	48% ($n = 47$)
Racial Background			
Asian	43% ($n = 28$)	57% ($n = 39$)	40% ($n = 27$)
Caucasian	63% ($n = 42$)	65% ($n = 43$)	46% ($n = 31$)
Student Status			
Graduate	42% ($n = 28$)	55% ($n = 35$)	38% ($n = 26$)
Undergraduate	58% ($n = 66$)	65% ($n = 73$)	51% ($n = 58$)

Note. The numbers reported in parentheses represent the total number of participants indicating a willingness to seek counselling for a personal, career, or academic issue.

to seek counselling for career issues than for any other type of issue and less willingness to seek counselling for academic issues than for any other type of issue. In addition, women, Caucasian participants, and undergraduate students were more willing to seek counselling for each type of issue than their male, Asian, and graduate student counterparts.

As well, the participants were asked to indicate "why or why not" they would seek each of the three types of counselling identified above. The specificity of this question elicited a limited range of responses that resulted in a small number of clear categories that are summarized below. For career and academic counselling, the three most common qualitative explanations did not differ across the grouping variable (i.e., gender, racial background, and student status). For willingness to seek career counselling, the three most frequent qualitative explanations were: a belief that the expertise of career counsellors would be helpful in addressing career issues (identified by 30% of the participants), a positive view of career counselling (23%), and an indication that the participant was not currently experiencing career difficulties and therefore would not seek career counselling (identified by 19% of the participants). For academic counselling, the three most frequent qualitative explanations were: an indication that the participant was not currently experiencing academic difficulties and therefore would not seek academic counselling (identified by 24% of the participants), a preference to solve academic difficulties independently (20%), or a preference to seek counselling due to a positive view of academic counselling (16%).

The qualitative explanations for personal counselling were more variable than the participants' responses for seeking career and academic counselling and differed by gender, racial background, and student status. The most common theme provided was an indication that participants' willingness to seek personal counselling would depend in part on the nature of the personal issue, especially its severity (identified by 19% of the participants overall). Twenty percent of the male participants, 17% of the Asian participants, and 21% of the graduate students identified a preference for resolving personal issues independently and 14% of the female participants, 24% of the Caucasian participants and 16% of the undergraduate students identified a preference for using their social support network for resolving personal issues. Finally, 32% of the female and 15% of the male participants, 29% of the Caucasian participants, and 31% of the undergraduate students expressed a positive view of counselling.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to extend the help-seeking model developed by Cramer (1999) by examining differences in the help-seeking behaviours of university students by gender, racial background, and student status. Cramer's model indicated that higher self-concealment is related to lower social support, higher distress levels, and less positive attitudes towards counselling. Cramer's model also indicated that social support is negatively related to distress, and that more positive

attitudes towards counselling are related to higher intentions to seek counselling. In the current study, when the variables of gender, racial background, and student status were added to Cramer's model, there was a relatively good fit, suggesting that differences in these variables contributed to variance in intentions to seek counselling. As well, these three variables were significant predictors when added to Cramer's model to examine the outcome variable of sought or received counselling. These findings were also supported by the qualitative results of this study. Implications for each of the three main variables are discussed below.

The results indicated that there were gender differences for help-seeking behaviours, with women indicating more likelihood to seek help than are men, which is consistent with the literature (Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994; Rosenfield, 1999). In addition, differences were found by racial background, with Caucasian students more likely to seek counselling than Asian students, which is consistent with previous findings (Leong, Wagner, & Tata, 1995; Suan & Tyler, 1990).

Although these findings are consistent with the hypotheses, they are difficult to interpret due to the diversity within the groups. For example, it may be that some men in this sample had less positive attitudes towards counselling and were less likely to seek counselling than women due to socialization experiences that are consistent with a more traditional male sex-role type (Good & Wood, 1995; Wisch, Mahalik, Hayes, & Nutt, 1995). However, another significant difference by gender was for distress level, with men having lower distress levels than women. One interpretation of this finding is that men may not have needed to access counselling to the same extent as women due to their lower distress levels. However, a different interpretation of this finding is that men may under-report their levels of distress as compared to women.

Similarly, with Asian students, it is important to recognize that there is considerable diversity within that group, and to not generalize when hypothesizing about what may contribute to these differences (Leong, Wagner, & Tata, 1995). As with the gender differences, Asian students had lower levels of distress than Caucasian students and therefore may not have needed to access counselling to the same extent. As well, it is important to develop a better understanding of what counsellor variables are related to Asian students' perceptions of "credibility" (Sue & Sue, 1990). Part of that process may involve counsellors participating in professional development activities to increase their awareness and connections with diverse student groups. Considering that the staff at this university's counselling centre currently does not include any Asian counsellors, these efforts seem to be even more important.

The examination of student status also yielded significant positive results with undergraduate students being more likely to seek help than graduate students. In addition, as with gender and racial background, positive attitudes towards counselling was a significant predictor in analyses with student status. It would be helpful for future research to understand more about students' attitudes towards counselling and whether outreach programming focused on connecting with

male, Asian, and/or graduate students would be helpful in increasing their participation in counselling.

As previously identified, the qualitative results supported the results of the quantitative analyses, with greater variability by gender, racial background, and student status in participants' responses for reasons for seeking or receiving personal counselling. It appears that students' willingness to seek counselling and their rationale for doing so is at least partially related to the type of difficulty being experienced. Because the participants appeared most willing to seek counselling for career difficulties, designing programs to address career difficulties may be an effective strategy for connecting with male, Asian, and graduate students. Working with students on career difficulties could positively impact psychological help-seeking attitudes for personal difficulties by dispelling myths and developing positive connections to counsellors.

Several limitations of this study limit the interpretation of the results. One limitation was the use of self-report measures; in particular, it is unclear whether the participants fully understood the questions, possibly due to language differences. A second limitation was the sample composition. Although all Student Affairs' offices were asked to participate, not all of them did. As well, although all students who contacted the participating offices were invited to participate, there was not equal representation from each of these offices. Finally, there was an over-representation of participants from the International Centre, including an over-representation of graduate students from it.

It is important to extend this area of study to students with different racial and ethnic backgrounds to help counsellors understand more about which students are accessing their counselling services and how to develop programming that will facilitate increased participation. As well, another area of inquiry is to identify differences among students who have sought counselling but did not follow through and participate in these services because more insight regarding students' decisions to not continue with professional assistance can contribute to changes in service delivery.

In conclusion, this study sought to extend Cramer's model and found significant differences by gender, racial background, and student status in help-seeking attitudes and behaviours. The differences that were identified are an important beginning to understanding more about which students utilize a university's counselling center. As well, counsellors can incorporate these findings in their modifications of programming, with the goal of facilitating increased participation by students with more diverse backgrounds.

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