

***Resource Guide to
Culturally Alert Counseling: Working With Asian Clients
A Training Video for Counselors***

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Based on the video produced by

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I. Introduction to the Series

This Resource Guide is part of the companion material for four training videos.* The Guide aims to help viewers be more active learners. The accompanying videos aim to teach learners how to incorporate culture into everyday counseling practice. This guide includes explanations of the skills that are demonstrated in each of the videos and suggested activities for trying out the skills. The viewer, informed by this resource guide and other reading, will, with practice, be able to try some of these skills soon after viewing the videos.

*Note that there are two additional videos that make a complete set. Those videos are, respectively, *Counseling Gay and Lesbian Youth: A Multiethnic Demonstration Video* and *Key Practices in Culturally Alert Counseling: A Demonstration of Selected Practices*. This last video is a guide to overall multicultural counseling skills. The other five videos, including the four in this set, are focused on methods for working with particular groups. Resource guides accompany each of the other videos and are available through Sage Publications (www.sagepub.com).

Definitions: Culturally Alert Counseling and Culture

Culturally alert counseling is defined as a *consistent readiness to identify the cultural dimensions of clients' and counselors' lives and to integrate culture into counseling work.*

There is no one method for doing culturally alert counseling. Instead, culturally alert counseling consists of intentionally adapting existing ways to help clients (1) understand their socially constructed worldviews through culture, (2) appreciate their various cultures, (3) to make choices about adherence to cultural norms, and (4) to recognize and respond to external bias relating to their cultural group membership. From this definition it is clear that such counseling attends to cultural strengths as well as barriers related to culture. It should be noted that culturally alert counseling is a sensibility and a set of skills. The counselor must first inquire

and understand the cultural dimensions of a client's life and then act in ways that are culturally attuned.

Culture itself is broadly defined here. Culture consists of *the attitudes, habits, norms, beliefs, customs, rituals, styles, and artifacts that express a group's adaptation to its environment—that is, ways that are shared by group members and passed on over time*. All human endeavors, from attitudes toward health and sexuality to everyday communication styles, are affected by culture, as are expectations about relationships, career aspirations, and self-esteem. What is especially important for counseling are these subjective expressions of culture: attitudes, habits, norms, and beliefs. Culture tells clients what to be ashamed of, unaware of, proud of, and what to aspire to. It tells them whom and how to love and whom and how to disdain. Both counselors and clients might benefit from knowing their cultural assumptions and manners.

General Introduction to the Demonstration Videos

(Key points are in bold font.)

Welcome to these demonstrations of **culturally alert counseling**. The upcoming sessions are guided by the assumption that **we are always influenced by our cultures**, whether they are our gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, or disability, to name some examples.

Those and other cultures affect us in at least two ways: **our own worldviews** and **how others** see us and treat us. On the other hand, it is important to remember that clients are also always **individuals**, with their unique temperaments, interests, and personalities. At any one time, **culture** may take center stage, as it does in the sessions that you are about to view. At other times, culture waits in the wings while clients explore their individual emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Even there, however, culture is intertwined with a person's emotions, hopes, and doubts.

The culturally alert counselor's **task** is twofold: to help clients know and appreciate **the impact of culture in their lives** and to help them **act in empowering ways** by challenging unhelpful cultural assumptions and external societal biases. Counselors must be ready to welcome culture into the work, and at times **invite** it.

In the four sessions that you will see here, culture is **foregrounded**, as clients confront **external bias, internalized cultural rules**, and importantly, **cultural strengths** in order to fashion the lives that they might imagine, with the counselor's help.

These demonstrations highlight some, but not all, ways to infuse culture into counseling. Viewers are invited to study these demonstrations and complement them with parallel readings from the book *Culturally Alert Counseling* in order to become more complete and ethical counselors.

May you do the good work of empowering clients so they can live the lives that they have imagined.

Guide to How to Get the Most From Watching the Videos

Complementary Reading

It is best to read material on each specific cultural group topic before, or after, viewing the videos. Each of the four videos in this set is based on material from related chapters in the book *Culturally Alert Counseling: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Those chapters are the following:

- *East and Southeast Asian Americans* by Bryan S.K. Kim and Yong S. Park
- *African Americans* by Kathy M. Evans and Rebecca George
- *Latino/Latina Americans* by Edward A. Delgado-Romero, Nellely Galvan, Melissa R. Hunter, and Vasti Torres
- *Religion and Spirituality* by Karen Eriksen, Shelley A. Jackson, and Chet Weld

What to Look for When Watching the Videos

A. Spoken Introduction to All Videos

After viewing the overall introduction by Garrett McAuliffe, K.C. Dunlap-Joachim, and Ulrisi Green, respond to the following questions:

- Does “culture” refer to only ethnicity and race? What else might be considered cultural? Why would those other groupings also be considered cultures?
- What are two ways that culture affects a person? Name an example for each of those two ways.
- Does culturally alert counseling mean that you can know enough about a person only by knowing her or his cultural group memberships? Why or why not?
- What are two tasks of culturally alert counseling in working with individual clients? Explain and give an example from one of your own cultural group memberships.

- Should the counselor wait for the client to introduce culture-related issues in a counseling session? If not, what might the counselor do to include culture? Give an example of how a counselor can include culture in her or his work.

Some of the answers to these questions will be clearer after you have viewed and reflected on the demonstration videos.

B. Areas to Reflect On

As you view each of these videos, consider the following issues to consider: What are at least two common values shared by many members of the cultural group in the particular video?

II. Work With Asian Clients

(Material partially drawn from “East and Southeast Asian Americans” by Bryan S. K. Kim and Yong S. Park. In G. McAuliffe, Culturally Alert Counseling: A Comprehensive Introduction, Sage Publications, 2008.)

I. Background/Key Considerations

East and Southeast Asians are a varied group, comprising over 25 nationalities, ethnic groups, and religious traditions. Individual Asian clients also vary, of course, by their levels of acculturation to the dominant cultures in which they might live. And, cultural norms are always changing. However, counselors who work with Asian clients can be alert to a number of values that might guide a client’s behavior.

The dominant value that drives many Asian cultures is **collectivism**, that is, commitment to the welfare of the group over that of the individual. Collectivism is expressed in specific ways, some of which are highlighted in this video, including the following:

- **duty to one’s family**
- **conformity** to group norms
- **obedience** to parents and deference to authorities
- maintenance of **interpersonal harmony**, which includes avoidance of confrontation and indirect expression of negative feelings or views
- placing **others’ needs** ahead of one’s own
- **modesty**, including minimizing one’s own achievements

Other values that counselors must be alert to in working with many Asian clients include the following:

- **self-control** of emotions and restraint
- **overcoming emotional distress** by oneself
- educational and career **achievement** as top priorities over personal pleasure

Each of these values is expressed in behavior. For example, negative views might be expressed indirectly, with even “yes” meaning “no” at times to maintain harmony. Silence and pauses are valued in communication. Praise of another might be offered to establish harmony.

II. Points to Consider for Counseling Practice

Given these values, a number of guidelines might be offered for working with some Asian clients. Again, these generalizations must be weighed against any individual client’s acculturation and enculturation. Given those qualifications, counselors should keep in mind the following overall guidelines. Failure to account for an Asian client’s culture could easily result in premature termination and increased distress for the person.

- Take a **solution focused**, rational, problem solving approach, with some meaningful gains seen early in counseling, rather than encouraging emotional expression and deep psychological exploration.
- Show interest in and **knowledge of** the client’s **culture**, and affirm the culture.
- Do **self-disclosure** about previous successes and personal parallels.
- **Include** the place of the **family** in discussion of individual concerns

In the session, these and other strategies are illustrated.

III. Ideas on How to Use the Video “Culturally Alert Counseling: Working With Asian Clients.”

1. **Narrator Overview of Asian Cultural Characteristics.** Before viewing the narrator’s overview of traditional Asian cultural characteristics, the viewer might first write down the cultural characteristics that she or he associates with Asian cultures. Here is space for such a description or list:

My current understanding of important traditional Asian values:

If this is a group viewing, the leader could then ask for those understandings and write them on the board. Upon viewing the opening narrative to this video, the learners might then compare their current understandings.

2. **The Counselor's Pre-Session Comments.** After viewing either (a) the counselor's (K.C.'s) opening description of her aims in the session with Kim and/or (b) the session itself, respond to the following:

- What does K.C. mean by "helping (the client) bridge?"

- o Answer: She means that the client need not give up either culture, but needs a way of seeing herself as bicultural; such a bridge might include help with communication with her parents and her partner, models of other bicultural Asian Americans, and ideas for compromising.

- What is your current opinion on such "bridging," vs. helping a client leave her cultural norms or adhere completely to them?

- What might be the benefit for Kim of the counselor's helping her to maintain her adherence to collectivist values?

- o Answer: Kim might have the benefit of family support and the further benefits of living within strong communities.

- What other choice might the counselor make in terms of working or not working with the collectivist values?

- o Answer: The counselor could (but shouldn't, in our view) encourage Kim to act and think "for herself" in the autonomous way that Western cultures tend to promote.

- What might be the risks and benefits of honoring Kim's desire to be more bicultural?

- o Answer: The risks are that her boyfriend, who is from a more individualistic Western culture, might see the family connections as oppressive. The benefits are that she could experience the best of both of these worlds, with a bit of compromise on all parts.

- Think of a time in which you were in conflict with family preferences over choice of friends, partner, or other persons, or a time in which family disapproved of a religious or

lifestyle choice you were making. How was the conflict handled? What was the result of the situation? Was it resolved satisfactorily?

3. **The Session.** Respond to the following either (1) while viewing the session, pausing the video periodically, or (2) after viewing the whole session.

- What does the counselor do to honor Kim's ethnic culture and to establish trust early in the session?

- o Answer: She checks in on the pronunciation of Kim's middle name.

- What do you hear as the central dilemma that is presented early in the session?

- o Answer: Conflict between her loyalty to her family and to her desire to be with her boyfriend. Other possible conflicts?

- What evidence is there for Kim's strong appreciation of her family?

- o Answer: Kim expresses gratitude, loyalty, and unthinking connection to the family as part of herself.

- What counseling skills does K.C. use early in the session to gather information and establish rapport?

- o Answer: K.C. reflects back to Kim the dilemma. Her body language is kind and caring. She listens well. She lets Kim express her experience.

- What is your opinion of K.C.'s choice of responses early in the session?

- What, in your view, are some alternate choices a counselor could make in working with Kim that might be problematic?

- o Answer: A counselor might push Kim to make an independent decision, with the Western idea of individuation mistakenly applied. Other?

- How does K.C. show cultural knowledge early in the session, based on the focus she chooses?

- o Answer: She focuses on the family and its importance to Kim.

- Are K.C.'s responses early in the session aimed at exploration or solution?

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- Answer: They are aimed at exploration of Kim’s conflict and of what is important to her and what is at stake.

- What is a negative view that Kim has about her ethnic culture?
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- Answer: She is embarrassed by the “old ways,” including the language and communication style of her family. Possibly other negative views.

- K.C. intentionally focuses on positives (strengths) of Kim’s ethnic culture. In what two ways does she do so?
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- Answer: She asks Kim to name strengths of her culture. She also leads her in a guided imagery activity in which Kim generates positive cultural symbols.

- What do you think of the guided imagery activity? Could you try it in a session?
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- K.C. shifts the focus of the session at one point. What shift does she make?
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- Answer: She shifts focus from culture and family to Kim herself as an individual, including her career interests.

- How does K.C. handle possible solutions? Who generates the pros and cons of Kim's dilemma?

- Answer: She lets Kim experience her response to the extreme choices she seems to be facing—giving up her boyfriend or giving up the family. She also lets Kim name the pros and cons.

- What question does K.C. ask to empower Kim as they work toward solutions?

- Answer: K.C. asks how Kim has handled the conflict up to this point.

- Does K.C. make a suggestion on a possible solution? What is it? What is your view of her making this suggestion?

- Answer: K.C. suggests that Kim introduce her boyfriend to the family.

- Is Kim likely to come back to work with K.C.? Why, in your view?

- What does K.C. do toward the end of the session that is consistent with Asian values?

- o Answer: She expresses appreciation for her and Kim's relationship.

IV. The Counselor's Post-Session Comments

- Name some aims and strategies that the counselor took that were especially well-matched with traditional Asian culture.

- o Answer: focusing on problem-solving; not deeply exploring emotions or motivations; including all of the family in the considerations; acknowledging family and gender hierarchy