

10 Beliefs and Attitudes

In this chapter, we focus on the diversity of spiritual practices among clients and the importance of understanding how beliefs and values affect individuals' worldviews, psychosocial functioning, and expressions of distress. Additionally, we discuss indigenous helping practices and make recommendations to help you understand all types of interventions in diverse communities. We emphasize bilingualism as a value counselors need to hold in order to best serve a variety of clients.

To highlight one area of these competencies and provide an example, let's look at how a person's beliefs and values may affect his or her psychosocial functioning in the area of a disability. Many models of disability exist that structure the ways in which society may perceive persons with disabilities (PWDs) (e.g., Palombi, 2010). Consider the difference between the moral model of disability (Olkin, 1999) and minority model of disability (Hahn, 1997): The former emphasizes disability as a punishment by a religious force for a wrongdoing by the PWD or his or her family, whereas the latter puts the spotlight on the responsibility of society to remove barriers and make the playing field equitable for PWDs (Palombi, 2010). Those who subscribe to the minority model believe that all members of society, regardless of ability, should have the same opportunities and access in order to succeed in life. Now, imagine you are working with a family as they struggle to obtain resources for a child who was born with Down syndrome. In what ways do you think your approach would differ if you were working with a family who operated from a standpoint of punishment as opposed to deserved equity? When we are knowledgeable about the diverse beliefs and attitudes of our clients, we are better prepared to select effective and culturally appropriate types of assessments and interventions.

Students unfamiliar with the MCCs in this chapter should begin the examination of this competency area by reflecting on how well they understand their own religious and spiritual beliefs. Additionally, they need to think about how they perceive illness and healing practices in their community. Finally, students new to the field of counseling should consider language and the role it plays in building rapport or understanding another person's culture. Advanced students familiar with this competency area should use the following activities to reflect on their own experiences with the role of religion or spirituality in individuals' lives as it applies to mental health. Also, advanced students could research indigenous helping practices that are unfamiliar to them. Finally, these students may use the activities about language in this chapter to renew their commitment to understanding their own communication strengths and limitations.

This chapter focuses on the competency area of Culturally Appropriate Intervention Strategies: Beliefs and Attitudes. According to Arredondo et al. (1996a):

1. Culturally skilled counselors respect clients' religious and/or spiritual beliefs and values, including attributions and taboos, because they affect worldview, psychosocial functioning, and expressions of distress.
2. Culturally skilled counselors respect indigenous helping practices and respect helping networks among communities of color.
3. Culturally skilled counselors value bilingualism and do not view another language as an impediment to counseling (monolingualism may be the culprit). (paras. 17-19)

Activity 1 (low risk): "Where the Soul Goes . . ." As noted in the documentary film *The Split Horn* (2001), when a Hmong person dies, his or her soul must travel back to every place the person lived until it reaches the burial place of its placenta. Only after the soul is properly dressed in the "placental jacket" can it travel on to be reunited with ancestors and to be reincarnated as the soul of a new baby. The Hmong revere their elders and believe that anyone who is not accorded the proper funeral will have a lost and wandering soul.

In 2007 a Hmong family of four drowned in a boating accident on the Mississippi River near Lock and Dam 7 in Minnesota (Behr, 2009). Within a few days, the bodies of the parents and daughter were found. The body of the son was not found, despite an extensive search for weeks, then months, then two years by the local sheriff's department

and local community fishermen. The sheriff's department personnel used every resource to ensure that they respected the cultural values of this Hmong community. Several years later, many Hmong as well as majority-culture people in this Minnesota community continued to grieve the loss of this young boy's soul, whether or not they shared in the religious beliefs of this Hmong family.

Think about your own religious beliefs. How is it for you to know that the Hmong continue to worry about the souls of those whose bodies are not recovered after a death? Write about your thoughts about these beliefs of the Hmong.

Recommended reading: Behr, K. (2009, June 6). Haunted: The search for Joshua Xiong. *La Crosse Tribune* (available at http://lacrosse.tribune.com/news/local/haunted/haunted-the-search-for-joshua-xiong/article_dc304a52-2131-508f-81fd-049fb0210ef0.html).



Journal Entry

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*Relevant CACREP core areas: Social and Cultural Diversity; Human Growth and Development; Helping Relationships

Activity 2 (medium risk): "What Would You Say?" There are many different ways of thinking about death and the process of grieving. One way with which most of us are familiar has to do with how we let go of and say good-bye to someone who has died. The emphasis is on the grieving process and the letting go of the loved one. Another idea that is expressed in some cultural traditions is that we develop new relationships with persons who have died (Corey & Corey, 2010). Klass, Silverman, and Nickman (1996) describe how dead loved ones continue to live on in how we remember them. When we tell stories about loved ones who have died, we keep them alive. White (2007) and Hedtke and Winslade (2004) have developed narrative therapy techniques in which individuals remember conversations they had with their late loved ones. In this process of remembering, they may also continue conversations with their loved ones about current issues or decisions, imagining what their loved ones would say to them about their life celebrations or challenges.

Consider your thoughts about these two different beliefs about death and the grieving process. In what ways have you processed

someone's death in your life? If you have not experienced the loss of a loved one through death in your life, consider how your parents or others you know have processed someone's death. Imagine losing someone close to you and how you might carry on conversations with that person after his or her death. Explore your attitudes and beliefs about those who pass on and how your work with clients who hold beliefs different from yours will be affected by your perspective.



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Activity 3 (high risk): "How I'm Left Behind" Reflecting on your own death is a powerful means to determine your values and beliefs about the meaning of death. Consider the two ways in which the process of bereavement is described in Activity 2 and imagine your impending death as a result of a fatal illness. How would you feel if you knew how your loved ones planned to say good-bye to you? How would you feel if you knew your loved ones planned to have conversations with you long after you had left this earth, imagining what your responses might be. What is your belief about each of these scenarios? What is your attitude toward people who wish to be communicated with after they die?



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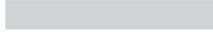
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Activity 4 (low risk): "Nonbeliefs" Consider what it would be like to be atheist or agnostic. Interview someone in your community who self-identifies as atheist or agnostic and find out how his or her life decisions, parenting style, and feelings while dealing with loss and life

crises are influenced by his or her perspective. Create three questions of your own that relate to your value system and “sit with” how it feels to talk about these issues with your interviewee.



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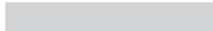
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Activity 5 (medium risk): “Religious Leaders” Read the article recommended below, and then interview a leader in your local or nearby Islamic, Jewish, or Christian community about the counseling practices in his or her community. Pay special attention to the integration of legal and religious considerations into your interviewee’s healing practices. What stands out to you in particular about the ways in which people from various religious groups view personal distress and marital/family discord?

Recommended reading: Somaya, A. (2007). Islam and counseling: Models of practice in Muslim communal life. *Journal of Pastoral Counseling, 42*, 42-55.



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Alternate Activity 5: “Los Barriletes” (“The Kites”) (contributed by Astrid Rios, M.S.) All Saints’ Day, or El Día de Todos los Santos, is celebrated each year in Guatemala on November 1. The creation of kites is one of several activities that Guatemalans carry out during this day to celebrate the lives of loved ones who have died.

Think about how you would make a kite to remember someone in your life. What types of things would you put on it? In what colors

would you design this kite of remembrance? How do you think it would feel to be in a country such as Guatemala on All Saints' Day and see hundreds of kites flying in remembrance of so many loved ones?

Make a kite in honor of someone in your life who has passed on. Create a kite that uses colors, shapes, drawings, materials, size, and so on to represent your loved one.

Materials:

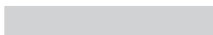
1. Two wooden sticks (the most commonly used is bamboo because it is lightweight), one longer than the other, for the kite's frame
2. Colorful china paper (papel de china) or other lightweight type of paper
3. A ball of strong string
4. Tape or glue

Instructions:

1. Tie the two sticks together tightly with string so that they form a cross; cut a notch in each of the four ends of the sticks.
2. Run a length of string through the notches at the ends of the sticks to form a diamond-shaped frame; the string must be pulled taut.
3. Place the stick-and-string framework on top of the china paper, cut the paper so that it is a bit larger than the framework, and then glue or tape the edges of the paper around the string, so that the string is covered.
4. Cut fringes out of more china paper and glue or tape them all around the edges of the kite.
5. Attach a long and very narrow piece of paper (or a long, thin piece of fabric) to the bottom of the longest stick, to form the tail of the kite.
6. Attach the end of the ball of string to the point on the front of the kite where the sticks cross.



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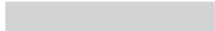
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Activity 6 (high risk): “Cleansing with Sage” Jane Alexander describes the process of “smudging” on her Soulful Living website (<http://www.soulfulliving.com/smudging.htm>). Basically, smudging is a practice used in some cultures to cleanse a physical space, body, and soul with the use of smoke from a stick made of a variety of herbs and plants. Smudging is a ritual developed and used by many shamans in Native American cultures in North, Central, and South America.

In addition to visiting Alexander’s website, search for other research on smudging. Purchase the necessary materials and set aside some time to try this ritual out for yourself. You may want to invite a few others to join you. As you smudge your physical space and body, pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, and attitude about this healing ritual, which is used in many different countries. What do you believe about a ritual such as this one? Do you believe you can cleanse your body and soul with this method? If you had a client who requested to do this type of ritual, what would your attitude be regarding the appropriateness of this type of intervention in a counseling session?



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Activity 7 (low risk): “¿Me Pueden Ayudar?” Find a way to translate the following (using the Internet, a translator, or some other resource). In English, explore ways in which you could help this client if you were working with her in a community center or school. What do you think about undocumented workers from Mexico or from Central and South America who come here to work and send money back to their families? Did you know that for many Latin American countries the main source of income is family members who work in the United States and send money back home? What are your beliefs about undocumented workers?

Caso: María es una cliente de 32 años de edad mexicana que sufre de insomnio porque está preocupada por la salud de su madre. Su madre está muy enferma y vive en México. La cliente vive en Minnesota y está trabajando y tratando de ahorrar dinero suficiente para ir a México para

visitar a su madre. Además, María lucha con sus creencias religiosas, ya que era muy difícil para ella y su familia inmediata encontrar una iglesia en Minnesota, donde se sientan cómodos asistiendo. Ella siente que su fe religiosa se ha reducido debido al estrés y su matrimonio ha comenzado a sufrir también.

Responda las siguientes preguntas basadas en el caso en Inglés.

1. La clienta es chicana o mexicana? _____
2. Cuántos años tiene ella? _____
3. De que sufre ella? _____
4. Está ella preocupada por la salud de su padre? _____

5. Dónde vive su madre? _____
6. Está la clienta trabajando en California? _____

7. Quiere la clienta viajar a México? _____

8. Ha podido ella ahorrar suficiente dinero? _____

9. A quién quiere visitar en México? _____

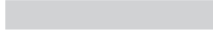
10. Es importante para ella y su familia inmediata asistir a la iglesia? _____
11. Ha sido fácil o difícil para ella y su familia inmediata encontrar una iglesia donde se sientan a gusto? _____
12. Está el estrés afectando su fe? _____
13. Tiene ella problemas en su matrimonio? _____

Escriba tres preguntas u oraciones en Inglés que Ud. le haría o diría a la clienta.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



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Activity 8 (medium risk): “What’s Your Language?” Sciarra (2001) recommends that counselors learn the languages of the groups they most commonly serve. In the case of school counselors, the positive effect of attempting to speak to individuals in their native language contributes to rapport building. If it is not feasible for a counselor to learn a group’s language, Sciarra suggests that he or she learn at least a few words to facilitate introductions early in a relationship, combining this with the use of translators when necessary.

Even obtaining the services of an interpreter is seen as a positive gesture by many non-English-speaking clients and students. Even if you live in an English-speaking community, select ten phrases that are common in another language (greetings, introductions, and the like) and learn to speak them. Practice them with a friend or instructor at your university. Imagine being able to use them when being introduced to a parent of a student or a client in your mental health agency. What is your attitude about having to learn another’s language? What do you think about the statement: “If they are going to live here, they need to learn English”?



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Alternate Activity 8: “Cultivating Sensitivity to Grief and Loss” (contributed by Debbie C. Sturm, Ph.D., and Karla Briseño, Ed.S. Candidate) This activity is designed, first, to help you understand the challenges faced by immigrants during the migration process; second,

to help you understand the choices involved in how immigrants preserve their heritage or acculturate to the dominant culture; and, finally, to foster empathy regarding the experience of loss immigrants face in the process of acculturation.

This activity can be completed in class or elsewhere and will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. If you choose to go a little more deeply in your reflection or engage in a small group discussion, you may wish to allot a little more time. Begin by finding a quiet place to relax and think about the scenario presented below. If you are in classroom, take time to sit quietly and reflect on the scenario before reviewing the questions.

Imagine that Native Americans are reclaiming their ancestral lands here in the United States. Everyone else is ordered to return to the country from which his or her ancestors came. In this scenario, you do not have a choice—you must leave regardless of whether you want to or not. You must leave the United States for another country based on your heritage. If you are unsure of your specific country of origin, you must return to the country that most closely matches your perceived cultural identity. Individuals who cannot make up their minds will be assigned to the United Kingdom. For the sake of this activity, you should also assume you will be subject to xenophobic treatment as an immigrant in your new country, as you will be competing for that nation's resources.

1. In a few words, describe how you feel about having to leave your country, about seeing family members and friends dispersed, and about having to start from zero.
2. To what country will you choose to “return”? Discuss the choice of the United Kingdom as the destination for those who cannot make up their minds: Will this be a good choice for everybody?
3. Given your physical characteristics, what do you think is more likely to happen in your new country: Will you be more accepted and therefore gain some advantages? Or will you be discriminated against and experience new or surprising disadvantages? What would those advantages or disadvantages be?
4. What American values or cultural elements do you hope that your descendants maintain? (Please disregard religion or economic status—focus instead on traditions, family or civic values, and the like.)

5. In the process of acculturation, do you believe you and your descendants will keep your cultural heritage (as identified by your responses to question 4)?
6. Will you encourage your descendants to preserve these values even if preserving them will result in their being subject to discrimination?
7. In the long run, what will be best for you and your descendants: (a) to lose all cultural traits and fully acculturate to the dominant culture, or (b) maintain your cultural heritage despite the disadvantages of “not belonging to the dominant group”?



Journal Entry



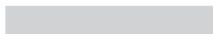
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Activity 9 (high risk): “¿Habla Usted Español?” Volunteer to work in a local community center where languages are taught and translation services are offered. Volunteer to teach a language course, tutor someone, or translate conversations for clients and staff. (Note: If you are unable to do this activity because of the lack of such a facility near you, improvise and create your own activity that will provide you with an experience of working with someone on his or her language skills, even if it is volunteering to teach adults to read.) What are your beliefs about the role of language in counseling? What is your attitude about immigrants who struggle with learning English and ultimately do not to learn it because they have children who translate for them?



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Intervention Strategy Exercises

1. You are doing career counseling with a young man from Somalia. He wants to bring in his parents to talk about his options and direct him in his decisions. What research do you need to do about his culture and decision-making process? How will you integrate religious and legal considerations into your conversations?

2. You are working with an elderly Asian woman who is presenting with depression about the recent loss of a lifelong friend and a current flare-up of chronic arthritis (which she has treated with Ayurvedic medicine for many years). Given the discussion in this chapter about the grieving process, how will you approach working with her on dealing with the loss of her friend? Also, how will you help her assess the need for medical attention for her arthritis while respecting her use of Ayurvedic medicine?

3. You are working with a diverse group of lesbian adolescents and the topic is grieving the death of a loved one. How will you structure interventions during group counseling while respecting the various helping practices of the different group members? How will knowledge of developmental theory help you to plan and implement activities? What do you need to know about sexual orientation?

4. You are conducting research about the types of stress experienced by immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and South America. You want to learn about immigration-related stressors and specific coping skills implemented by these immigrants during and after their journeys. How will you control for the various languages (e.g., Portuguese, Mayan, and a range of Spanish dialects and slang) spoken by the immigrants? How will you do research with ethnically diverse subjects and respect their individual languages?

Discussion Questions

1. This chapter has focused on respecting a client's religious and/or spiritual beliefs and values. In what ways do you believe you should learn about various ethnic religious and spiritual practices in order to be multiculturally competent?

2. After reflecting on the various helping practices discussed in this chapter, how are you more aware of your own preferences about how you are cared for when you need physical or mental health intervention? What self-knowledge in terms of effective types of "helping" provides you with insight about how to be sensitive to the indigenous healing practices of your clients?

3. Select one of the following questions to discuss:

- What are the effects of being monolingual on your work in the mental health field?
- How can being bi- or multilingual provide you with a certain level of multicultural competency? What are some skills you may struggle with in your work with diverse others despite your language skills?