

Resource Guide to

Culturally Alert Counseling: Working With Conservative Religious 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.

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 Asian 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 Religious Clients

(Material partially drawn from “Spirituality and Religion.” In G. McAuliffe, Culturally Alert Counseling: A Comprehensive Introduction, Sage Publications, 2008.)

I. Background/Key Considerations

Religion is often a confusing topic for counselors. For many years secular counselors avoided the topic, dismissing religion as a “non-psychological” matter. With the emergence of culture as a legitimate topic, religion is seen as a powerful source of human meaning-making. It must be addressed, either implicitly or explicitly, in counseling for many clients. A particular challenge is helping clients for whom religion is central, especially those who are conservative or traditional in their faith.

II. Points to Consider for Counseling Practice

A number of matters are worth noting, as they are seen in the video.

First is that the counselor does not always have to share a client’s faith in order to be helpful. However, the counselor does have to **show respect for that faith** as well as **have some knowledge of that faith tradition**.

Second, you will notice that it is important to **assess the role and importance of the client’s faith**, including both **helpful and harmful** dimensions.

You will also notice that, as in any cross-cultural counseling, religious clients are likely to be uncertain about whether they can **trust** the counselor. You must be prepared to answer questions about whether you share the religious client’s faith.

Finally, you will see the counselor **reinterpreting religious understandings**, using the faith language to make links to clients' experiences. To do so, counselors must know enough of the religious tradition to offer helpful reinterpretations, or they must consult with religious leaders.

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

1. **Narrator Overview of Religious Cultural Characteristics.** Before viewing the narrator's overview of religious issues in the counseling session, the viewer might first write down the cultural characteristics that she or he associates with religious clients. Here is space for such a description or list:

My current reactions to and understandings of religion and religious individuals, especially conservative or traditional religious perspectives:

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 (Tim's) opening description of his aims in the session with Sherry and/or (b) the session itself, respond to the following:

- How did Tim plan to establish trust with Sherry?

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- Answer: by broaching the topic of religion early, by inquiring about any questions or concerns the client might have about religion and counseling, and by sharing his knowledge of her faith tradition

 - What does Tim do to affirm Sherry's religious perspective while challenging her to consider a more helpful view on her concerns?

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- Answer: He emphasizes the strengths and positive dimensions that come with her religion, while inviting her to consider new applications of her religious understandings.

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 Tim (the counselor) do early in the session to establish trust?

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- Answer: Tim asks Sherry if she has any questions. He has a connection to her pastor. He tells her his knowledge of Christianity.

- How is Tim's opening question solution-oriented?

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- Answer: He sets up a positive expectation by asking her about her “hopes” for their work together.

 - Early in the session, Tim emphasizes Sherry’s feelings over her religious interpretations (e.g., that Satan is deceiving her; that a wife must be obedient to her husband at all times). How does he do that?

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- Answer: by reflecting feelings like “confusion,” “hurt,” and “anger”; by asking her to describe the feelings; by accepting her feelings without judgment or dismissal

- How does the counselor incorporate religious views with helpful behaviors?

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- Answer: by referring to alternate, potentially more helpful interpretations of religious teachings; by intentionally including religion in the understanding and solution

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

- Answer: by emphasizing her strengths and positive commitments (to God, to family); by asking her to name a positive view of the future (using the “miracle question” and the video recording imagery)
- How does the counselor use an empowering approach to solution-finding?

- Answer: He lets the client name her desired future; by asking her to name her power to make a positive future happen.
- What is your view of Tim’s overall approach? 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?
- Answer: including the family in the work; using her church and religious resources, e.g., through bibliotherapy; including the pastor in the work
- What longer-range developmental goals might be set for Sherry?

- Answer: to have more trust in her own judgment; to be more “self-authorizing” rather than dependent on others’ views of how she should be