

Resource Guide to

Culturally Alert Counseling: Working With Latino/Latina Clients

A Training Video for Counselors

Written by Garrett McAuliffe

Based on the video produced by

Garrett J. McAuliffe, Ed.D.
University Professor of Counseling
College of Education
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, VA 23529
gmcaulif@odu.edu

Available through
Sage Publications

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.

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:

- *African Americans* by Kathy M. Evans and Rebecca George
- *East and Southeast Latino/Latina Americans* by Bryan S.K. Kim and Yong S. Park
- *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 Latino/Latina Clients

(Material partially drawn from “Latino/Latina Americans.” In G. McAuliffe, *Culturally Alert Counseling: A Comprehensive Introduction*, Sage Publications, 2008.)

I. Background/Key Considerations

In working with Latino/Latina clients, counselors must be alert to both cultural—and individual—dimensions of a person’s life. However, given the pervasive influence of culture on how clients experience the world, culture must often take center stage in the work. It should be noted that the term *Latino/Latina* covers a wide range of nations and subcultures in the Americas. Therefore, a client of Latino/Latina heritage should not be stereotyped as fitting a rigid set of values and behaviors. Given that proviso, there are nevertheless common elements among Latino/Latina peoples that counselors need to know:

- **familismo**, or a value on both extended and nuclear family over the individual
- **respeto**, which is holding elders and authorities in esteem
- **simpatica**, that is, a desire for non-conflictual, pleasant relationships
- **defined gender roles**, sometimes called **marianismo** and **machismo**, which indicate female self-sacrifice and dedication to family, and male dominance and responsibility to family as a provider

Counselors need to anticipate and appreciate these four value dimensions. Each of these values is seen in the upcoming session. They must also often help clients deal with a clash between these traditional values and those of a dominant, modernist culture in which they also live.

II. Points to Consider for Counseling Practice

Four recommendations can be made for working with traditional Latino/Latina clients. In counseling work, counselors might do the following:

- **focus on the present**, that is, current events and perceptions, as opposed to encouraging extensive exploration of the past or the future

- take a **problem-solving orientation**, rather than probing for psychological discrepancies and motivations
- **include family** in the process, both intentionally introducing it as a topic and bringing in family members
- **acknowledge** the family **hierarchy**, recognizing the father as head of household in traditional families

To these recommendations, two guidelines that may affect the work with clients should be added:

- be open to **addressing racism and prejudice** in clients' lives
- **adapt language** as fully as possible, from having a translator present to asking clients for clarification on expressions they use

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

1. **Narrator Overview of Latino/Latina Cultural Characteristics.** Before viewing the narrator's overview of traditional Latino/Latina cultural characteristics, the viewer might first write down the cultural characteristics that she or he associates with Latino/Latina cultures.

Here is space for such a description or list:

My current understanding of important traditional and contemporary Latino/Latina American 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 (Tammi) opening description of her aims in the session with Arminda and Jose and/or (b) the session itself, respond to the following:

- Name an overall goal or strategy that Tammi employed to work with each client in this session.

- o Answer: attending to Jose in order to establish rapport so that he would "buy in" to the counseling process, and attempting to empower Arminda.

- What might possibly be done to help a couple such as Arminda and Jose discover new roles in the family and between each other?

- o Answer: hear each of their desires, reflect back the cultural expectations, name the conflict, ask for compromises, maintain respect for the cultural traditions, move slowly but boldly suggest possibilities, self-disclose parallel situations

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 Tammi (the counselor) do early in the session to establish rapport? How might those behaviors be particularly appropriate in Latino/Latina culture?

- o Answer: Tammi spends a lot of time in relationship-building by asking the clients what names they prefer to use, spending time in relationship-building (which is important in Latino/Latina cultures) by discussing interests, self-disclosing, naming the ethnic dimension, and inquiring about language preference.

- What is your personal response to Jose's initial stance on counseling and on his assumption that he is the authority in the family?

- What does the counselor do to include both partners in the session?

- o Answer: She intentionally directs attention to each.

- What does the counselor do to show respect for cultural assumptions?

- o Answer: She inquires about their norms and values and asks how they came to know those. She accurately reflects their values on family roles.

- How is the counselor proactive in engaging cultural issues in the session, in contrast to treating the client as a non-cultural being?

- o Answer: She asks about the overall ethnic norms for gender roles; she brings in culture as a basis for their values.

- How does the counselor highlight the conflict while respecting the culture?

- o Answer: She reflects the conflict to both of their satisfaction and shows empathy for both of their dilemmas.

- How does the counselor demonstrate solution-focused counseling strategies?

- o Answer: She helps clients generate past exceptions and successes, which they use to build toward a beginning compromise solution. She asks each of them how a past success worked for both of them.

- How does the counselor use an empowering approach to solution-finding?

- o Answer: She first asks the clients to name a solution based on their mutual desires.

- How does the counselor show patience in helping the clients come up with possible solutions?

- o Answer: She is not daunted by Jose's adamancy that Arminda not work. She pauses to summarize the dilemma. She lets the clients generate ideas.

- How does the client help Jose trust her and the process?

- o Answer: She praises him for his willingness to consider alternatives; she honors his concerns; she starts with small, acceptable steps.

- What is your view on Tammi's overall approach? Is it sexist? Is it culturally sensitive? What, if anything, would you do differently?

4. **The Counselor's Post-Session Comments.**

- Is the work done at this point? If not, what are possible future directions that might need to be taken?
