

Running Head: COUNSELING ASIAN AND NATIVE AMERICANS

Counseling Asian and Native Americans

Josie Gosper

Saint Bonaventure University

Counseling Asian and Native Americans

When counseling minorities it is important to keep in mind the struggles they have experienced in the past and are experiencing at the present time. Coming from a white majority ethnicity it is extremely important to realize how their perceptions of me might affect the therapeutic process as well. There are a lot of important factors that go into the therapeutic process when dealing with the minority cultures. In this paper the major or most important skills and strategies will be discussed.

Overall there are some general skills and techniques that go hand and hand when counseling any minority. If only one of the things mentioned are lacking than the therapy won't be as effective as possible. A counselor must examine their own biases and work through any misperceptions they may have about a minority. If they can't work through them before the therapeutic process begins, then they must refer them to another counselor. A counselor coming in with their own biases can be detrimental to counseling and the well-being of the client.

Counselors must also continuously update themselves on political and social issues minorities face. They must advocate for local minorities and make their self known. This is important because a counselor must be educated and already be prepared for current issues at hand.

Along with education, a counselor must also keep themselves educated with any new journals, studies, and research about minorities that could be helpful. As time goes on so does information and understanding of different issues. A counselor must be ever learning and advancing themselves.

A therapist must also use acculturation scale when working with minorities. Each has their own unique scale. Depending on where they fall might determine what tactics, strategies, and skills the counselor must use. This typically is determined during the intake or first session.

Lastly and most importantly a counselor must have patience and genuineness when working with minorities. Because of their possible stereotypes and past issues with the majority culture these 2 qualities are crucial. Only through patience and genuineness can a joint therapeutic alliance can be formed.

Asian and Native American's are no different than other cultures in needing the assets above from a counselor. But, each has their own general need of skills and strategies unique to their culture. A counselor must be ready upon first session to provide these attributes. Below are listed the most important and prevalent skills and strategies needed by a counselor while working with these cultures.

Asian American's are just one of the many minorities that will be encountered by a counselor. When counseling this group there are many strategies a counselor must utilize. If not then the counselor will be hurting the therapy process and causing more harm than good to the client.

“Because non-directive, reflective therapeutic styles will increase their clients' anxiety, counselors must be willing to maintain the role of teacher-expert until client become comfortable with the counseling process” (Moy, 1992). This quote hits on how important directive approaches work best with Asian Americans. They generally like to be told what to do and how to do it. They often times come in with a preconception about counseling. “Many Asian clients come into their first therapy session believing that the therapist will tell them what is wrong and how to resolve their problems” (Sue and Sue, 2008).

It is also crucial for counselors to keep therapy time limited, structured, and with clear goals. Asian American's typically want a set time to get the therapy done and want to take part in determining goals. They would like a quick solution to their problems and don't want it to drag out any longer than possible. With the counselor being prepared for all of these things and identifying any other expectations they may have, it will help the process run much smoother.

Another important aspect to keep in mind when counseling Asian American's, is that they generally do not share or show their feelings openly. This is another time when patience is crucial. "An individual's emotional problems bring shame and guilt to the Asian family, preventing any family member from reporting such problems to others outside the family" (Paniagua, 1994). It will take time to get the client's to show emotions and might never fully occur.

Shame and guilt is a huge issue with this population. They rely heavily on their family for help and are extremely reluctant to mental health counseling. "For this reason, the first meeting with Asian clients should always be considered a potential crisis" (Paniagua, 1994). A counselor might want to conduct an assessment of their shame and guilt. "The therapist may use this assessment to infer that the client is having problems talking openly about mental problems because of the shame and humiliation resulting from the public admission of such problems" (Paniagua, 1994).

Typically Asian American's do well with these three type of therapies; Art, Cognitive Behavioral, and Solution Focused. A counselor must be prepared and ready to implement these three therapies as well as a mix of others. Art therapy seems to be most effective because of its hand's on and tangible approach. "For example concrete activities such as sand play could allow clients to express their worlds and engage in self-discovery of subconscious themes, emotions, or

beliefs” (Enns & Kasai, 2003). Cognitive Behavioral therapy is quite often beneficial because Asian American’s prefer to think and not feel their problems. Cognitive Behavioral approaches are also concrete and directive and do not make them explore their internal issues (Paniagua, 1994). Lastly, Solution Focused therapy is a great tool to use with Asian American’s. It is quite often time limited, specific to issues at hand, and doesn’t explore feelings as much as other types of therapy.

Another minority group that counselor’s need to be prepared for upon their arrival is Native American’s. Counseling Native American’s, much like all other minority groups, takes much consideration and thought from the counselor before counseling ever begins. Like stated earlier, the counselor must be fully prepared or the counseling experience for them will be useless or causing more harm.

First off a startling stat that should stick in every counselor’s mind is that only 50 % of Native American’s ever even return for the second session (Thomason, 1991). A counselor must be particularly cautious on the first session to make sure they are not offended and also feel hopeful when leaving. Smaller things like humbleness and appreciation could go a long way. Native American’s typically are very humble and do not like a lot of attention. By striving to make them feel comfortable to be the center of attentions is vital. Showing appreciation is also a big player in making them feel even with the counselor (especially when being a white counselor).

Humor also plays a big part when counseling Native American’s. They generally like to laugh and be light hearted. A counselor being able to understand this humor and even mirror it back occasionally is a great way to earn trust.

A very specific and unique thing to remember when working with Native American's is *The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)*. This act acknowledges the tribe as the best agency to determine custody issues for Indian children (Paniagua, 1994). The act mostly deals with child adoption, foster care, custody proceedings, Indian child and family programs, and record keeping. So right away if you have an issue with a child or family they need to be called to get involved. They will often take over and the counselor will not be utilized. This is very unique and extremely important for a counselor to be ready for.

Overall, tribes play a big role. Native American's are not individualistic and believe that they all support each other. Bringing members from the tribe such as; friends, family, medicine man/women, or tribal leader are crucial. A counselor must be prepared if a Native American shows up with one or more of the people to join in on the counseling session.

Time might be another important factor to be prepared to discuss by the counselor. Native American's tend to not put a great emphasis on being somewhere at a specific time. "American Indians treat time as a natural event and do not believe that time should control their natural way of living (Paniagua, 1994). Unfortunately, that goes very much against a therapist's often time limited, structured, and busy schedule. A way it could be addressed is explaining that by one person being late it sends a ripple effect down for the rest of the day and others will have to wait longer. As long as it is represented in a genuine and empathic way Native Americans will not be offended.

Therapy approaches that counselors will need handy when counseling a Native American are behavioral therapy, family therapy, and solutions focused therapy. Behavioral approaches are recommended because they emphasize the cause of behavior and are determined by external events and avoid explanation of behavior in terms of internal conflicts (Paniagua, 1994).

Behavioral therapy can bring in the holistic view which is extremely important when working with Native American's. They believe everything is connected. Family therapy can be beneficial as well because they place so much emphasis and need for the family support. Bringing the whole family in could really set up a network and understanding for all involved. Lastly, solution focused therapy is appropriate when working with Native American's. They don't like to think about the past or future as much as the present. This therapy focuses almost only on the present. It is also time limited which seems to fit the Native American need.

Each minority within the United States has their unique and differing issues. It is vital that a counselor must be ready to address these issues with their client's and also act as an advocate for them. Understanding the need for these skills and strategies listed above (and more) will aid the counselor in the process and give the client the best counseling possible.

References

- Chang, C.Y., Myers, J. (1997). Understanding and counseling Korean Americans: Implications for training. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 37 (1)*, 35-50. Retrieved May 29, 2008, From EBSCO Host database.
- Enns, C. & Kasai, M. (2003). Hakoniwa: Japanese sand play therapy. *The Counseling Psychologist, 31 (1)*, 93-112.
- Moy, S. (1992). A culturally sensitive, psychoeducational model for understanding and treating Asian-American clients. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 11*, 358-367.
- Paniagua, F.A. (1994). *Assessing and treating the culturally diverse*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Sue, D.W., & Sue, D. (2008). *Counseling the culturally diverse* (5th ed.) Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Thomason, T.C. (1991, March/April). Counseling Native Americans: An Introduction for non-Native American counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 69*, 321-327.