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# Healing Layers of Trauma: Culturally Responsive Counseling with Asian American Clients

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HEALING LAYERS OF  
TRAUMA: CULTURALLY  
RESPONSIVE  
COUNSELING WITH  
ASIAN AMERICAN  
CLIENTS.

Presenters:

Yun Shi

Atsuko Seto

Sharon Stanley



# Learning Objectives

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Objective 1: To understand the wide range of traumatic experiences that affect the Asian American population and implications for counseling practice.

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Objective 2: To articulate the foundation for establishing a therapeutic relationship with clients of Asian descent.

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Objective 3: To be able to apply 3-5 trauma-informed and culturally responsive counseling strategies for facilitating the growth and healing of Asian American clients.

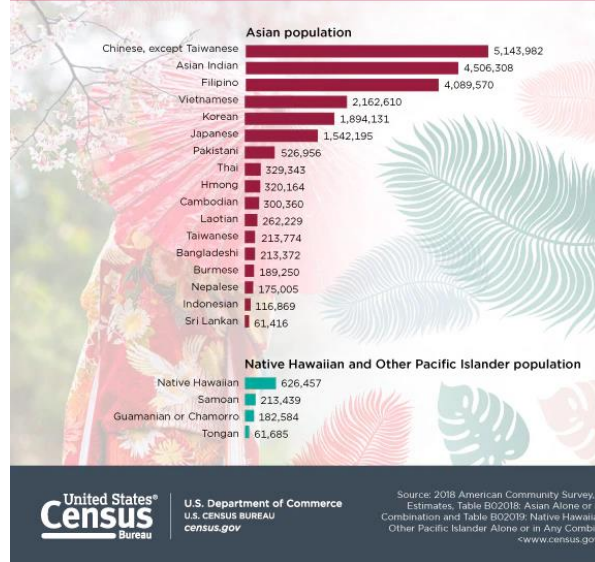


# Dismantling myths about Asian Americans

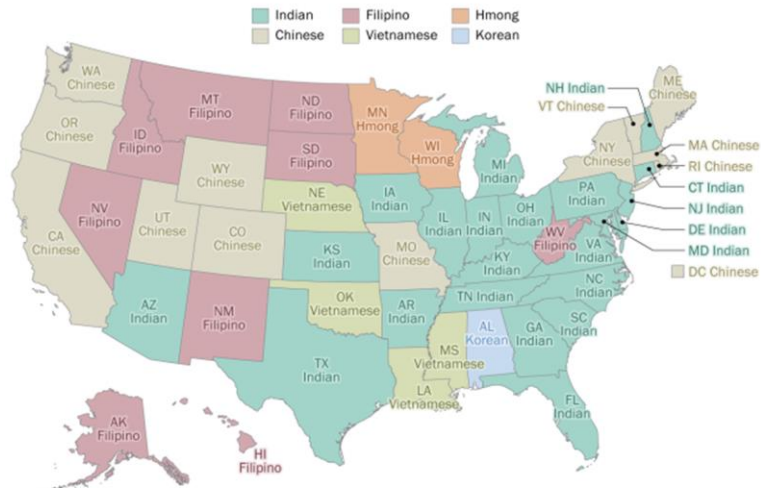
AAPIs are a monolithic group



## Asian and Pacific Islander Population in the United States



### Largest Asian origin groups by state, 2019



Note: Figures for all origin groups include mixed-race and mixed-group populations, regardless of Hispanic origin. "Chinese" includes those identifying as Taiwanese.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2017-2019 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



# What is Trauma?

“Individual trauma results from an **event**, series of events, or set of circumstances that is **experienced** by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse **effects** on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”

(SAMHSA, 2014, p.7)

## Integration or Survival mode

“For real change to take place, the body needs to learn that the danger has passed and to live in the reality of the present.”



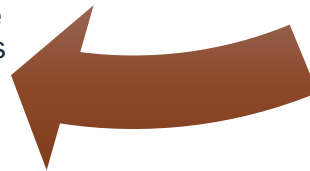
## Trauma

“Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning.”



## Brain response

“Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life.”



## Support system

“The imprint of trauma left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present.”





# Culturally-Based Trauma

Trauma from home countries

Trauma as immigrants

- Migratory loss (Casado et al., 2010)
- Diversity among immigrants (e.g. undocumented persons, refugees) (Howell, 2020; Kim & Yellow Horse, 2018)
- Acculturative stress (Lueck & Wilson, 2009)





# Culturally-Based Trauma

## Racism:

- *Xenophobia & Sinophobia* (Litman, 2020)
- Racial trauma as a “Disenfranchised grief” (Doka, 1989 as cited in Collins, 2022, p.13)

## Repeated experience of microaggressions (Sue, 2010)

- “Uniquely Asian”– Myth Model minority, Perpetual foreigners, Ascribe intelligence
- As a result of cultural gender stereotyping/objectification in the United States

# What Does Trauma Look Like in Clients?

Depression

Anxiety

Eating disorder

PTSD

Violence in neighborhoods, failure of family structure, children's behavior

Psychosomatic symptoms/physical complaints (Jones-Smith, 2019)





# Establishing a Therapeutic Relationship with Asian clients

## An Enactment

While watching the skits, please think about the following questions:

- What are the counselor's and client's assumptions about counseling in each skit?
- What might the counselor and client be experiencing during the interactions?
- What are the unspoken messages between the counselor and client in each skit?



# Establishing a Working Alliance: Barriers and Challenges

Coming from the counselor:

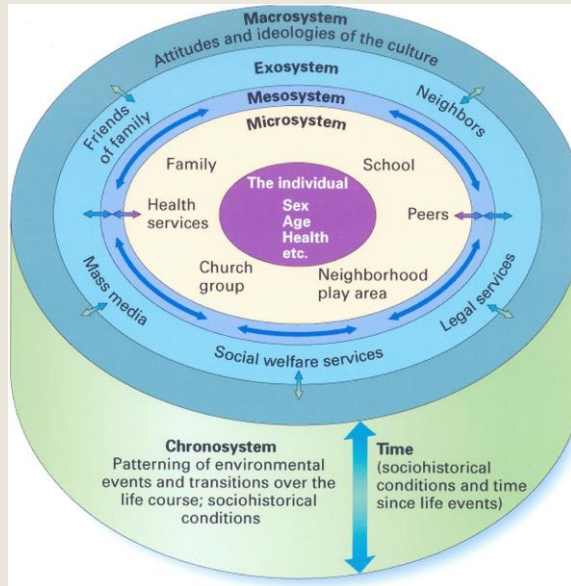
- Assumptions and stereotypes
- Lack of knowledge, skills, or sense of self-efficacy

From the client:

- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Behavioral
- Linguistic
- Interpersonal



# Establishing a Working Alliance: Knowing the Context



Mind the context

AND

Focus on the individual

- Intersectionality of multiple identities (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, SES, Different ability status, age/generation, religion/spirituality, FOR, Immigration history and status, regionality)
- Trauma History
- The client' meaning making and narratives

# Culturally Responsive Interventions

- Know your client
- *“Sell” counseling*
- Provide a container
- Addressing “the elephant in the room” and other safety issues
- Instill hope
- Offer support
- Active engagement
- Therapeutic self-disclosure

*(Duan, 2019)*





# Culturally Responsive Interventions

Are you listening?

- Culturally specific expressions of mental health needs
- Focus on meaning rather than words
- Empathy in cross-cultural encounters

Speaking the client's language

- Therapy-speak vs the client's preferred expressions



# Culturally Responsive Interventions

- Incorporating families in treatment
- Therapeutic use of the hierarchical structure
- Being cautious about indirect communication
- Accepting overlapping social circles with clients
- Skill integration
- Internal focus
- Identifying commonality
- Employing accommodative approaches

*(Kim-Goh, ; Wu et al., 2016)*



# Culturally Responsive Interventions

## Build safety

- Have an open dialogue about “the elephant in the room”
- What does the client need to feel safe
- Incorporating trauma-informed care in the working relationship  
(SAMHSA, 2014, p.10)





# Counseling Strategies on Trauma

- Breaking silence of trauma at individual, familial, and community levels
- Challenging vs. normalizing cultural norms and beliefs

(Kim-Prieto et al., 2018)

# Counseling Strategies on Trauma

- Body Based
  - Bamboo Sway
  - Progressive muscle relaxation
  - Hug yourself
- Grounding
  - Calm space
    - *Adding Breathing Shift technique*
    - *Adding Bilateral stimulation (Getting past your past –F. Shapiro)*
  - 5,4,3,2,1
- Out of session recommendations:
  - Yoga, qigong, acupuncture, etc. (ver der Kolk, 2015)





# Multicultural & Ethical Considerations

- Continuous learning about:
  - *Counselor's culture*
  - *Client's culture*
  - *Contexts*
- How these two cultures intersect in counseling
- Be aware of society's tendency to perceive AAPI as a homogeneous group
- Be mindful of differences and uniqueness among AAPI population (avoid overgeneralization)
- Be able to develop a culturally responsive treatment for each client by considering the client's: a) understanding of presenting concerns within their culture, b) cultural values, c) preferred indigenous healing methods, and d) individual and group strengths

(Jones-Smith, 2019)

- Awareness of One's Vicarious PTSD/Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)
- Engage in Self-Care

(Wicks, 2008)

# Thank You!

Questions? Comments?

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