



## **Innovations in Counseling: Working with Minority Populations- Part 1**

### **Session 7: The Humanness of Minority Clients**

#### **Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Tyler Wilkinson**

##### **Question from Anna Lisa De Lima**

Is self-disclosure more helpful in multicultural settings or can it be more harmful to certain cultures?

##### **Answer from Presenter**

It depends on the type and timing of self-disclosure. I think self-disclosure can occur in different ways: i.e., disclosure about the counseling process, disclosure about feelings in the here-and-now, disclosure about the self of the counselor. All of these have a time and place in counseling, which would vary based upon the individual with whom I am working.

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##### **Question from Courtney Castillo**

What is your theory on the application of logo therapy in a humanistic perspective?

##### **Answer from Presenter**

I must admit I do not know enough about logo therapy; however, I believe it is rooted in the existential idea of seeking out meaning. From what I know, I can see this paradigm can be utilized in a way that promotes the whole of the person and works within the therapeutic relationship. How clients make sense of the world in which they live is a rich source of information when deepening the relationship.

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##### **Questions from Doris Carroll**

1. How do you balance the humanistic emphasis with the increase in neuroscience? I see the latter as the 5th influence in counseling and humanistic counseling as a lesser influence.

2. Where does mindfulness fall on the humanism continuum?

3. Does humanism assume a Euro-centric emphasis? Most of these theorists and philosophies are from Euro-centric background. It does not embrace a collectivistic influence. How do we reconcile its individualistic orientation in humanism?

##### **Answer from Presenter**

1. I would like to think that neuroscience can coexist in the counseling realm. I may disagree as to what you mean by lesser influence, though I am not sure what is intended by that statement. I do think we are seeing more discussion and research on neuroscience and I can definitely see the usefulness of this understanding. I think it may lead to discussion then how does this play out or translate to the work of the counselor. For me, neuroscience can be useful in expanding the concept of holism.

2. I think mindfulness is a great way in which one can work towards greater self-awareness. I think counselors can only enhance their work by being more self-aware. Moreover, mindfulness with clients can help them



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become more focused on their experiences leading to further dialogue related to their phenomenological experiences.

3. Humanism is rooted in many different philosophical paradigms. Some of the concepts of humanism which embrace the idea of viewing individuals holistically has been shown to exist across a variety of cultures. In my webinar I was trying to highlight recent literature that seeks to incorporate concepts from the multiculturalism movement with the concept of the “whole” of the person. I think initially the idea was to think of the individual as holistically (i.e. thoughts, feelings, and behaviors) rather than a single behavior or unconscious desire. With the emergence of multiculturalism, we begin to focus on the importance of one’s cultural and historical background as being influential in the person’s way of being. I think our understanding of holism can broaden to understand how the individual exists with a complex ecological system (culture, family system, neighborhood, etc.).

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### **Question from Gladys Hayes-Whitfield**

Isn't one of the main challenges of counseling minorities, to reduce the felt distance between the counselor and client? Technology is good but adds distance to what may already be difficult?

### **Answer from Presenter**

I think one of the main goals of counseling is to work towards a strong therapeutic relationship with all clients. I am reading this question to understand that reducing distance is related to increasing trust, which I believe comes within a safe therapeutic relationship. I often use the term “interpersonal safety” when I think about this concept.

In response to the second part of the question, I do not think I agree with the assumption that technology leads to distance; that is, interpersonal distance. I would want to know more by what is meant by “technology” and how it is being utilized in the counseling context in which you are referring. Though technology may create physical distance, for some individuals I think felt interpersonal closeness can be created through the use of technology. The physical distance may create enough safety to begin risking interpersonal connection, especially if some feels as though he or she is in the minority.

This also begins to lead me to think about many interesting, philosophical questions as it relates to how we can know someone. How can we keep an ongoing meta-dialogue in the counseling relationship related to each member’s felt sense of connecting? How do we work within felt discrepancies in relational distance between counselor and client?

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### **Question from Jane A Joerin**

Humanism has a negative reaction with Christians. I do not speak the word, humanism but rather use the principles of self-determination and client centered, etc. No question, just a comment that humanism is a loaded statement for those in the faith communities and one needs to take care when working with Christian clients.

### **Answer from Presenter**



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I am not in a position to speak on faith communities. However, I think you bring up another point as to how counselors address their theoretical approach with clients. I rarely use the word humanism (or phenomenological, existential, post-modern, etc.) with my clients. I find using my \$0.25 words just creates confusion and places me in an unnecessary relational power differential. I try to use language from the get go that will work towards building the trust in our relationship. Additionally, every client brings with them prior experiences, beliefs, biases, and preferences that create a plethora of opportunities for the client and counselor to dialogue as to make sure the relationship is moving towards greater understanding.

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### **Question from Jillian Newkirk**

How do you put clients at ease who think of Humanism as being against their belief system when you say your theoretical orientation is Humanistic Counseling?

### **Answer from Presenter**

As I stated above, I rarely describe my orientation to clients as “humanistic counseling”. I usually talk about approach in a more descriptive way, trying my best to immediately work towards establishing an egalitarian relationship. I have found the philosophical sounding words can keep clients at an initial distance.

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### **Question from Kimberly Lawrence**

Any suggestions for staff training

### **Answer from Presenter**

Staff training on humanism? I will assume yes to my question. If you genuinely believe in the usefulness of humanistic principles, I would not hesitate in sharing them. I am not sure what role you play with the staff but I think there always exist a need for more education and training on humanistic principles. I am not sure if this is what you are asking but maybe offering a workshop, etc. on the topic.

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### **Questions from Lauren D**

What are your thoughts on using creative & expressive art therapies with at-risk or underserved populations such as juvenile delinquents, at-risk youth, inmates, those experiencing homelessness, etc.

### **Answer from Presenter**

I think creativity is a wonderful tool. Admittedly one that I can continue to utilize better myself. I think all individuals have untapped creative potential that is left unrealized. Creativity is something that exists in all individuals. I have found that introducing creativity approaches can sometimes create suspicion for some clients because of expectations of counseling is “just talking”. I have found by spending time setting up and sharing my intentions as to what I am doing, creative approaches have been accepted with greater success. I never cease to be surprised by what comes out of creative approaches, like a drawing for example.

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### **Question from Linda Stein**



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While I agree with the context of anyone feeling in the minority in the counseling room, and the importance of respecting an individual's worldview, I fear that this idea that "anyone can feel like a minority" in the social justice realm devalues the systemic and cultural racism, oppression, etc. that is a real force in our country. Institutional oppression is not just a subjective experience of people in "minority" populations. Do you think this philosophy can be off putting to people who have suffered systemic or institutional racism/oppression?

## Answer from Presenter

I agree with what are you saying. In fact, I have been thinking much about this point building up to the webinar and since the webinar. My definition of "minority" yesterday was one I intended to be used to conceptualize the way in which we work with our clients. I do not think it is in any way sufficient to be used in a socio-political context. I also do not intend to imply that because two people may feel as though they are in a minority that they have had equally oppressive experiences. I think this broader clinical definition should move counselor to more social action to address the institutional oppression that exists. I am a proponent of incorporating values from feminist counseling theories to emphasize the social justice piece. I use the broader definition because in session I am working with an individual's experience and a different definition may be useful when looking at marginalization that occurs at a cultural or institutional level. Happy to dialogue more about this as I continue to ponder on the idea.

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## Question from Yolanda Wilson

I've found that patients that are bi-racial find it harder to open up when in a group setting when in a group of those not of a minority group. How can I encourage the patient to open up without feeling they are being individualized or forced to speak?

## Answer from Presenter

I think the hesitancy to speak is in fact saying something about that individual. I am unclear if its difficulty opening up in general or on specific topics. I find that sometimes getting individuals to talk about the fear of talking can be helpful in moving towards discussing the topic.

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## Question from Stacy Sheffler

What is the best approach to utilize humanistic approaches with minority clients that see you as the 'one person' therapy?

## Answer from Presenter

I am understanding this to mean, how a counselor can utilize humanistic approaches when a client is desiring the counselor to be directive-tell them what to do. If this is the case, I always place the emphasis on the relationship. This seems to me to be one of those questions where the appropriate answer is, "it depends". Though that answer may be unsatisfying, if I am focused on the relationship and the whole of the individual I can move to responding in ways that are most appropriate for what that individual needs in our session.

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## Question from Teresa Byars

Can you give an example of how to use the humanistic approach when dealing with an angry teenager who comes from a low socio economic family and violence is part of their daily life?



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## Answer from Presenter

As with all of these questions, I am reading them through my own lens and my own experiences (personally and professionally). One of the most difficult aspects of any counseling relationship is running up against systemic struggles that are difficult, if not impossible, to change. First, with any client that is potentially at risk, I make sure safety is addressed-especially if there exists a potential for violence or neglect. After that, I think providing teenagers an outlet to be angry and to be heard is very empowering. Most individuals, especially teenagers, are often shut-down or minimized when expressing emotions. A counselor's ability to respond with empathy and genuineness potentially creates a relationship where the teenager can feel accepted for being angry and coming from a low SES-accepted as a whole person. I also hear the potential for interesting existential concerns. i.e. "I am 15 why is this the hand I was dealt?" "Why do I have to be subjected to these hardships?". Teenagers can be great clients to engage in existentially oriented discussions.

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