Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence, and Relational Collaboration with Native American Indians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal:</th>
<th>The Counseling Psychologist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript ID:</td>
<td>TCP-09-INV-0055.R1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript Type:</td>
<td>Invited Manuscript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keywords:</td>
<td>Multiculturalism &lt; Content, Psychotherapy &lt; Content, Race/Ethnicity &lt; Dimensions of Diversity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence

Running Head: THE VIRTUES OF CULTURAL RESONANCE, COMPETENCE

The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence, and Relational Collaboration with Native American Indian Communities: A Synthesis of the Counseling and Psychotherapy Literature

Joseph E. Trimble

Department of Psychology

Center for Cross-Cultural Research

Western Washington University
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence

Abstract

The article extends the scholarship, observations, and recommendations provided in Joseph Gone’s article, “Psychotherapy and Traditional Healing for American Indians: Prospects for Therapeutic Integration.” The overarching thesis is that for many Indian and Native clients, interpersonal and interethnic problems can emerge when a counselor’s lack of culturally resonant experience and knowledge, deeply held stereotypes, and preconceived notions interfere with the counseling relationship and impede counseling effectiveness. A brief synthesis of the counseling literature themes suggests that there is ample evidence that by using particular culturally resonant techniques, counselors can promote client trust, rapport, cultural empathy, and improve the counselor-client relationship, both in general and with American Indian and Alaska Native clients specifically. Topics consistent with Joseph Gone’s main thesis also are explored that relate to spiritual healing and other counseling considerations involving relational collaborations with Indian and Native communities. Information provided in this article is focused on helping to stimulate effective cross-cultural contacts between mental health counselors and Native American Indians.
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence, and Relational Collaboration with Native American Indian Communities: A Synthesis of the Counseling and Psychotherapy Literature

To set the tone for the review and appraisal of Joseph Gone’s article attention must be given to what culture means and how is used to describe the thoughtways and lifeways of ethnocultural populations especially American Indians and Alaska Natives. Within the behavioral and social sciences the cultural construct is the foundation of research and development in the multicultural field thus a worthwhile and useful definition should be offered to serve as a channel and guide. Almost everyone, however, seems to know what it means yet it may be easily the most misunderstood construct in the social and behavioral sciences. Lonner and Malpass (1994), for example, indicated there are about 175 definitions of culture that can be found in the social and behavioral science literature; their count is considerably more than the 79 features of culture generated by Murdock, Ford, and Hudson (1971). However, Geertz’ (1973) definition provides a path that is reasonably inclusive of all of its elements when he maintained that it “is an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life” (p. 89). In offering his definition, Geertz cautiously reminded us that, “the trouble is that no one is quite sure what culture is. Not only is it an essentially contested concept….it is fugitive, unsteady, encyclopedic, and normatively charged, and there are those….who think it vacuous altogether, or even dangerous, and would ban it from the serious discourse of serious persons” (Geertz, 2000, p. 11).
For Peer Review

The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence 4

Geertz (2000) adds more to problem when he queried, “What is culture if it is not consensus?” (p. 224). While people may be able to achieve some consensus on what culture is, in general, the agreement seems to fall apart when scholars attempt to break down it’s meaning into some reasonably well defined components. Unfortunately, use of the construct also breaks down when people rely on it as a label to describe similarities and differences between and among ethnocultural populations. A review of the literature in multicultural counseling provides ample testament to Geertz’ contention; Joseph Gone’s findings also add credence to the disputation when he asked, “How much ‘culture’ is required for the culturally competent practice of psychotherapy with the culturally different?” (p. 6). He doesn’t answer the question in his article but at minimum his descriptions and recommendations prod the debate and topic and thus moves the question much closer to the onion’s core.

A Historical Précis on Native American Counseling Literature

The mounting literature on providing culturally sensitive and competent counseling services for Native American Indians is extensive but limited in its depth and scope. In effect, the well-used onion metaphor advocated by Geertz (1973) applies to this observation. One has to continue to peel away the onion’s layers to ostensibly get deeper into one’s cultural origins; the vast majority of the literature on counseling Native American Indians unfortunately deals largely with the outer superficial layers. To go deeper into a cult unit one has to peel away many more layers; Joseph Gone’s article accomplishes this as he delves deeply into spiritual topics that most often are ignored or not openly discussed in academic venues.
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence

To assist in extending Joseph Gone’s thesis it may be helpful to summarize the major themes that appear in the counseling literature focusing on Native American Indians. A systematic examination of the literature indicates that authors tend to focus their writings on several major themes to include: client characteristics; counselor characteristics; counseling approaches and techniques; value differences; acculturative status; ethnic and tribal identification; historical trauma and unresolved grief; alcoholism and drug abuse; spirituality; developmental life stages; ethics; developing multicultural competency skills; and traditional healing perspectives and their implications for counseling and psychotherapy.

Flexibility and Cultural Contexts

A constant theme occurs repeatedly in the Indian and Native literature — counselors of Indian and Native clients must be adaptive and flexible in their personal orientations and in their use of conventional counseling techniques. According to Herring (1999), to achieve flexibility counselors should adopt a "synergetic orientation" to assist them in establishing a "culturally affirmative environment" (pp. 55, 58). Consistent with the recommendations of other scholars and counselors in the field, Herring maintains that counselors should: 1) address openly the issue of dissimilar ethnic relationships rather than pretending that no differences exist; 2) schedule appointments to allow for flexibility in ending the session; 3) be open to allowing the extended family to participate in the session; 4) allow time for trust to develop before focusing on problems; 5) respect the uses of silence; 6) demonstrate honor and respect for the [client’s] culture(s); and 7) maintain the highest level of confidentiality" (pp. 55-56). Herring's suggestions reflect the sentiments and recommendations of many observers concerning the conduct of research.
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence

in Indian and Native communities (Darou, Kurtness, & Hum, 2000; Darou, 1997; Trimble & Fisher, 2005) and are in keeping with what Trickett, Watts, and Birman (1994) refer to as "principled cultured sensitivity."

To be effective, culturally resonant, and competent, counselors should strive to understand the cultural contexts and unique cultural and historical characteristics of their clients (Herring, 1992; Koverola, 1992; LaFromboise, Berman, & Sohi, 1994; Trimble & Gonzalez, 2008). Salzman (2001), for example, recommends that counselors respect “culture as a necessary psychological defense and design interventions accordingly; promote interventions emphasizing meaning construction at the community level and support the collective (community) and individual construction of meaning that sustains adaptive action; support and assist individuals and communities in the identification of standards and values within the cultural worldview they identify with that promote adaptive action in current realities; and support and assist communities in cultural recovery through collaborative content analysis of traditional stories” (pp. 189-190).

Acculturation and Identity

Assessing an Indian and Native client’s acculturation and ethnic identity levels is a consistent theme in the literature. Most counseling practitioners would agree that a client’s responsiveness to counseling is not necessarily a function of where he or she was born and reared. Rather, it would appear that a client's acculturation and the degree and intensity of his or her Indian and Native identity are potent contributors to that client's receptivity to counseling in a conventional sense (Trimble, 1987, 1996, 2000). Like many other members of ethnic minority groups and other culturally distinct people in North America, Indians and Natives express the full range of acculturation. Many, regardless of
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence

age, are traditional and Native oriented; others are transitional in the sense that they reflect an understanding and appreciation of culture-specific folkways yet recognize the need to adopt the values and beliefs of the dominant, mainstream culture. Others, whether because of geographic isolation from their ancestral homes or personal choice, to some degree, have internalized the lifeways and thoughtways of modern society.

Although a counselor’s sensitivity to the client’s degree of acculturation will facilitate the counseling process, the dynamics surrounding acculturation also may create therapeutic issues. For some individuals who are otherwise healthy, the conflicts surrounding movement between cult units may be what bring them into counseling, and the counselor must be prepared to assist with these conflicts. These issues become more salient for Indian people who are living in urban or other nonreservation environments.

**Traditional Healing Perspectives and Considerations**

Joseph Gone’s major traditional healing thesis is consistent with some of the recommendations and techniques advocated by several practitioners and academic scholars. In essence, considerable discussion has taken place concerning counseling paradigm shifts and the manner in which counseling and mental health services are offered to Indian and Native individuals and communities (Herring, 1999; Pedersen, 1999). Rather than focusing exclusively on how to use and/or adapt Western perspectives of healing, many are describing and proposing models of healing from a Native American Indian perspective (Garrett, Garrett, & Brotherton, 2001; Lewis, Duran, & Woodis, 1999; Thomason, 1991; Trimble & Gonzalez, 2008). A few authors recommend that counselors establish working relationships with traditional healers. The collaboration with an indigenous healing system can take several forms: the counselor may (a) support the
viability of traditional healing as an effective treatment system; (b) actively refer clients to indigenous healers, or; (c) actively work together with indigenous healers.

Increasingly, numerous examples have been proposed concerning the worth of introducing Indian and Native beliefs and ceremonies within the conventional counseling setting (Dufrene & Coleman, 1992; Garrett et al., 2001; Gray, 1984; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; Roberts, Harper, Tuttle-Eagle Bull, & Heideman-Provost, 1998). In general, the recommendations and examples follow the wisdom and advice offered by LaFromboise, Trimble, and Mohatt, (1990) concerning the importance of blending culturally unique and conventional psychological interventions to advance the goal of Native American Indian empowerment.

**Spirituality**

A few counselors working with Indian and Native clients have incorporated spirituality in counseling sessions and have achieved a modicum of success. Garrett and Garrett (1998) describe the use of the "sacred circle" and its related symbolism in an "inner/outer circle" form of group therapy and how the Native perspective can facilitate client progress. Lewis, Duran, and Woodis (1999) found that a process-oriented training model grounded in spirituality can allow therapists to enter into a non-Western-based reality with their clients, thus enhancing their sensitivity to and respect for Native worldviews. Heilbron and Guttman (2000) use a traditional aboriginal "healing circle" with non-aboriginal and First Nations women who were survivors of child sexual abuse and found that both groups responded favorably to the approach.

Simms (1999) describes the use of a blended counseling approach that combined an integrated relational behavioral-cognitive strategy with traditional healing approaches,
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence

including talking circles, sweats, and participation in cultural forums. The client that
Simms describes was experiencing cultural identity, self-confidence, and academic
problems that could not be resolved through the use of a straightforward conventional
counseling technique. Similarly, McDonald and Gonzalez (2006) describe the weaving of
cognitive-behavioral therapy with traditional Lakota healing practices for a veteran
experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder. Here again, there were cultural circumstances
related to war and battle that necessitated the inclusion of Native ways of knowing and
healing. Also, use of sweat lodges and talking circles as means for promoting client
participation and retention is receiving some attention in the multicultural counseling
literature (Garrett & Osborne, 1995). Colmant and Merta (1999) describe the
effectiveness of incorporating a sweat lodge ceremony in the treatment of Navajo youths
who were diagnosed with behavioral disruptive disorders. The ceremony has
considerable overlap with conventional forms of group therapy and thus merits
consideration in the treatment of Indian and Native youth.

Although incorporating traditional spiritual and healing methods such as the sweat
lodge and talking circles can facilitate counselor effectiveness, client retention, and
progress under controlled circumstances, decisions to use such techniques must be made
with a strong degree of caution. LaDue (1994) strongly recommends that non-Indian
counselors abstain from participating in and using such practices, asserting that they
should not promote or condone the stealing and inappropriate use of Indian and Native
spiritual activities. Doing so may invoke ethical considerations, as Indian and Native
spiritual activities and practices are the sole responsibility of recognized and respected
Indian and Native healers and elders. Indeed, there is currently high interest in spirituality
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence

worldwide and part of this growing interest involves the exploitation and appropriation of traditional Indian and Native ceremonies without the consent of indigenous healers. Matheson (1996) maintains that non-Native individuals who use traditional Native American Indian spiritual healing practices are under mistaken, even dangerous impressions, and, as a consequence, are showing grave disrespect for the indigenous origins, contexts, and practices of these traditions by Indian and Native peoples. If the essence of a counseling relationship is built on trust, rapport, and respect, then the exploitation and appropriation of indigenous traditional healing ceremonies and practices for use in counseling sessions will undoubtedly undermine a counselor’s efforts to gain acceptance from the Indian community and the client. These last points are not meant to discourage the non-Native counselor from exploring and learning about Native ways of knowing and healing.

Effective Counselor Characteristics

Joseph Gone takes the position that counselors who want to work with Indian and Native clients must modify conventional styles and techniques and embrace a Native wisdom that would help their effectiveness in working with clients who come from cultures different from the counselors’ own. Moreover, many conventional counselors possess generic personal characteristics that promote positive relationships with any clients, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. In fact, many conventional providers of mental health services share healing characteristics similar to those of shamans, spirit healers, and medicine people. Additionally, providers of traditional helping services in Indian and Native communities most likely exemplify empathy, genuineness, availability, respect, warmth, congruence, and concreteness, characteristics that are likely
to be effective in any therapeutic treatment setting, regardless of the provider's theoretical orientation or counseling style. Effective counseling with Indians and Natives begins when a counselor carefully internalizes and uses these basic characteristics in counseling settings (see Morse, Young, & Swartz, 1991).

Continuing with this theme, Reimer (1999, p. 60) collected information from Inupiat members of an Alaska Native village concerning the characteristics they found desirable in a healer. Her respondents indicated that a healer is (a) virtuous, kind, respectful, trustworthy, friendly, gentle, loving, clean, giving, helpful, not a gossip, and not one who wallows in self-pity; (b) strong physically, mentally, spiritually, personally, socially, and emotionally; (c) one who works well with others by becoming familiar with people in the community; (d) one who has good communication skills, achieved by taking time to talk, visit, and listen; (e) respected because of his or her knowledge, disciplined in thought and action, wise and understanding, and willing to share knowledge by teaching and serving as an inspiration; (f) substance-free; (g) one who knows and follows the culture; and (h) one who has faith and a strong relationship with the Creator. Thus, counselors don’t need to abandon their conventional counseling styles, but instead must show a willingness to pay attention to what Indian and Native clients value in respected traditional healers. Moreover, having the ability to suspend disbelief is helpful for counselors working with Indian and Native clients—that is, counselors need to be willing to listen to and hear whatever clients may say without judging the credibility of the belief systems associated with healing ceremonies, Indian medicine, and spiritual quests.

Shamanic Healers
To set part of the stage for his article’s thesis, Joseph Gone recounts the life and experiences of the Gros Ventre healer, Bull Lodge, and the influence he had on keeping their traditional healing methods and techniques alive within the context of the Gros Ventre worldview. The intent of his description is to demonstrate that “cultural divergences in subjectivity and experience are directly relevant for any comparison of therapeutic principles and practices” (p. 17). Gone’s inspired description clearly demonstrates that Bull Lodge was connected to the spirit world and the every day life in his community and that the relationship was one that provided him with the sacred healing knowledge necessary to effect recovery from one’s suffering and hardship.

Gone’s description of Bull Lodge’s life and influence is consistent with several biographic stories about Indian and Native healers. Biographic studies of shaman and indigenous healers have been the province of anthropology and for the most part focus on the more prominent ones among certain North American Indian tribes (Eliade, 1964). Most of the accounts are descriptive life histories where the life of the person is described as the healer lived it. For example, Sapir’s (1921) work on “The Life of a Nootka Indian” touches on the significant portions of a certain man’s life and how he promoted community healing. “Sun Chief”, an assisted autobiography by Simmons (1942), traced the growth and development of a Hopi but cast the portrayal as a symbol of the tribe’s folkways.

A few anthropologists have taken on the added task of providing psychosocial analysis of the healer’s character. Most notable is the classic work of Leighton and Leighton (1949) of Gregorio, a Navajo hand-trembler. In their work, they present a life chart showing not only sequences of the healer’s life but the significant events
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence

surrounding major life changes; psychological interpretations are offered for various phases of Gregorio’s life challenges. Also, they argue that the major concerns of the hand-trembler’s life adequately represented those of other Navajo’s living in the same area of the reservation.

Lurie (1961), in her guided autobiography of the Winnebago, Mountain Wolf Women, departed little from the conventional life history approach. Her slight departure from the conventional life history method produced a detailed analysis of Winnebago sex role relationships and attitudes towards non-Indians. She also provides a coherent analysis of Mountain Wolf Woman’s relationship with her brother Crashing Thunder, the subject of yet another life history by Radin (1926).

In her biography of Yaqui women, Kelley (1978) emphasizes the relationship between the individual and the forces of the changing community’s changing sociocultural lifestyle. She effectively blends together a description of the influential factors affecting the adaptive strategies used by Yaqui women but sparked with some attempt at interpretation and analysis.

In recent years, a handful of psychologists have given considerable attention to the healing practices of indigenous “medicine people” that go well beyond the use of an ethnographic participant observer sojourn. The well-written and thoroughly researched life stories extend well beyond written accounts of the healer’s life and community. Rich descriptions are provided that reveal psychological profiles that reveal the healer’s sociocultural and psychosocial influences on their character and their healing effectiveness. In an introspective, informative, and sensitively written autobiography, Mohatt and Eagle Elk (2000) relate the life story of the practices, experiences, and career...
of a traditional Native American Indian healer. As a cross-cultural clinical psychologist, Mohatt’s adds a unique perspective that enables him to highlight the psychological dimensions and worth of Eagle Elk’s healings as he places them within a cross-cultural context.

Katz’ (1982, 1993), a clinical cross-cultural psychologist, beautifully written and dramatic descriptions of “boiling energy” among the Kalahari Kung and the “straight path” and healing and transformation among Fijians enlightens the mysteries of indigenous healing from the perspective of one who apprenticed himself to healers with the community and healers’ permission. Katz, Biesele, and St. Denis (1997), in an enthralling and engaging book titled, “Healing Makes our Hearts Happy,” recounts the story of the Kalahari Jul’hoansi and the extraordinary power of spiritual energy that affirms community traditions and relationships. The authors maintain that, “Part of the story we have to tell involves the interplay in contemporary Jul’hoan tradition expectation and observation, of conservative ideology and creative symbolism. It is a story of history - both past and present - told by a ‘committee’ of Jul’hoan people. The voice of the book is not one person but a medley of voices. A story where truth lies – if it exists – in verbal communication. It is a story of the dialogue and question and answer and how that dialogue may create a new understanding that is mutual and useful to the Jul’hoansi” (p. 156). The eloquent words of by Katz, Biesele, and St. Denis resonate profoundly with Joseph Gone’s concluding observation. Specifically, Gone states that, “substantive community involvement and engagement in the formulation of integrative approaches exposes the particular interests of the dominant professional agenda even as it reformulates that agenda to its own ends. As a result, it remains imperative that such
integrative projects in Indian country extend well beyond the creative achievements of a single individual—no matter how ingenious, poetic, or politic—to the collective energies and efforts of community members engaged in charting a sustainable and self-determined therapeutic praxis that reflects their own distinctive strategy for hurdling the colonial abyss” (p. 84). Consequently, without firmly establishing a collaborative long-term relationship with communities the likelihood of garnering an abiding partnership is slim (Trimble & Mohatt, 2006).

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to extend and expand the scholarship, observations, and recommendations provided in Joseph Gone’s article, “Psychotherapy and Traditional Healing for American Indians: Prospects for Therapeutic Integration.” The recurrent theme is that for many Indian and Native clients, interpersonal and interethnic problems can emerge when a counselor’s lack of culturally resonant experience and knowledge, deeply held stereotypes, and preconceived notions interfere with the counseling relationship and impede counseling effectiveness.

Joseph Gone advocates an integration of selected American Indian and Alaska Native healing practices with contemporary theory and practice in counseling and clinical psychology. Balanced descriptions of the traditional Gros Ventre healer Bull Lodge and the contemporary Native clinical psychologist Eduardo Duran are provided; the latter illustrates use of selected healing Indian and Native practices with Indian clients.

Advocating an integration of the traditional with the conventional is not without its problems. For many Indians and Natives, the idea that sharing their traditional healing and spiritual traditions with outsiders would not be acceptable and would be met with
fierce resistance. On learning that a traditional healer would not share the mysteries and
secrets of his techniques and practices a prominent rather ethnocentric psychiatrist
allegedly ranted that, “Since he won’t share his techniques and secrets with me then I’m
not going to teach him what I know and can do with patients.” Apparently, as the story
goes, the healer didn’t care one bit about learning the psychiatrist’s theories and

techniques. If both healers held a strong interest and concern for some of the clients and
tribal members both could have benefited from the collaboration; in this case
unfortunately the psychiatrist wasn’t willing to spend considerable time in the community
to nurture the relationships. In essence, establishing a deep abiding relationship with the
community, the healer, and the healer’s large extended family wasn’t significant enough
for the presumed elitist psychiatrist.

As Joseph Gone points out, there are a few Indian and Native communities who
are willing to establish collaborative relationships with mental health practitioners.
Moreover, there are a few Indian and Native healers who work with outsiders to promote
health, well-being, and spiritual balance.

Numerous Indian and Native community leaders demand that collaboration with
mental health specialists occur under their direction and control. Practitioners should be
prepared to collaborate with the communities, share results that have practical value, and
accept the conditions imposed by the community in gaining access to those in need of
psychological assistance. Additionally, practitioners must be aware of the scientific,
social, and political factors governing the rules of professional conduct embodied in
federal regulations and professional codes. Yet, professional codes and standards provide
incomplete guidance for identifying and resolving complex ethical challenges often
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence

inherent in providing mental health services for Indians and Natives and the communities
in which they live.

References

Colmant, S., & Merta, R. (1999). Using the sweat lodge ceremony as group therapy for

Counselling, 21*, 33-41.

school experience in Canada: A review. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology,
29*, 766-767.


counseling Native American Indians. In D. R. Atkinson, G. Morten, & D. W. Sue
(Eds.), *Counseling American minorities* (5th ed., pp. 183-192). New York:
McGraw-Hill.

Garrett, M. (1999). Understanding the “medicine” of Native American traditional values:
An integrative review. *Counseling and Values, 43*(2), 84-98.
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence


    technique based on Native American healing circles. *Journal for Specialists in

    Group Work, 26,* 17-30.


    of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 20,* 35-43.

Herring, R. D. (1999). *Counseling with Native American Indians and Alaska Natives:


    Psychology and Christianity, 11,* 345-357.


    Cambridge, MA: Harvard.


    Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.


    Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence


Matheson, L. (1986). If you are not an Indian, how do you treat an Indian? In H. P. Lefley & P. B. Pedersen (Eds.), *Cross-cultural training for mental health professionals* (pp. 115-130). Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.


The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence


The Virtues of Cultural Resonance, Competence


