Culture and the Treatment of Abnormal Behavior

Chapter 12

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- Treatment of Abnormal Behavior across Diverse Cultures in the United States
- Treatment Issues
- Culturally Competent Services
- Indigenous Healing
- An Alternative Approach to Treatment
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CULTURE AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

Traditional Psychotherapy
- Freud's psychoanalytic model: through individual therapy sessions, therapists encourage patients to explore their memories and unconscious thoughts
- Roger's client-centered approach to psychotherapy: emphasized client's self-propelled growth
- Traditional psychotherapy stems from and is bound by a uniquely Western cultural perspective

Contemporary Psychotherapy
- Cognitive therapy: focused on examining rationality or validity of one's beliefs
- Cognitive-behavioral therapies: emphasize development of strategies for teaching cognitive skills
- Psychotherapy is a distinctively Western approach

Cultural Limitations of Psychotherapy
- Approaches to treatment are bound to cultural norms, values, and beliefs
  - Traditional and contemporary psychotherapy focuses on the individual
  - Other cultures might find this focus on self uncomfortable and believe dwelling on unpleasant thoughts should be avoided
Psychotherapy in Cultures Outside the United States

- Psychotherapy has been exported to other parts of the world; incorporated essential elements of their culture to make psychotherapy useful
  - ex) In Malaysia, religion incorporated into psychotherapy
  - ex) In China, Taoists and Confucian principles incorporated into psychotherapy

Summary

- The usefulness of treating with psychotherapy individuals who are not from the West has not yet been well established
- Need to evaluate efficacy of treatments

TREATMENT OF ABNORMAL BEHAVIOR ACROSS DIVERSE CULTURES IN THE UNITED STATES

Psychotherapy with Diverse Cultures in the United States

- Only few studies examining effectiveness of psychotherapy for people of diverse cultural backgrounds
- Those studies report conflicting results; therefore premature to arrive at definitive conclusion
- Researchers and practitioners advocate for infusion of cultural elements for successful treatment

Seeking Treatment

- Asian American and Native American adults and adolescents report lower rates of utilization of mental health services, higher dropout rates, and poorer treatment outcomes than European Americans and African Americans
- Utilization of ethnic-specific mental health services leads to better outcomes
Barriers to Seeking Treatment

- Reasons for underutilization of mental health services
  - shame, loss of face, active avoidance of morbid thoughts, attributions of causes of mental illness to biological factors, and fear of a system not set up to deal well with cultural differences (for Asian Americans)
  - Individuals encouraged to rely on own willpower to confront problems (for African Americans)
  - Cultural belief that sickness comes from disharmony with self, community, and nature (for Native Americans)
  - Cause of mental disturbances attributed to evil spirits (for Latinos)
  - Mistrust and stigma (for all ethnic groups)

TREATMENT ISSUES

- Issues to consider when treating ethnic minorities
  - Understanding culturally different ways of thinking about illness and expressing thoughts about illness
  - Correct interpretation of nonverbal communication
  - Taking into account how cultures vary on importance of hierarchy in interpersonal relationships
  - Treatment expectations
  - Recognizing role of extended families in many cultures

CULTURALLY COMPETENT SERVICES

- Treatment methods should be modified to improve their fit with the worldviews and experiences of culturally diverse clients
- Acculturation status and ethnic identity may be important determinants of client response to treatment (more than simple ethnic similarity)
- Clinicians sensitive to client's cultural background and who take the time and effort to understand the client within his/her cultural context is beneficial
According to Sue and Sue, a culturally sensitive therapist will have acquired:

1. Knowledge of diverse culture and lifestyles
2. Skill and comfort in using innovative treatment methods
3. Actual experience working with culturally diverse clients

Therapist should also be aware of his/her own cultural background and its influences on definitions and perceptions of abnormal behavior.

Indigenous healing encompasses therapeutic beliefs and practices that are rooted within a given culture.

Many indigenous treatments are rooted in religion and spirituality; they rely heavily on family and community networks.

Many countries merge aspects of traditional psychotherapy with culture-specific methods and beliefs to produce unique systems of healing.

Examples of Blending Traditional Western-Based Treatment Approaches with Indigenous Healing Practices

- Example of Hmong refugee
  - Mental health workers were sensitive to the client's cultural background and his beliefs about origins of his distress
  - Combined Western and non-Western healing methods indigenous to Hmong culture

Culture-specific systems of treatment all share the characteristic of mobilizing healing forces within the client, but cultures differ in the exact ways in which the mobilization of healing forces occur.

 AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO TREATMENT
Community psychologists analyze mental health at the community level.

Community-based treatments may especially relevant for helping immigrants, refugees, and those from developing countries.

All accredited clinical programs of clinical training in the US mandated to incorporate culture and diversity in their training programs.

Future research needs to explore the efficacy of different treatment approaches that address both etic and emic concerns, blending traditional and culture-specific methods in a comprehensive fashion.