

Latinas/Latinos in Counseling: A Cultural, Strengths-Based Approach

A review of the video

Counseling Latina/Latino Clients

with Patricia Arredondo

Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2005. American Psychological Association Psychotherapy Videotape Series V. Item no. 4310617. \$99.95

Reviewed by

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Explaining and teaching the subtleties of effective counseling and psychotherapy techniques can be a challenge. An even greater challenge can be capturing and conveying the nuances of how counseling an ethnic minority client is indeed different from working with a nonethnic minority client. In this multicultural counseling video, Arredondo masterfully conquers both challenges by emphasizing the fundamentals of counseling as well as skillfully communicating what is at the heart of counseling Latina/Latino clients. Arredondo is a well-known name in the field of ethnic minority psychology and counseling: a widely published author and scholar and a national leader who has received many awards and has been recognized by the American Counseling Association as a “Living Legend” for her contributions to diversity issues, particularly those pertaining to Latina/Latino issues. This video is a must for psychologists’ and counselors’ “toolbox” because of its practical and thoughtful approach. Educators and practitioners will be pleased to have the videotape’s images and information for their repertoire of teaching and practice-based tools.

The format of the video is sensible and easy to follow. Approximately two hours in length, the video is structured in four parts: an interview of Arredondo by host Jon Carlson, an actual counseling session featuring Arredondo and a Latina client, a general analysis of the session guided by Carlson, and a review in discussion format of select issues of the session. The video begins in an interview format wherein Carlson asks Arredondo general questions about working with Latina/Latino clients. Arredondo also answers questions about the elements that guide her own strengths-based counseling approach. The video moves to an actual session, in which Arredondo meets a 39-year-old Latina client for the first time. A time counter is visible at the bottom of the screen for the viewer to follow during the 45-min session. Whole-image views of the client and counselor together are shown as well as split-image screen views in which the client and counselor are presented side-by-side. After the session, Arredondo and Carlson discuss the session in broad strokes and then move to deeper analysis by discussing specific issues while reviewing select segments of the session.

Several American psychology and counseling organizations dedicated to ethnic/racial minority issues, including the American Psychological Association’s Division 45 (Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues) and the National Latino Psychological Association, are approaching or have celebrated their silver anniversaries. Such groups have logged more than 20 years of service to research and practice. The scientific literature that references consideration of ethnic and racial issues goes back at least this far, thanks in part to many of the individuals who helped establish and maintain these multicultural organizations. In 1981, the field of multicultural counseling saw one of the first organized compendia of

guidelines for working with ethnic and racial minority clients—the classic *Counseling the Culturally Different: Theory and Practice* by Derald Wing Sue and David Sue. Now in its third edition, it is recognized for organizing and integrating key concepts regarding multicultural counseling. Although many took issue with Sue and Sue's claim that traditional approaches to therapy with minority clients can actually cause harm, few now doubt that counselor knowledge about a client's cultural background can enhance the client's counseling experience. In her videotape, Arredondo echoes this view and convincingly makes the point that a central element to working effectively with Latina/Latino clients is not only to get to know the individual client but to go beyond the individual to consider the cultural context. She emphasizes that culture influences an individual's thinking and behavior and that consideration of the client's ancestral roots and related historical events is important. In the case of Latinas/Latinos, she acknowledges the variations among the ethnic groups, such as Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans (the three largest groups in the United States); however, she reminds the viewers that the commonalities among Latinas/Latinos include the Spanish language, values, religion, and spirituality. Beyond these aspects, Arredondo explains that knowing the individual's familial, social, and environmental contexts is also important. She promotes a multicultural orientation to counseling as one that includes an understanding of the greater context of the individual for matters such as political issues, bilingualism, and immigration status.

Arredondo maintains that the key to successful counseling with Latina/Latino clients is for the counselor to be adaptive and flexible regarding the application of particular counseling models. She describes how she is personally guided by a psychohistorical approach to counseling, which she explains is based on Erik Erikson's (e.g., 1975) model of psychotherapy. By having the client chronicle events and changes in his or her life, Arredondo elicits how the client perceives goals and conflicts in a developmental process of therapy in which she seeks to learn about individuals "in their own words."

Counseling and therapy approaches invariably emphasize the cornerstone role of the client-counselor relationship. Arredondo argues that the relationship between the counselor and the client takes on added importance in work with Latina/Latino clients, and, therefore, rapport building is essential. She details that getting along with others and valuing relationships is a key Latina/Latino cultural value referred to in counseling as *personalismo*, which involves listening to others, having a genuine interest in getting to know others, and demonstrating good social skills. Such sharing can take the form of humor and select self-disclosure on behalf of the counselor as Arredondo authentically shares relevant aspects of her experience in this session with the client.

The core of the presentation lies in the fourth section of the videotape, in which Arredondo and Carlson explore many meaningful concepts of Latina/Latino culture as related to Arredondo's counseling session with "Martha." Arredondo's caring and respectful style with the client gently illuminates for the client how her choices and behaviors interface with her family's cultural values. Arredondo's discussion with Carlson helps the viewer understand the implications of breaking cultural values and the emotional impact on the client. For example, Martha's decision to pursue a college education instead of early marriage and motherhood and her choice to live with her boyfriend but not yet marry him are issues raised by Martha in the session in the context of wanting to effect changes in her life. In discussion with Carlson, Arredondo examines how the individual and therefore, by extension, the family may be viewed negatively in the greater community when social values are transgressed. She reminds the viewer that *family* in Latina/Latino culture can often be represented by the concept of extended family, wherein nonblood relatives such as godparents (*madrinas* and *padrinos*) are key family members.

Elements of Martha's situation highlight the cultural importance of the collective family unit's reputation over the needs of the individual, that is, the importance for children (including adult children) to show respect (*respeto*) and be respectable (*bien educado*) by adhering to family and cultural values and not create shame (*vergüenza*). Religious and spiritual values also inform this clash, and Arredondo introduces the concept of *marianismo*, the devotion and self-sacrificing virtues of the Virgin Mary. Arredondo contends that contemporary women may struggle with the cultural expectation that they "put up with" (*aguantar*) undesirable family and/or gender role situations because of a Latino cultural standard of living up to the

image of the Virgin Mary. Such clashes of values of independence and interdependence are not atypical, says Arredondo as she recasts Carlson's interpretation of Martha's father as being old-fashioned as instead being more traditional in his expectations of his daughter. The clash is framed less as a generational one and more as one of cultural values. Arredondo also introduces the role of *machismo*, whereby the male authority figures in the family play a dignified role in providing for the family's security and safety.

As the counselor in the video, Arredondo illustrates how she incorporates the use of bilingual words in the session, as when she asks the client about the use of proverbs (*dichos*) by elders. Arredondo describes a Latina/Latino client's use of both English and Spanish as *code switching*. Although the viewing audience may be primarily English speaking, missing from the analysis of these types of exchanges is commentary from Arredondo regarding the rationale for conducting the session primarily in English as opposed to Spanish. The limitations of therapy conducted in a client's secondary language versus his or her primary language regarding the expression of emotional content is a topic worthy of emphasis. For example, in the case of a bilingual therapist, should he or she ask the client whether he or she has a preference for a language, or should the bilingual therapist follow along in the language the client chooses to speak? Arredondo's thoughts about the pros and cons of interpreters for monolingual, Spanish-speaking clients would also be instructive for non-Spanish-speaking counselors. For English-speaking counselors and therapists, a cautionary note about the use of idioms when speaking with immigrant clients would also be helpful, as when Arredondo says to Martha, "You're on to something," as it is possible that the use of idioms may be lost on some clients. Arredondo also describes how she likes to encourage a client's use of journaling in counseling as well as the use of bibliotherapy. When she asks Martha whether she has read any Latina authors, Martha is visibly pleased to share her joy of reading Latina authors and is happy to accept Arredondo's recommendation of a book title. This is clearly an appropriate recommendation for this client, and it also appears to create the effect of an even greater degree of rapport between counselor and client. Nonetheless, missing from Arredondo's analysis of the session is a reminder to the viewer about the general use of bibliotherapy with some Latina/Latino clients. For some immigrants from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the lack of formal schooling may preclude the use of such sophisticated therapy techniques.

Indeed, there are few limitations to Arredondo's presentation of the theme of Latina/Latino counseling in this video format. Although the 45-min therapy session may seem long to some viewers, it is well worth watching, because having viewed it makes the debriefing portion of analysis all the more valuable. In the videotape, Arredondo confidently proves to the viewer how the skilled counselor can serve as a guide for the Latina/Latino immigrant client who feels the emotional and physical stress associated with the acculturation process. The counselor can help the individual reflect on the expectations of the different cultures and help the individual begin to disentangle from what Arredondo refers to as *interchanges*. Viewers who would like a text handbook that can serve as a winning complement to Arredondo's videotape should consider the 2002 book *Counseling Latinos and la Familia: A Practical Guide*, by Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, and Gallardo-Cooper. The book is a competency-based approach to intervention filled with appropriate self-assessment tools as well as excellent summary tables of key cultural concepts. The video is a rich one filled with descriptions and explanations of cultural values and concepts and explicit examples of how to reflect on issues raised by the Latina/Latino client as well as how to raise issues for the Latina/Latino client to contemplate. Arredondo's contribution through this videotape is a timely one: The U.S. Census Bureau reported that half of U.S. growth is due to Latinos and that the U.S. Latino population has passed 40 million ("Half of U.S. Growth," 2005). If, as the U.S. Census has indicated, there are no longer regional concentrations of Latinos, then counselors and psychologists in all parts of the country will increasingly be working with Latina/Latino clients, and novice and experienced professionals alike will benefit from the insight and wisdom of Arredondo's teachings as presented in this videotape.

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