



Innovations in Counseling: Working with Minority Populations- Part 5
Session 3: Bridging the Cultural Gap Between Korean Immigrant Parents and Their
1.5 and 2.0 Korean American Children

Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Josephine Kim

Question from Allen Vosburg

What is an accepted manner to help the Korean parent to understand the child's desire to be accepted in a new culture?

Answer from Presenter

I find that presenting theories and research about the topic helps to normalize acculturation for parents. They begin to recognize it is not something that is unique only to their child but a process that all immigrant children undergo when trying to fit into a host culture. This recognition helps parents to understand that their child is not acting out a personal attack against them by countering traditionally-held cultural norms. It's also extremely useful to create opportunities for parents and children to hear from bicultural and bilingual Korean Americans who have come out on the other side as well-adjusted people.

Question from Maura McCullough

Do you feel that there are differences with minority myth when considering gender?

Answer from Presenter

Gender influences are pervasive worldwide, and while the model minority myth holds all Asians to the stereotype that they are hard-working, successful, and studious, I believe there are distinct gender differences in general stereotypes held about Asian women and men. Asian women are expected to be subservient and quiet, yet exotic, hypersexual, and a "Dragon Lady." Asian men are often seen as asexual, nerdy, passive, and unathletic, yet skilled at martial arts.

Question from Allen Vosburg

How can a counselor get a Korean child to be better able to successfully become inclusive when the parent(s) are holding that process back?

Answer from Presenter

Being inclusive means to hear and allow all voices to be heard, and I think conversation is key. Korea is a small peninsula that is surrounded by greater powers, and it was poverty-stricken and war-ridden for a large part of its history. It suffered catastrophically from 33 years of colonization, where Koreans were brutalized, enslaved, and dehumanized. The Korean language was eradicated, and Koreans were not considered fully human. Korean narratives from that era closely resemble that of the Jews and African Americans. Of course, even after



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independence was found, the aftermath of war left the nation in tattered ruins. I mention this historical piece, because it was necessary for Koreans at one time to say, “If you’re not one of us, we don’t trust you, and we don’t want anything to do with you.” It was for self-preservation and self-protection. Most Koreans will tell you that Koreans can be, by far, one of the most discriminatory people groups around, and I, myself, didn’t understand the healthy strivings beneath the prejudice until I began to study Korean history. Of course, the context has changed, and what may have been healthy and necessary at one point in time is certainly not acceptable today under different contexts. However, understanding Korea’s historical context will help to frame conversations around inclusion.

Question from Claudia Reiche

How does a Korean end up in counseling if it's not ok to ask for help?

Answer from Presenter

I should clarify that “help” often means “professional help.” What we find is that they wait till symptoms worsen, and if things don’t improve, they may seek help from family, clergy, or a community leader. By the time they are forced to seek professional help, symptoms have progressed to full disorders, and it takes more effort, energy, and time to treat. Counseling and the idea of sitting down and talking out an intimate problem with a stranger is a Western concept; as such, education on what counseling is and what the process entails helps to influence help-seeking behaviors. It’s also a good strategy to train and educate Korean community leaders who serve as gatekeepers, because they are often the first line of defense. An ethnically-matched Korean-American, bilingual counselor is desirable, and when I searched in 2002, I found at least one counselor of Korean descent in all 50 states and D.C. I’m hopeful that numbers have increased since.

Question from Claudia Reiche

In the Korean culture, is physical abuse common when raising children?

Answer from Presenter

Historically, corporal punishment was employed in child-raising; however, this is changing with younger generations of parents (where we see more indulgence and coddling). As with other populations, in homes where domestic violence or physical abuse takes place, it is common to find higher levels of financial, emotional, and relational stress and trauma, coupled with alcohol consumption/abuse. Intergenerational conflicts also play a role. From my experience, physical abuse is more common with parents who lack parenting skills and emotional regulation, which is why educating parents about appropriate discipline, communication, anger management, and problem-solving is imperative.



Question from Jehanzeb Dar

Do you find limitations in the individualism/West and collectivism/East framework? I have read critiques of the individualism/collectivism binary where authors have argued that not everyone can neatly fit into these categories, and that sometimes this can carry the negative connotation that people don't have any agency.

Answer from Presenter

Certainly! There are limitations to any dichotomy, and what I shared was cultural norms in their simplest form (which carries limitations and can seem reductionistic). I agree that not everyone fits neatly into a binary, and everyone's subscription to any given cultural norm or value varies significantly, which is why we always need to come back to counseling's emphasis on personal relationships. It's all an assumption until we "check it out" with our clients. Having said that, there is research that posits how it takes at least three generations for a cultural group to shift in cultural values, so while there are limitations, I personally think the binary provides baseline knowledge (of course, with the caveat that we understand these are very broad strokes). As for the lack of agency – I believe when misused, collectivism can be a system's disallowance of individual agency; however, Korean cultural norms and values stem from the fundamental roots of order, harmony, and the cyclical nature of care-taking of others ("old takes care of young; young takes care of old"). The original intent of collectivism was to enhance these roots rather than deprive one of agency.

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