



Innovations in Counseling: Working with Minority Populations- Part 1 Session 8: Becoming a Culturally Competent Counselor A Process

Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Sandra I. Lopez-Baez and Atsuko Seto

Question from Matthew Beal

The previous slide stated that "values are arbitrary". I was hoping to hear an explanation/defense of that idea.

Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: Basically, values are subjective. Values are acquired through family, religion, media, education, and multiple sources. New experiences and information can modify values.

SETO: I agree with Sandy in that values are relative to what we consider of importance. Often times, the cultures, society and family in which we grow up all have significant influence on how we form values. As we increase counselor cultural competencies, we may realize that we can choose to form values that may not be consistent with our existing values or what our respective culture might hold as important.

Question from Faith Henderson

There would not be enough counselors for certain populations and mental health care would not be easily accessible for certain groups if counselors only counseled clientele they preferred.

Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: True! Counselors need diversity training to address diverse populations. Information and experiences that provide exposure to diversity are necessary to develop competencies.

SETO: I couldn't agree with you and Sandy more. A question for us to ponder is "How do we practice ethically while also taking a certain degree of risk to enhance our skills and knowledge in working with particular groups that are less familiar to us?" In addition to establishing specialty areas in our practice, we might also want to continue working through our discomfort of working with less familiar populations in order to increase our competency. I have a lot of work to do on this one myself.

Question from Ellen Rebman

I agree that it is unethical to refuse to see others based on personal preferences or prejudices. I also agree that it is unethical to practice outside of your ability or knowledge level. How do you work within the ethics of both using best practices?



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Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: By developing & refining your approach to diversity, you develop a framework for dealing with human diversity. Also, by “giving away” your expertise to the client so he/she can teach you about their culture thus, joining in the therapeutic endeavor.

SETO: I share your struggle. I do not know if there is a clear answer to this. I think this is where counselor awareness becomes important. The more aware we are about ethical practice from a multicultural perspective and our own current limit, we can decide on how to enhance our cultural competencies. For example, I was asked if I could be a part of providing online based counseling to people who reside in a country other than the U.S.. I would have loved the opportunity to do this, but I realized I did not have the sufficient training in providing such a service at that time. My first step was to contact ACA Ethics Committee to learn about ramifications of providing online based counseling to clients in another country. I also made a plan to complete a Distance Credentialed Counselor (DCC) certification that is available through NBCC Center for Credentials and Education. I consider this as a start to developing necessary competencies in providing services at a more global level.

With that being said, I think another part of our growth has to come with our willingness to work through the discomfort of working with clients who are less familiar with us. As Sandy mentioned, our desire to effect positive changes in people’s lives pushes us to support people who are in distress. For example, an overwhelming number of counselors volunteered to serve as disaster mental health counselors in response to Hurricane Katarina. Many of us were unfamiliar with disaster response counseling until that time, but we as the profession came to together to use our existing knowledge to function in somewhat of a new territory.

Question from Julie Reimann

My difficulty as a woman in working multiculturally is that many cultures see women as second class citizens. I have a hard time being open and accepting to that belief.

Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: Yes, many parts of the world believe that men & women are not only different, but one is superior to the other. I encourage my female clients to find their strengths and cultivate them regardless of what society tells them.

SETO: I, too, have a hard time accepting cultural norms that perceive women as a second class citizen or subordinate to men. If a female client comes to perceive her cultural practice as being hindering to her, I would assist her in advocating for herself. Going against one’s cultural norms can have a significant consequence (e.g., disowned by a family), so I make sure to explore potential ramifications of her decisions as a part of counseling.



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I also remind myself of my own interpretation of “second class” and try to be open minded about different gender dynamics that are observed among cultures. For example, someone who is not from Japanese culture may perceive a traditional couple’s dynamic (women taking a more submissive role) as hindering to women, but a couple may be content with roles each of them plays in their relationship.

Question from Irene Muncy

What would be some cultural pitfalls with either CBT or client-centered or client- focused counseling techniques?

Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: Any approach not designed for a diverse population may have to be significantly adjusted to the client’s cultural reality. Remember that “one size fits all” is a fallacy!

SETO: Sandy summed it up for us. My assumption is that each theory has its own limitations, and that is where our own cultural competency comes into play. The more competent we are, the easier we can modify our theoretical orientation to meet the needs of a particular client by considering his/her individual uniqueness and worldview. For example, if we are employing CBT in working with a client who has some intellectual disability, we need to know how to modify CBT oriented techniques to make them useful for the client. Perhaps, having a strong counselor-client relationship helps us be sensitive to how different techniques are working for a particular client as well as invite the client to share his/her experience in counseling with us.

Question from Yolanda Wilson

As a therapist, I’ve found that media events play a role in cultural acceptance while in a group setting with those of various cultures. What do you recommend as a means to divert the anger to acceptance in a group environment?

Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: I believe that anger is a creative force that contains creative energy. When appropriately channeled, it can be very constructive!

SETO: I am curious to hear more about your thoughts on the impact of media on cultural acceptance. I wonder if you are referring to how media reinforces negative stereotypes about certain groups. In terms of diverting a feeling of anger, some of us may think that anger is a secondary response to underlying emotions that are somewhat suppressed. I tend to agree with this perspective and try to explore with clients about whatever they are struggling with beneath their anger. It seems to me that some people use anger to assert themselves, while others may use it to voice their needs (seeking help) and use it as a mechanism to cover oncoming adversities. In a group setting, it could shift anger into something that is healing if we can tap into underlying

concerns/challenges that are collectively shared among group members. When anger is associated with hatred, it can be extremely difficult to shift such emotion and mentality.

Question from Kristine Gile

Has there ever been a question of the member mistreating each other. I'm thinking of Maine's Deaf Community treatment of each other.

Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: I am not familiar with that specific group. But the situation intrigues me and I would ask a member of the group about it. Does it have a purpose? Or is it a reflection of the treatment they have received?

As: I am sorry I am not familiar with Maine's Deaf Community either and would appreciate learning more about what challenges you have noticed this community having. In terms of within group mistreatment, I think many groups experienced this to some degree. For example, couples who marry out of their race may be discriminated by both communities (their own racial group and one that their partner is from) because of their choice to marry someone who is of a different racial background. I wonder if within a group mistreatment is even more complicated because perceived trust, mutual support and sense of community are damaged. I am not sure if this applies to Maine's Deaf Community as I do not have background information on this community.

Questions from Uyen Bui-Anderson

1. Can presenters provide resources/references to help better understand different groups?
2. Is this topic imperative to bring into supervision?

Answer from Presenters

1. LOPEZ-BAEZ: The references at the end of the PowerPoint are a start. A literature search for each specific group is recommended.

SETO: As Sandy said, there are a number of sources that are available. We provided a few pertinent literature on multicultural counseling competencies as a part of our presentation. I personally like to use a variety of sources such as biographies, movies, and children's books in addition to academic readings (e.g., peer reviewed journals, books). I do not have the list of sources, but you got me thinking perhaps I should create one, or we can collectively work together to develop it.

2. LOPEZ-BAEZ: I believe so. Supervisors have power and influence over supervisees, thus to be a competent supervisor you must be culturally competent. You cannot offer effective supervision if you do not understand a



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supervisee different from you much less their clients. Open and honest communication on the topic is important. I do ask my supervisees what their approach to diversity is as well as explain mine to them.

SETO: Sandy said it well. I think supervision is essential for us to develop or hone in on our skills to effectively broach cultural and racial topics in counseling.

Question from Fanita Henderson

What questions would be appropriate during an intake interview that would include client's ethnicity and culture?

Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: "Do you identify with one or more ethno/racial group/s"; "How have those groups influenced & currently impact your life"? Adjust the question to the client's age & level of education or awareness.

SETO: I have used a cultural genogram that explores a client's cultural background and find it helpful in learning about the client. Resources I have utilized include Focused Genograms: Intergenerational Assessment of Individuals, Couples, and Families by DeMaria, Weeks, and Hof; and Genogram: Assessment and Intervention by McGoldrick, Gerson, and Petry. You can find helpful questions in these books.

Question from Edward Ewe

Do the presenters have any thoughts about how living environments (rural vs urban) affect our assumptions of others?

Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: The community in which you grew up and choose to live has an impact on how diverse the population and the amount of exposure to diverse populations. The greater the homogeneity of the environment that less exposure to diversity, the higher the risk of stereotyping.

SETO: I agree with Sandy. I have lived in small communities as well as big cities. Based on my personal experiences, I have also learned that people regardless of where they live can initiate in cultural immersion experiences, but such efforts can be met by discouragement if a community tends to prefer to be homogeneous. Often times, we confirm or alter our assumptions based on what we have learned through our "lived" experiences. Similar to how our own family has shaped our assumptions about others, a larger system such as a community (e.g., rural, urban, suburban, etc.) shapes our assumptions and perceptions to some degree. Additionally, what makes a difference is how a person interprets cultural experiences and incorporates them into forming assumptions about others. Some people become more open minded, whereas others may remain within their existing comfort zone.



Question from Janis McCollum

I am African American and I currently am living in Korea. Korea is not a melting pot like America. How would you communicate culture differences with them if there are language barriers?

Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: I believe you are describing two different issues. Language can be a barrier because some concepts may not exist in the culture, such as the term “diversity”. So, if an analogous or equivalent concept exists, how do they articulate it and approach it?

SETO: Language barrier can intensify feelings of isolation and frustration because it significantly limits communication with others. When I first moved to the U.S., I did not know where to even begin in terms of communicating with others because I had very limited English language proficiency. What had helped me was personal relationships I gradually built with individuals. Once I was able to establish a positive rapport with a person, we seemed to find ways to communicate in whatever the methods we could use (e.g, using pictures, body language, putting words together instead of a complete sentence). As you said, America has different ways of approaching diversity and multiculturalism than what is practiced in Korea, and I wonder what kind of opportunities there are for you to make a connection with natives. I also do not know reasons why you currently live in Korea, but I would hope that making friends who are interested in learning about you including your cultural background is a start of overcoming language barriers, at least at a micro level.

Question from Cyrilla Beveridge

What is considered an appropriate situation in which a counselor would refer the client to someone else?

Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: If the counselor lacks the competencies to work with a client and will do more harm than good should they work with the client, then referral is necessary. However, choosing not to learn about a subject is not an excuse.

SETO: I agree with Sandy!

Question from Kimber-Lea Raef

Since each of you are involved in Higher Education Institutions, do you frequently face the reality that White people are blind to their own diversity and cultural ideals?



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Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: For me, daily. I do my best to educate and frequently use the analogy—“most of us may not know we have bad breath until someone tells us. So, are they doing you a kindness or being rude?” Maybe we should listen to what they are telling us.

SETO: My husband who is a White person and I talk about White privilege and culture blindness from time to time. On a personal level, I have met White people who are incredibly sensitive and aware of their own cultural heritage and that of others. I also have met those who significantly lack awareness of diversity and multiculturalism including their own. Regardless of a person’s racial background, I try to voice my concerns about ethnocentrism and micro-aggression when I witness it. I am not always good at doing so, but I think I am getting better at bringing them to a person’s awareness in as genuine manner as possible. When I lived in Japan, I think I had a very limited awareness of my own culture partially because I was a member of the majority. Coming to U.S. really changed that. So, in a small way, I can relate to a “cultural blindness” that you are referring to.

Question from Tamara Snyder

How would you suggest to explain to young children the differences they notice? Such as, a child states, Why is her skin different? Why doesn't she believe in Jesus?

Answer from Presenters

LOPEZ-BAEZ: As a matter of fact. A wonderful speaker once told us a story of a very young child who approached her and “tasted” her arm much to his parents’ embarrassment. She replied: “looks like chocolate, but does not taste like it!” She then explained her brown complexion to the child. Teaching young children the value of diverse races and ethnicities needs to start very young. Providing them with experiences, stories and anecdotes enriches their life!

SETO: My daughter is my teacher on this one. As Sandy said, I think a wide range of exposure to diversity and multiculturalism enriches a child’s learning. Good friends of mine gave me some excellent children’s books (e.g., *People* by Peter Spier, *In the world were a village* by David Smith – Some statistical information in these books may be outdated, but they are still great books to me) that help children learn about differences among humans and human universality. I read them with my daughter who is soon to be five years old. When my daughter asks culture-related questions, I find myself saying to her something like, “I do not know the answer, but this is what I have learned about ...” This way, I am not giving her a definitive answer but rather sharing my thought on the topic/population. My hope is that she can feel free to form her thoughts instead of simply incorporating my perspectives on different groups.

She has experienced a few incidences where differences were perceived negatively, and it has been heartbreaking to see her big eyes filled with tears and say to me “Mama, I don’t want to speak Japanese because



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no one speaks Japanese.” Helping her navigate through her own bicultural and biracial development has enriched my own growth as a racial and cultural being. As Sandy and I emphasized in our presentation, becoming a culturally competent counselor is a process!

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