

and rapport are important in establishing a working alliance; that culture-specific modes of counseling work better with clients from some cultural groups; and that aspects of cultural background and the acculturation experience can influence receptiveness to counseling (Sue & Sundberg, 1996). However, awareness and knowledge alone are not sufficient. Counselors also need multicultural skills to achieve positive outcomes in counseling across cultures.

Tatar (1998) has identified four intercultural counseling strategies with varying degrees of effectiveness. Although these approaches were originally developed for use with immigrant students, they can be extended to work with other acculturating persons. The first and most widely used strategy, "counselor as culturally encapsulated assimilator," is the least reflective of multicultural effectiveness. In this approach, counselors are trapped in the culturally dominant way of thinking that advocates rapid assimilation "in the students' best interests." Tatar comments that the assimilative approach supports a cultural deficiency model, building on the premise that the dominant culture is also the superior one. The second approach Tatar identifies, "counselor as self-facilitator," emphasizes the individuality of each student, rather than seeing an immigrant as a member of a labeled group. Tatar describes this method as involving the counselor as an active influence, working with the individual and with relevant others in recognition and acceptance of the client as undergoing a developmental transition in a multicultural society. In the third approach, labeled "counselor as specialist," the counselor uses his or her personal and professional expertise to devise innovative strategies for client needs. Although this often achieves positive outcomes, a challenge for counselors working with allied professionals is to avoid ethnic stereotyping of certain client groups. Finally, there is the "counselor as translator" approach, in which the counselor serves as a bridge between two cultures, not only assisting the migrant client to operate effectively in the new environment but also educating local persons about other cultures and what can be learned from them. The last of these strategies most clearly reflects an ecological approach, as it involves interventions targeted at individual, relational, and contextual levels.

While the application of the ecological model of acculturation may be relatively new to some counseling professionals, it should resonate with the more familiar systems theory employed in counseling and social work practice. Systems theory has been used to understand and interpret clients' experiences in context and from a holistic and integrative perspective. It recognizes that individual traits and characteristics unfold within social systems and that these systems are situated in a larger environmental and sociopolitical context (Kaplan, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 2006). One of the most significant outcomes of systems theory, as with Tatar's (1998) counselor translators, is the tendency to target interventions at levels of the system beyond the individual.

We suggest that therapeutic effectiveness is enhanced by these multilevel interventions. Not only are they more holistic and ecologically valid, but they are also more meaningful to many immigrant and minority group members. For example, the high value placed on affiliation, interdependence, and family ties by Asian and Latino/a Americans suggests that the relational-level aspects of the acculturation experience assume greater importance (Fuligni et al., 1999). Relatedness is a core value in collectivist cultures and plays a key role in shaping interpersonal and intergroup behaviors (Triandis, 1989). Moreover, collectivist ideals often conflict with the individualist values enshrined in the United States and Canada, including the implicit values held by "mainstream" counselors. Ultimately, understanding this "big picture" is required for therapeutic success as contextual factors interact with individual and relational factors to constrain or enhance clients' psychological and social well-being.

Employing therapeutic interventions across levels can be difficult and in some instances beyond the range of a counselor's capacity and expertise. Addressing the issue and outcomes of discrimination is a case in point. Surveys have found that 20% of Muslim Americans consider prejudice and discrimination against Muslims to be major problems (Pew Research Center, 2011). Three-quarters of Mexican immigrants and 57% of other immigrants in the United States say there is at least "some" discrimination against immigrants (Bittle, Rochkind, Ott, & Gasbarra, 2009). In Canada, 36% of visible minorities report that they have experienced discrimination on the basis of race or culture in the past 5 years (Reitz & Banerjee, 2007). We know that perceived discrimination is related to a variety of negative outcomes, including increased stress, lowered self- and group esteem, impaired health, antisocial behaviors such as drug use and delinquency, identity conflict, and poorer work adjustment and job satisfaction (Ward et al., 2001). Counseling efforts can be channeled to provide support to acculturating people, to increase their resilience, and to assist them in dealing with the stress of discrimination, but ecological interventions are also required. Further, strategies are needed to improve intercultural relations in schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces, and programs should be developed to counter negative societal attitudes toward visible minorities.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have identified generic themes and issues for acculturating persons and provided an ecological framework for interpreting and understanding their experiences. We have also recommended multilevel interventions for working with

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indigenous peoples, sojourners, immigrants, refugees, and ethnocultural groups. We challenge counselors to consider cross-cultural contact and change from a broad perspective and to acknowledge the sociopolitical, community, institutional, and relational influences on both client well-being and the wider outcomes of the counseling process. Fostering the notion that immigrants and refugees are active coping agents in a continuous process of life improvement, Ehrensaft and Tousignant (2006) note:

Resilience does not develop in a social or cultural vacuum. The immigrant is part of a family, which is in turn part of a community, which also interacts with a host society. All of these levels contribute to the success or failure of the process of resilience. (p. 481)

Mental health professionals should bear this in mind when counseling across cultures.

Critical Incident

Imagine that you are a school counselor in an urban center. A concerned teacher at your school has referred a 17-year-old female student to you because her behavior has become withdrawn and her grades have been consistently dropping over the past few months.

The referring teacher, who leads the school orchestra, had noticed that the student, a second-generation immigrant from a Middle Eastern background, did not attend orchestra practice for 3 consecutive weeks and asked the other students if anyone knew the reason for her absence. In private, one of her friends disclosed that the young woman has been having family problems because her parents found out that some of her classmates were dating boys from another school and that as a group they had all been spending time together. Although the girl herself is not in a relationship, after finding out that she was unsupervised in the company of young men, her

parents have stopped allowing her to go to extracurricular activities and outings with her friends. They also now drop her off at school and pick her up every day, and they will not let her answer phone calls from her friends. This situation is obviously negatively affecting the student's well-being as well as her school performance.

Discussion Questions

1. How might you facilitate an initial counseling session with this young woman?
2. How does this young woman's situation illustrate tensions in the acculturation process?
3. In the contextual domain, what elements of the broader social setting and the specific school setting do you think are influencing the situation?
4. In the relational domain, how would you identify who should be part of the counseling process? Should friends, family members, or others be involved? Who should make the decisions regarding whom to include or exclude, and how will these choices affect the sessions?
5. In the individual domain, what identities, personality attributes, and personal characteristics are pertinent to the situation?
6. How does this situation illustrate the interactions among domains within the ecology of acculturation?
7. How would you design an intervention for this young woman that takes into account the influences from all ecological domains?

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