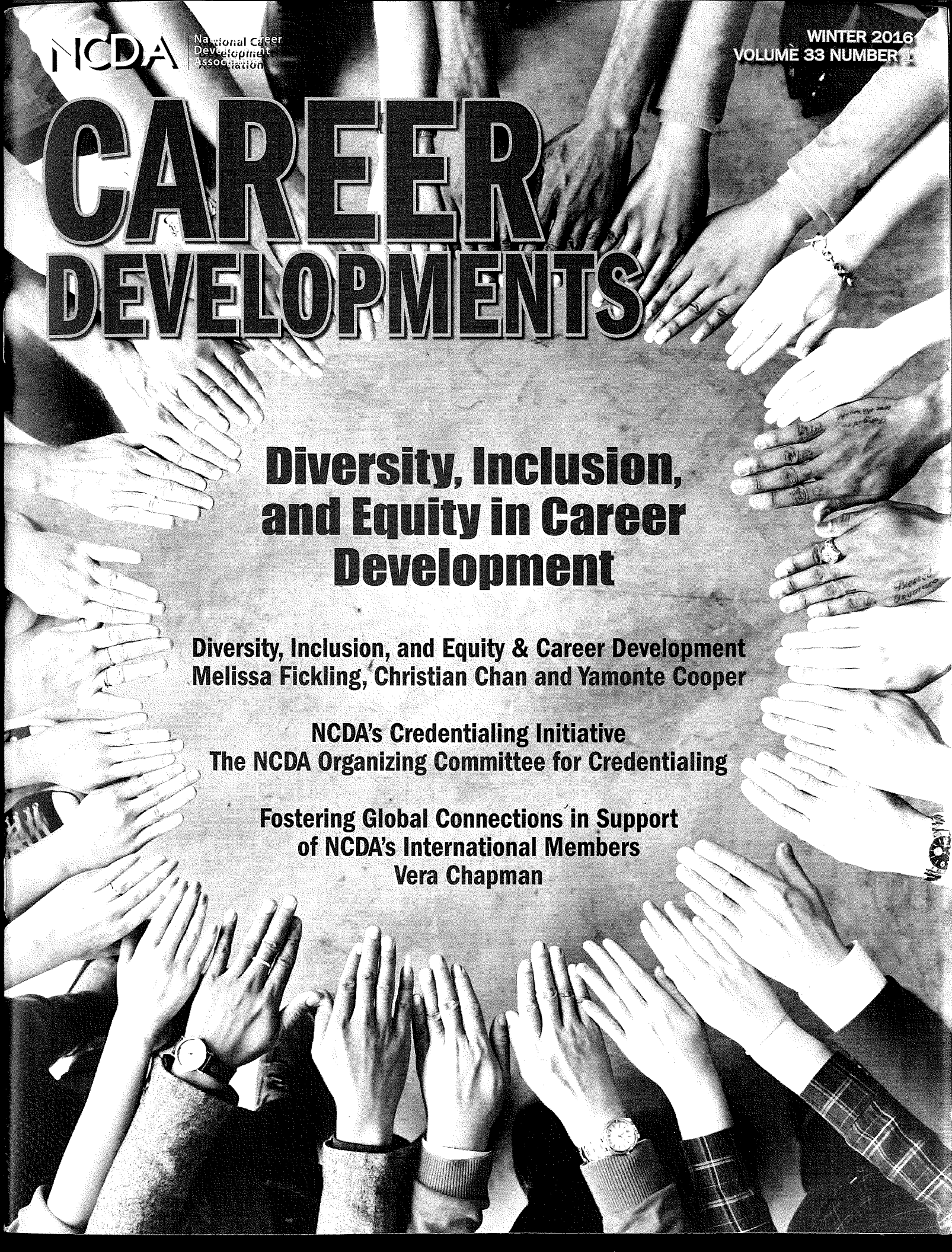
NCDA National Career Development Association

WINTER 2016
VOLUME 33 NUMBER 1

# CAREER DEVELOPMENTS



## Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity in Career Development

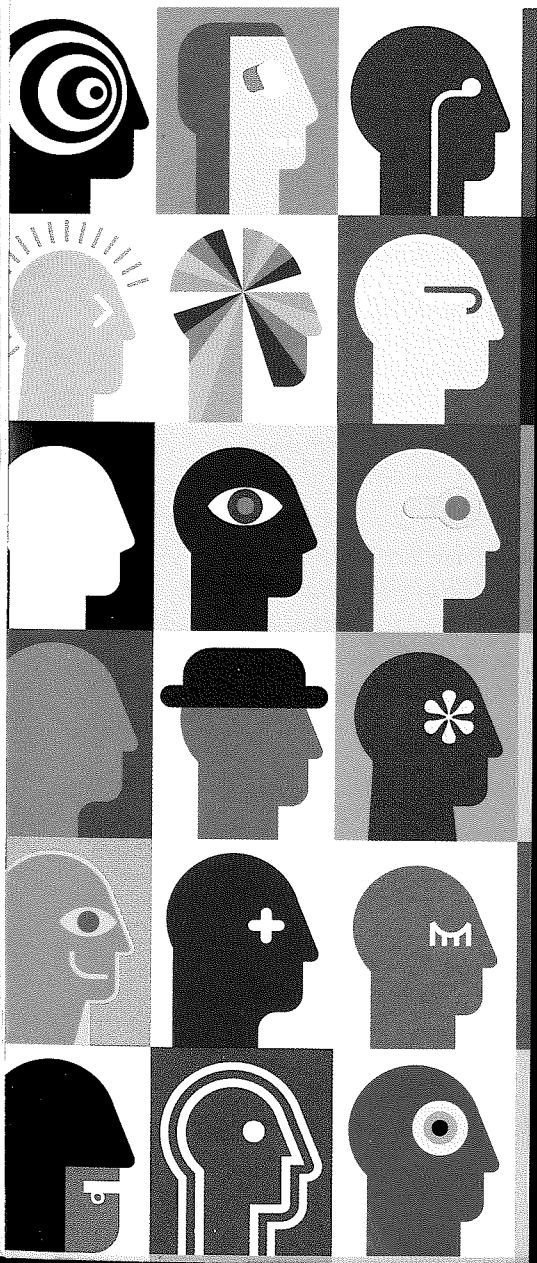
**Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity & Career Development**
Melissa Fickling, Christian Chan and Yamonte Cooper

**NCDA's Credentialing Initiative**
The NCDA Organizing Committee for Credentialing

**Fostering Global Connections in Support of NCDA's International Members**
Vera Chapman

# Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity & Career Development

BY MELISSA J. FICKLING, CHRISTIAN D. CHAN, AND YAMONTE COOPER



Honoring diversity and promoting social justice are core values of career practitioners. In this article, we discuss the concept of intersectionality as a way of recognizing complex identities. We briefly describe some best practices when working with three different populations.

## Introduction

A significant number of career development practices continue to evolve in order to meet the needs of diverse clients through the formation of culturally relevant practices targeted at perspective taking, cultural understanding, and empowerment. While mapping the movement of career development across decades of research and state-of-the-art practices, issues of diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice reside as an integral component in the fabric of innovative practices. The most recent movements of multiculturalism and social justice operate at a confluence of values that are contextual, social, developmental, and essentially political. An important task is to translate values consistent with multiculturalism and social justice into career development practices, especially with the multidisciplinary influence career development has encountered in multiple work contexts (e.g., private practice, higher education, student affairs, clinical mental health counseling, school counseling, rehabilitation counseling).

In alignment with guiding documents, such as the National Career Development Association (NCDA) Code of Ethics (2015), American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014), the NCDA Minimum Competencies for Multicultural Career Counseling and Development (2009), and the newly coined Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (2016), training and practices with a focus in multiculturalism and social justice persist as paradigmatic forces involved within our professional responsibilities as career development practitioners. Although our profession speaks vehemently about

the need for integrating multiculturalism and social justice, practitioners and educators have a unique opportunity to engage the values vividly in order to meet the needs of oppressed, underrepresented, and marginalized populations. It is through this unique opportunity that members of marginalized groups have an opportunity to be heard and seen.

While building upon this praxis, we discuss three samples to continue the dialogue on diversity. The examples included reflect the reality that intersectionality and multiple social and cultural identities contribute heavily to an intimate understanding of diversity. Intersectionality has become an interdisciplinary force that creatively engages multiple forms of social identity while enacting a social justice agenda. Hence, intersectionality has become as a catalyst to view social and cultural identity as more than one single category. While Kimberlé Crewnshaw (1989, 1991) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) noted in their seminal work, their presence and voice as Women of Color were often misrepresented in the feminist movement to enact social change and counteract social inequities. Examining power relations in social structures and systems, they often referred to the convergence of racism among White feminists and sexism among Men of Color.

## African-American Men

Today's social and political climate has brought the strain of race relations within the US out of the shadows and into the light. The tension has brought about a new focus on the burden of two ascribed negative social identities that African American (AA) men carry as they move through society, one as a member of the AA race (i.e., anti-Black racism and stereotypes) and the other as an AA male (i.e., Black misandry or anti-Black male ideologies and oppression). This burden is continually aggravated by racial microaggressions, which are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards People of Color. As a result, AA men are constantly developing unique racial and gendered-race based techniques for applying highly adaptive and active coping strategies.

It could be said for AA men that every day feels like fighting the civil war all over again. To understand this sentiment it's important to be aware of the interdisciplinary theoretical framework of Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF). RBF is a consideration of the increased levels of biopsychosocial stressors and subsequent psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses of fighting racial microaggressions in *mundane extreme environmental stress* (MEES; Smith et. al., 2011). Recent research also links RBF to generalized anxiety

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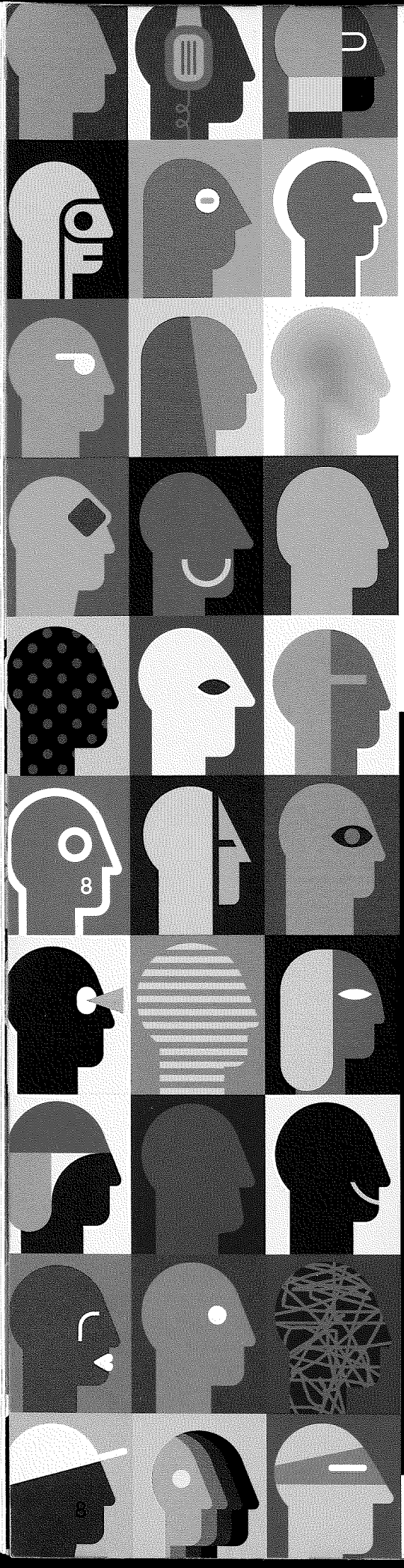

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disorder (GAD), which is triggered by racist experiences. The ever increasing frequency of these experiences has made depression, tension, and rage about mundane racism the most shared problems presented by AA men in psychotherapy.

AA men have had to utilize coping strategies to confront ongoing and unique race-based stressors. Examples include, having to identify when, where, and how to resist oppression, versus when, where, and how to accommodate it. Further, AA men spend mental and emotional energy discerning the difference between individually supportive Whites and destructive actions by Whites as a collective. AA men also have to spend mental energy considering whether they are genuinely accepted or just being tolerated.

As educational attainment increases for AA men there is a correlation with a higher level of MEES resulting from microaggressions. Societal problems also have a large influence in MEES across all educational levels. In addition, for college graduates, both racial microaggressions and societal problems contribute approximately 40% of mundane stress (Smith et. al, 2011). Social, educational, and professional institutions, such as society at-large, must realize that there is an emotional, physiological, and psychological cost of racism. These experiences shape identities, motivations, dreams, activities, and the psychological and physiological welfare across the personal and professional lifespan of AA men and other people of color.

Interventions should be developed in education, community, and work settings that address and combat the increased levels of racial microaggressions and MEES that are associated with RBF. Some micro interventions include acknowledging our own racial (and other social identity) history and how we view ourselves and others, confront our own biases, and actively work to develop our recognition, reflection, and action skills.

Here are some additional techniques that can be utilized by career counselors working with AA male clients:

## Career Practitioner Interventions

- Allow clients to externalize their experiences with racism by contextualizing microaggressions within larger systems of racism and oppression.
- Assist clients in making the connections between their experiences with microaggressions and their presenting concerns in case conceptualizations.
- Normalize client struggles by integrating research findings that support the connection between discrimination and psychological symptomatology.
- Assess and ameliorate potential negative scripts as a result of internalized oppression.
- Participate in activism as a means to combat racism and oppression.

# Queer People of Color

Since Crenshaw and Collins shifted the discourse, the implementation of intersectionality has sparked numerous applications of intersectionality. These intersectional identities emerge as mutually constituting identities as opposed to mutually exclusive categories. For Queer People of Color (QPOC), the reality of intersectionality affects their wellness and representation in policies, protections, and safety. Critical to thriving in careers and the workplace, QPOC are under constant scrutiny primarily due to the convergence of racism and heterosexism. The term Queer, although previously a derogatory term has been reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community to illuminate and mobilize the community to achieve sociopolitical change and advocacy. Although identifying as Queer results in a standalone identity, its reference to the community explains the discrimination and minority status associated with gender identity (i.e., identification of gender not necessarily assigned at birth), sexual identity (i.e., physical/sexual attraction), and affectional identity (i.e., emotional/affective attraction). People of Color is an inclusive term that relates to the discrimination and minority status within racial and ethnic identity (e.g., African American, Latino American, Asian American, and Native American).

Career counselors and specialists may wonder how QPOC factor into the safety issues in the workplace. While specific social identities open dialogues around particular cultural values, it is important to observe that not all values are reflective of the cultural group's particular experiences. Cultural values can serve as a launching point for dialogues as opposed to conclusions about particular cultural groups. Based on intersectional experiences with multiple identities, there is a stark reality that individuals with multiple oppressed identities are also subject to oppression within their own minority groups and communities. For example, LGBTQ+ individuals could face genderism and heterosexism within their own racial/ethnic communities. On the other hand, racial/ethnic minorities within the LGBTQ+ community continue to remain subject to racism.

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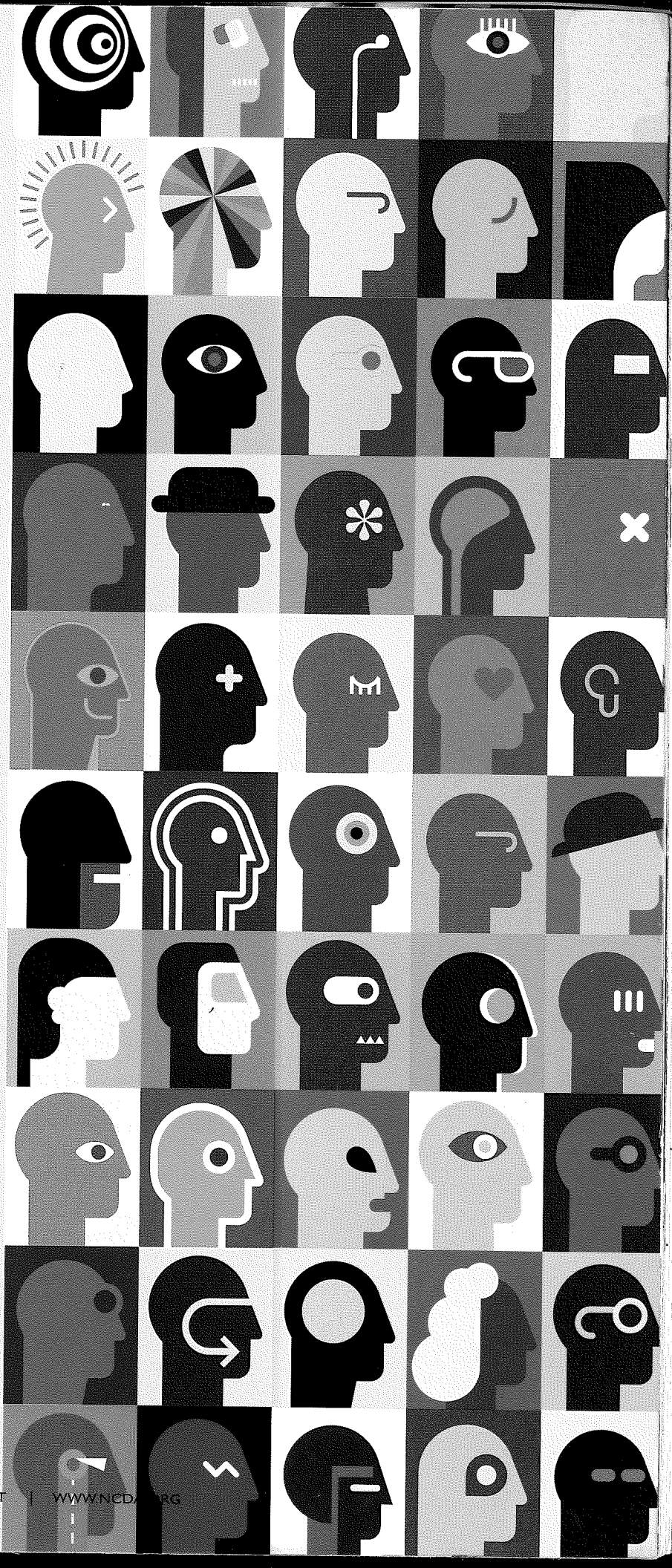
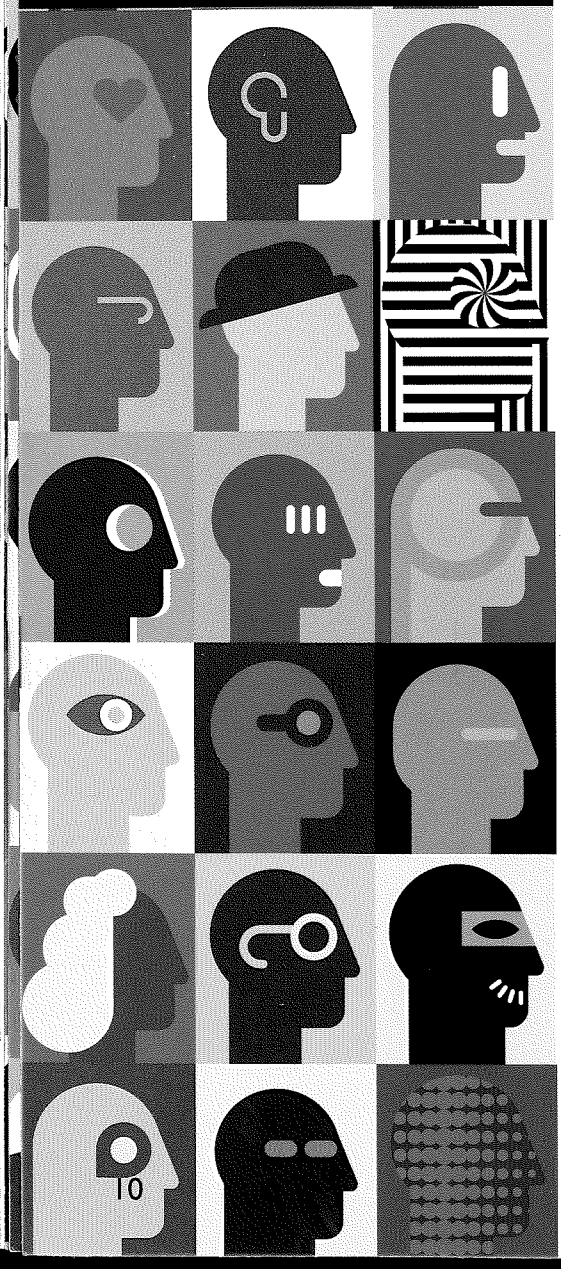


## Some additional issues include the following:

- Bias in the Hiring Process
- Structural Barriers in Promotion and Tenure
- Lack of Nondiscrimination Protections
- Absence of Mentoring and Support
- Wage Gaps
- Lack of Benefits
- Educational and Training Barriers



While some of these issues pervade minority groups at large, it is important to note specific issues associated with QPOC's experiences in career development and the workplace. For example, members of the same racial/ethnic group might share an identity with a QPOC, but might still participate unknowingly in microaggressions upon the individual's gender identity, sexual identity, or affectional identity. Gender norms also continue as a pervasive issue. A major assumption in the workplace is a heteronormative belief that all workers are assumedly heterosexual and either male or female. If they do not act according to stereotypes, others incorrectly assume they are considered members of the LGBTQ+ community, although they may identify as heterosexual and cisgender. On a more political level, only approximately 19 entities, including the District of Columbia, cover both sexual orientation and gender identity in their nondiscrimination laws. Meanwhile, a majority of states continue to lack coverage of sexual orientation and gender identity in nondiscrimination laws. Career practitioners could take part in advocating for inclusive laws that protect clients and diverse individuals in the workplace.

## Disability

Thanks to the activism of people with disabilities, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – a comprehensive piece of civil rights legislation – became law in 1990. Despite the existence of the ADA for over a quarter of a century, persons with a disability are still much less likely to be employed than their counterparts without a disability (BLS, 2016). This is true across all age groups and educational levels despite the fact that people with disabilities are striving to work (Kessler Foundation, 2015). Further, the oppressions of ableism and racism intersect; Black and Latina/o workers with disabilities are unemployed at much higher rates than White and Asian workers (BLS, 2016).

Nineteen percent of US households have at least one working-age adult with a disability (Kessler Foundation, 2015). As the workforce continues to age and as treatments continue to improve for persons with disabilities, career counselors and specialists will need to become increasingly knowledgeable and supportive of this population. Two ways we can do this is by empowering clients and educating employers.

## Empowering Clients

Would you know how to respond to a client who asked you the following questions?

- Do I have to disclose my disability during a job interview? What about once I am on the job?
- How should I request a reasonable accommodation if I discover that I need one?

Sometimes, empowerment may mean informing clients of their rights and working with them to find good answers to their questions. At the pre-employment stage, employers cannot request disability information or give medical exams. However, if a conditional job offer is made, employers may request such information if it is requested of all candidates. Once a worker is on the job, an employer may request disability-related information if there is a reasonable basis to do so. It is up to the worker whether or not to disclose, but an employer is obligated to provide a reasonable accommodation only for a known disability. Unfortunately, employers may violate these laws and we must discuss with clients how they wish to respond to unlawful and discriminatory practices. Career counselors and specialists can be key support persons to help a worker with a disability navigate these processes.

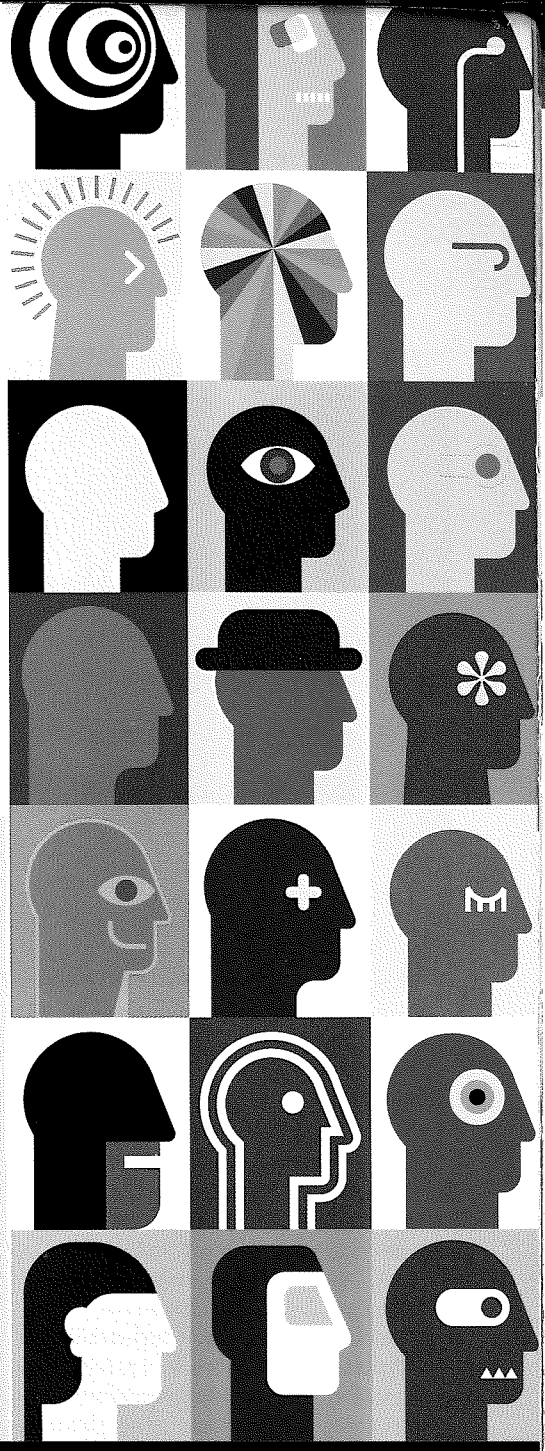
## Educating Employers

Some managers and business owners may have misconceptions about their obligations under the ADA. As career counselors and specialists, we can be the ones to inform employers of the business advantages of recruiting a more diverse workforce, including workers with disabilities.

One area where employers may have questions is regarding reasonable accommodations. A reasonable accommodation is an adjustment to assure that a qualified individual with a disability has rights and privileges in employment equal to those of employees without disabilities. Employers may need to be assured that they do not have to lower standards or provide a reasonable accommodation that would impose undue hardship on the operation of the business. Many reasonable accommodations cost nothing and most cost under $500. Even better, employers often find that a reasonable accommodation made for an employee with a disability tends to improve productivity for all workers.

Employers do not have to learn the laws alone. The Job Accommodations Network (JAN) provides free one-on-one consulting services for all employers, regardless of the size of an employer's workforce, and the JAN website is full of useful information an employer can begin utilizing right away: http://tinyurl.com/zeczbrn.

Unfortunately, many myths and prejudices about workers with disabilities persist, but career counselors and specialists can be the ones to bridge any gaps between employers and job seekers if we have the multicultural competence in order to advocate effectively.



## CONCLUSION

One of the core professional values of NCDA is "honoring diversity and promoting social justice" (NCDA, 2015, p. 1). Career development practitioners are in key positions to raise awareness among workers and employers about achieving a more fair, just, and diverse workforce. We must also do the ongoing work of ensuring that we, as individuals and as a profession, are self-aware and informed in order to facilitate raising awareness with those we serve. If you would like to broaden your knowledge base and skill set related to the specific strengths and needs of diverse populations, the Committee on Diversity Initiatives & Cultural Inclusion at NCDA welcomes all members and strives to continue the conversation started here. To join the committee, please contact any of the authors. NCDA members may access an updated list of multicultural resources compiled by the committee and updated in February 2016 here: http://tinyurl.com/ztpt4v3.

From an intersectional perspective, the diversity of clients we serve is boundless. Honoring and making space for this rich complexity of human experience is one way career counselors and specialists can advocate for clients and for our profession. By taking action and challenging ourselves and our society, we move toward social justice and form systemic change.

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A complete list of references is available upon request from the authors.