
Counselling and the Northern Native

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Résumé

Il semble que divers problèmes existent entre le counseling et les différents groupes autochtones. Cet article tente de délimiter ces problèmes et suggère certaines directions pour les conseillers d'orientation. Des différences au niveau des attitudes et des valeurs existent entre les autochtones et les non-autochtones. Les recherches empiriques montrent que les clients autochtones préfèrent les conseillers autochtones et partagent les problèmes plus importants avec eux. De plus, le concept de choix de carrière ne fonctionne pas dans les communautés du nord. Il est suggéré que les conseillers d'orientation développent plus de flexibilité et de sensibilité vis-à-vis des problèmes inter-ethniques.

Abstract

It would appear that recurrent problems exist between counsellor and Native clients. This paper attempts to delineate these problems and suggests certain directions to counsellors. Several attitude or value differences, often unrecognized, seem to exist between Natives and Non-Natives. Empirical studies show that Native counsellors are preferred and are given more important material, non-directive approaches are disliked, and the concept of career choice may not hold in northern communities. In conclusion it is suggested that counsellors need to show flexibility and understanding of inter-ethnic issues.

Counselling and psychotherapy appear to be problematic issues for Canadian Native people. Even when competent counsellors are invited into Native communities, they may fail regardless. This is clearly a problem of cross-cultural communication. Perhaps the counsellors are miscommunicating their intentions, and perhaps the Native leaders are miscommunicating their community's helping needs.

An even more awkward situation arises when a helping professional is thrust on a Native group. The intervention is rarely successful and most Native groups have the degree of autonomy to control access to their lands; a problem of authority then compounds the problem of communication.

To be effective, counselling must fit with certain Native values. Counselling programs do not generally meet this challenge, and have produced a considerable amount of hostility among some Natives. Nonetheless, the Province of Ontario Task Force on Educational Needs (1976), ranked counselling services and counselling training programs as the second most important need felt by Native people. It is impossible to generalize across cultures as diverse as the Navajo, Sioux, Shalish, and Cree. Nonetheless, in wide-ranging American studies, six values appear to be common to most Native groups. They are co-operation, concreteness, lack of interference, respect for elders, the tendency to

organize by space not time, and dealing with the land as an animate not inanimate object (Trimble, 1981). These are not necessarily values common among trained counsellors.

The counselling literature supplies some useful insights for programs with Native people in general. One particularly helpful article is by Trimble (1981). He pointed out that counsellors of Natives can easily misunderstand their client's behaviour because of inter-ethnic conflicts. "Many clients for example may not recognize the need for professional assistance when community-based helping networks are perceived as far more beneficial" (p. 14). On the other hand, the counsellor can become so enchanted by the client's unique way of looking at the world that he fails to deal with the actual problem at hand. Counsellors need to focus on expressed values rather than preconceived images or notions about Indians. For example, Littrell and Littrell (1982) found that Native students preferred a counsellor dressed in a fashionable business suit to a counsellor dressed in a choice of five other forms of dress including "casual" and "western." Non-Native students preferred casual and fashionably dressed counsellors. For many Non-Natives the one-to-one counselling relationship is private and confidential. For a Native client, however, a third person can supply a kind of support system, and some extra cultural "punch" (Katz, 1979). Because of these differences, Native people appear to need ample opportunity to adapt the counselling context to their own terms.

SUBJECTIVE STUDIES

Sue and Sue (1977) considered several sources of resistance to counselling. A client may be seen as unco-operative simply because his language is different. Underclass clients expect to receive advice and tangible treatment. When the counsellor attempts exploration of personality, the client may become confused, alienated, and frustrated. The counsellor may perceive the client as hostile and resistant. Counselling may have several counterproductive, culture-bound qualities. First, counsellors expect clients to be open and amenable to psychological counselling. Second, unstructured counselling may cause anxiety and confusion. Third, silence, lack of eye contact, and short responses may be delivered by a client as acts of respect, but perceived by the counsellor as resistance. Fourth, clients may expect to be treated as they would by doctors or priests. Fifth, an emphasis on inductive logic may run contrary to the client's philosophy of life. In all, counselling in particular and American culture in general may be seen by Natives as a practical form of cultural racism.

Philip Katz (1979) is a psychiatrist from Winnipeg with a large Ojibway clientele. He points out several more cultural factors that apply to counselling. Younger clients may have trouble reconciling their here-and-now attitude towards time, with the world of work. A communal

attitude towards property may also reduce the benefits of working. A third difference Katz points out is the way of dealing with anger. The Native client tends to suppress it. Korner (1959) suggests that there is more involved than simple suppression. Nonetheless, the conclusion stands that any counsellor who espouses the free expression of hostility will be seen as very inappropriate and offensive by the Native client.

Katz's views have substantial empirical support. Wintrob and Sindell (1969) used the Adolescent Adjustment Inventory to investigate the psychology of Cree adolescents who were attempting to belong to both traditional and White societies at the same time. They found strong signs of identity conflict in 62% of the 109 students interviewed. Young adolescents cope with this conflict by forming fantasies. But for older students, these attempts tend to break down and the conflict intensifies. This can result in considerable disturbance. Students who passed through this very difficult time successfully, tended to have strong affective ties with their parents when they were young, their parents were generally supportive of their education, and their vocational aspirations were consistent with maintaining close contact with their kin and ultimately contributing to the welfare of the band.

Further advice was given by Lockhard (1981), a Native Indian from Boston. She suggested the additional following items:

1. Self-disclosure is not traditional; the counsellor needs to share his own disclosure and become a better observer.
2. Advice is perceived negatively as interference.
3. Genuineness is perceived positively.
4. Question-asking may be inappropriate.
5. The counsellor is carefully observed and modelled.
6. It is helpful to begin with a structured format.

Some further insight into counselling with Native people is given by Paisano-Suazo (1979). She provides four unusual case examples that demonstrate non-conventional approaches. In the first case, an alcoholic Cheyenne combined pow-wow dancing and therapy. This combination allowed expression of feelings and exploration of feelings of pride instead of inferiority. In second case, a woman rescued an injured nighthawk (a sacred bird to the Cherokee) in her backyard. This was interpreted by the counsellor as a powerful, good omen. The third case involved a psychosomatic Cree. His wife said privately that he had been cursed, so the therapist sent him for a weekly session with a shaman. The client was able to return to work. In the fourth case, an elderly woman was grieving the death of her husband. In a dream, he returned and instructed her to care for her grandchildren.

Any hint of racial prejudice by a Non-Native counsellor must be dealt with. In a study with Manitoba Saulteaux-Ojibway teachers using the prisoner's dilemma paradigm, Corenblum (1980) found that subjects

were more likely to exploit a co-operative but prejudiced opponent, than either a competitive-prejudiced, competitive-non-prejudiced, or a co-operative non-prejudiced one. This effect may explain why Natives have more disdain for an unconsciously racist, "do-gooder" psychologist than for the local, rich, clearly exploitive White store owner.

At its worst, a typical counselling program could be seen as follows: The client comes in for counselling because the social worker said so, to gain something concrete such as child custody. The client is faced with a barrage of questions that represent a challenge to emotional restraint. To cope with this severe threat to outward amiability, he or she can take on an air of indifference, and if a response is inescapable, make a response that will please the counsellor. The obvious solution to this double-bind, however, is simply to never come back again (Popham, 1979). This scenario is supported by Sue and Sue (1977) who found that 50% of Natives dropped out of counselling after the first session (versus 30% for Anglos).

EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Much of the preceding information is basically subjective. A study by LaFramboise and Dixon (1981) investigated perceived trustworthiness and the race of the counsellor in a counselling analogue. Counsellors acted in an untrustworthy way by doing things such as changing the topic when the client showed interest, making racist remarks, and breaking confidentiality. The results indicated that trustworthy counsellors were seen as significantly better helpers. For low trustworthiness, race did not matter, but for high trustworthiness the Native counsellor was seen as more effective than the Non-Native.

In a study by Dauphinais, Dauphinais, and Rowe (1981), taped counselling sessions were played to residential school students. The tapes included both Native and Non-Native counsellors, and three methods, directive, non-directive and a Native culture-based method. The results showed that the Native counsellor was preferred and that non-directive counselling was rated as least effective. The conclusions made from this study are useful. All else being equal, Native counsellors who use some sort of concrete approach are perceived to be the best counsellors for Native clients, yet most counsellor training facilities teach a neo-Rogsonian approach to counselling. The authors conclude that Native people take a dim view of the usual counselling situation.

This conclusion is further supported by a survey conducted by Tsung-Yi, Tardiff, Donetz, and Goresky (1978). They found that in a sample of severely disturbed mental patients, Native Indians tended to be referred by their families much less than other racial groups. In a survey study conducted by Blue (1977) it was also found that Native students generally took a dim view of counselling services. The students tended to use the university counselling services for urban or guidance problems, such

as finances and study skills. They used Native elders, however, for cultural and personal problems such as alcoholism, religion, and mental health. This particular study resulted in the hiring of a Native elder for the counselling service.

This is unsettling research. Non-Native counsellors have difficulty helping even highly motivated clients.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Career counselling provides an intervention that is perceived as valuable to Natives, but suffers in very specific ways from the problems described above.

Northern Native communities such as the James Bay Cree communities tend to be "undermanned," i.e., there are not sufficient people to fill the available jobs. This changes the nature of work in these communities (Heller & Monahan, 1977). There is greater participation, a tendency for each person to fill more than one role (i.e., double-casting), and more use of marginal members. In James Bay Cree communities there are many essential positions that must be filled with an available person, otherwise community functioning is handicapped. Positions such as chief, school commissioner, or even maintenance man, must be filled, whether or not there is a suitable applicant.

Often the person to fill such a position must be removed from another less important post. At other times the position simply remains unfilled (Houghboy, personal communication, March, 1980). Thus, practical training is not the controlling factor in career success. As a result, a Non-Native guidance counsellor may have a grave misunderstanding of career choice based on training and career interest.

Kanungo (1979) pointed out that freedom to select an occupation is only a factor in Western European societies such as Canada and the United States. Thus most cross-cultural studies of job involvement, satisfaction, fulfilment, and above all, career choice, must be considered invalid. For Mistassini Quebec specifically, Pothier (1965) indicated that for practical purposes, the only occupational choices that were available were to become a band counsellor or a trapper. Thus the concept of career choice cannot be considered tenable among Northern Native people. The purpose of any investigation undertaken in this environment is then not to help students make a more appropriate career choice, but to help them conscientiously fit into the place where the community experiences a need.

From this literature it appears that the impact of even a small counselling intervention may be very large because of its effect on manpower. It is crucially important to respect the sensitivities of the subjects. And as is seen from the job-choice information, the situation in a Native community is very different from a Southern city, and many fundamental assumptions are ethnocentric.

Other aspects of Native culture also affect vocational counselling with Native people. In early studies, Hallowell (1955) pointed out that for remotely-located Saulteaux-Ojibway, achievement and self-esteem are closely related. According to Hallowell's Rorschach profiles, Ojibway people gain little from social position, and for men particularly, self-esteem rests mainly on personal power and inner spiritual support. Graves (1973) and Trimble (1969) showed that for the Nez-Percé and Navajo Indians, career success is not related to level of education or training, but to self-esteem. Further evidence was found by Brookes (1979). He showed that whereas for Non-Native students, concept-learning skills were independent of other abilities measured, for Native children concept learning was dependent on communication skills. Thus it would appear that any career development program should have a basic self-development component.

MISTAPEO AND THE CONCEPT OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

Northern Natives (and perhaps others), act from the unconscious or from intuition, but to understand them, the Non-Native professional wants to hear well-organized and complex explanations of behaviour. Understanding this can be aided by considering the "Mistapeo" (literally, *mista-napawo*, *great man*) and relations to the Cree unconscious. Von Franz, (1964), discussed the Jungian interpretation of the Mistapeo.

Those Naskapi who pay attention to their dreams and who try to find their meaning and test their truth can enter into a deeper connection with the Great Man. He favors such people and sends them more and better dreams. Thus the major obligation of an individual Naskapi is to follow the instructions given by his dreams, and then to give permanent form to their contents in art. Lies and dishonesty drive the Great Man away from one's inner realm, whereas generosity and love of one's neighbors and of animals attract him and give him life. (p. 162)

An example of working from the unconscious can be seen in information from a Plains Indian spiritual leader, George Daniels. As far as he and other elders are concerned, it is no contradiction to practice and believe in both the Native religion and Christianity simultaneously (Darou, 1980). This can be extremely difficult for a Non-Native to reconcile. Levi-Strauss (1978) explains the problem as the difference between the Non-Native's linear logic, and the Native's logic of the senses, i.e., the unconscious.

Often this question of the unconscious seems to reflect more a way of communicating than a psychological process. Coleman and McLuhan (1972) in their description of the great photographer E. S. Curtis, gave an example of this: "At the turn of the century, the Indians had lost most of their 'superstitious' (though hardly baseless) fears of having their spirits stolen by the camera's eye" (p. 6).

In summary then because a traditional Cree respects his "inner companion," a counsellor who asks a Cree "Am I doing something that bothers you?", should not necessarily expect a direct answer. In addition, because the Cree must follow his own spirit, the counsellor must be prepared to be ejected unceremoniously and without warning.

CONCLUSION

From the research two major themes appear. First, recurrent problems exist between counsellors and Native persons. Second, there is some preliminary evidence that the psychological structure, emotional make-up, attitudes, beliefs and values of Native persons are quite different from those of Non-Natives. Native people give great credit to communication with the unconscious. They may take a dim view of anger. They may rely strongly on non-verbal communication and scorn Non-Natives who are not skilled at perceiving non-verbals. They have a tendency to organize by space instead of time (and incidentally reap havoc with the "55 minute therapeutic hour"). Northern Natives generally view questioning as interference.

The failure of treatment would seem to be related to the fact that counsellors often fail to take into account cultural differences and as a result may unsettle Natives at a very deep emotional and psychological level. In addition the tests and therapeutic technique themselves, in so far as they fail to take into account the culturally determined psychological makeup of Native People, may be quite inappropriate for revealing meaningful data. Methods of measurement may be so stressful that they mask the characteristics being sought. Therapists failing to recognize the psychological structure of Natives, may act totally out of context by, say, demanding information verbally that is generally given non-verbally. The Native clients, with their superior non-verbal skills, may perceive the Non-Natives' response set, and give answers that most satisfy, because they are fond of the particular Non-Native.

On the basis of the existing data, as limited as it is, successful counselling and psychotherapy would be enhanced by the recognition of several factors:

- With a certain level of ability, a Native therapist or an elder is probably more effective than a Non-Native.
- Lacking a suitable Native, the Non-Native's knowledge of true versus idealized Native culture will increase the likelihood of success.
- Native silence, often perceived as a problem by Non-Natives, needs to be re-interpreted as communicating high stress or respect.
- Native people tend to put aside anger (I avoid Hallowell's interpretation that it is repressed or Katz's interpretation that it is suppressed).
- A demand for self-disclosure as it is conceived in counselling is

resented, yet the Non-Native counsellor often misses even clear non-verbal disclosures.

—It is generally seen as intrusive and inappropriate to ask questions.

In conclusion, the counselling situation is in a poor condition in terms of how it serves Native clients. Much of this is due to transferring counselling services unadapted to a new context, and to the unintentional ethnocentrism of the service providers. Perhaps because of the celebrated lack of time orientation of Native people, the situation is not beyond hope, and can be rectified by an openness to learning and flexibility on the part of counsellors.

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