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What university counseling centers need to know about Asian American college students in order to be a credible source of help

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

WHAT UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTERS NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT ASIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS
IN ORDER TO BE A CREDIBLE SOURCE OF HELP

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING AND
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

BY

BETSY J. DAVIS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Asians have had a long history of suffering racist and discriminatory treatment in the United States. Two prominent examples are the Alien Land Act of 1913, which prohibited Asians who were eligible for citizenship in California from owning or leasing property, and the internment of all people of Japanese ancestry during World War II (Toupin, 1980). However, since the mid-1960's, attitudes towards Asian Americans have become relatively more positive and they are now often viewed as a "model minority" (Suzuki, 1980). Asian Americans' educational and economic attainments have contributed to this perception. For example, a study based on the 1970 U.S. Census data showed that the median years of schooling and the median annual family income were higher for Asian Americans than for U.S. families as a whole (Urban Associates, Inc., 1974, as cited in Suzuki, 1980). In addition, Asian Americans are perceived as experiencing few emotional or mental health problems (Sue and McKinney, 1975). This perception grew out of studies that showed Asian Americans underutilizing mental health care services in comparison to Caucasians (Kitano, 1969; Sue and Sue, 1974), which has been interpreted as indicating lower rates of mental disturbance.

However, if these perceptions are examined more closely, it becomes apparent that these positive impressions are often as erroneously based as the previous negative perceptions of Asian Americans (Crystal, 1989). Despite their

education, Asian Americans tend to have lower incomes than other Americans with similar educational backgrounds. Higher incomes are partly due to having more than the national average number of dual-wage earners in the family. The perception that Asian Americans experience fewer emotional problems is also erroneous. It is based on the method of determining mental health problems from utilization rates, which can be misleading because Asian Americans are more reluctant to use mental health services than are Caucasian Americans (Sue and Morishima, 1982). In fact, studies have shown that while Asian Americans were underrepresented as patients, those that did seek help were suffering more severity of mental disturbance (Sue and Sue, 1974; Sue and McKinney, 1975). Thus, it appears that Asian Americans are experiencing problems, but are not seeking traditional mental health services for them unless their problems are extremely debilitating.

According to Sue and Morishima (1982), numerous explanations have been offered for Asian Americans' underutilization of services. These include 1) cultural values of placing stigma and shame on experiencing mental health problems and of needing to maintain family honor by not discussing problems outside the family (Toupin, 1980); 2) a belief that mental illness is caused by organic factors, hence the tendency to seek medical treatment for emotional problems; and 3) lack of responsiveness of services, regarding which Sue and Morishima (1982) stated that if mental health services do not respond to the needs and value of clients, then underuse, premature termination and poor outcomes would be expected.

A series of studies conducted in the Seattle, Washington, mental health

system between 1970 and 1973 (Sue, 1976; Sue and McKinney, 1975; Sue, McKinney, & Allen, 1976) found that some minorities underutilized mental health services and that all had higher drop-out rates than Caucasian-Americans. Because of these findings, concern focused on making changes that would improve the appropriateness and responsiveness of services. Sue (1977) called for 1) hiring bilingual/bicultural staff to work with ethnic minorities and to educate existing staff about cultural groups; 2) providing parallel services to treat ethnic groups within their own communities; and 3) providing non-parallel services that would offer different types of treatment and programs. It appears that making these types of changes may improve utilization and drop-out rates, as seen in O'Sullivan, Peterson, Cox, and Kirkeby's (1989) replication of Sue and associates' original Seattle studies. In the 10 years since Sue and his colleagues had conducted their studies, the various changes cited above had been implemented in the county. While the design of the O'Sullivan et. al (1989) replication study did not allow the authors to show causal effect, the changes did precede significant improvements in which minority groups were no longer underrepresented and failure to return rates had been reduced.

However, despite these service delivery changes, Sue and Zane (1987) cite some difficulties at the client-therapist level with this approach to providing culturally responsive services. Efforts ended up focusing on establishing cultural knowledge about a particular ethnic group and using certain treatment techniques that were viewed as culturally appropriate for that group. However, this resulted in stereotypes that often led to inappropriate interventions because the cultural

knowledge used about a particular ethnic group did not take into consideration individual differences within the group. There were also difficulties for therapists in changing their existing therapeutic style or orientation. Hence, Sue and Zane (1987) suggested a reformulation of the approach to providing culturally responsive services by focusing in part on the process of gaining credibility, which refers to "the client's perception of the therapist as an effective and trustworthy helper." (Sue and Zane, 1987, p. 40). The authors believe that this process is more closely linked to the goal of effective therapy than is the focus on culture-specific techniques or knowledge.

According to Sue and Zane (1987), two factors are involved in credibility: 1) ascribed status, which is the role the therapist is assigned by others; and 2) achieved status, which refers more directly to the therapist's actions through which clients develop trust, hope, and confidence. The underutilization of services may be explained by a lack of ascribed credibility, because many Asian Americans do not believe that therapists can help them. Premature termination could be explained by a lack of achieved credibility, if the therapists interventions did not earn the trust and confidence of the clients. The authors further explore the issue of achieved credibility, citing three areas as important: conceptualization of the problem; means for problem resolution; and goals for treatment. Knowledge of the client's culture is used only as way for the therapist to understand if there may be problems in achieving credibility in each of these three areas.

If Sue and Zane's (1987) framework of ascribed and achieved credibility is applied to the mental health issues of Asian American college students, counseling

centers would need to consider two areas: 1) students' attitudes towards help seeking--because how they view the university's counseling services impacts the credibility they ascribe to the center; and 2) the problems of Asian American college students--because not understanding their specific concerns may affect the counseling center's ability to attain achieved credibility. While research on the mental health of Asian Americans began to appear in the early 1970s, the literature has not addressed these two particular areas until recently. Leong (1986) conducted a comprehensive review of the Asian American mental health literature published through the mid 1980s. Since then, new contributions to the literature have been made that address the problems of Asian Americans in a different way as well as the relatively unexplored area of attitudes toward seeking help.

Lingoes (1986) review identified numerous personality studies that have been done with Asian Americans as a method of assessing their problems. The results of these personality studies have shown that Asian Americans in comparison to Anglos have less tolerance for ambiguity, prefer structured situations and practical immediate solutions to problems, exhibit lower levels of verbal and emotional expressiveness, and have more personality problems than Anglos. The personality problems include being more submissive, different, reserved, serious, regulated, apprehensive, tense, affected by feelings, socially precise, neurotic, anxious, introverted, and less dominant than Anglos (Lingoes, 1986). Lingoes (1986) identified two problems with using this method of assessing Asian American problems: 1) the inventories may not be valid for Asian Americans and may be

influenced by ethnic response sets and 2) that the personality differences may be viewed negatively from the Western perspective but may in fact be positive attributes from the Asian perspective.

It is also important to point out that in Lingo's review, no studies were cited that address Asian Americans' perceptions of their own problems or any studies that assess attitudes toward help-seeking. However, more recently, studies have begun to address both of these issues. It may be that this shift in how to study variables affecting Asian American mental health and use of health services came about when it was seen that using personality studies was not an appropriate method because it overestimates Asian American problems, while using the treated case method is also inappropriate because it underestimates Asian American problems (Sue and Sue, 1987). If Asian problems are not appropriately assessed through personality studies and if they underutilize existing mental health services, then the shift toward assessing their problems in new ways (through self reports and assessing their preferences in helpers) is a logical outgrowth of these earlier studies.

Until now, no in-depth, analytic review of these new studies has been undertaken. It is important, however, to compare the methods used in the different studies, to assess similarities and differences in their findings, and to identify limitations of the research in order to guide future efforts. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to conduct an in-depth, analytic review of nine studies (Atkinson & Gim, 1989; Atkinson, Ponterotto, & Sanchez, 1984; Atkinson, Whiteley, & Gim, 1990; Gim, Atkinson, and Whiteley, 1990; Solberg, Choi, Ritsma, & Jolly, 1993;

Solberg, Davis, & Ritsma, in press; Solberg, Ritsma, Davis, Tata, & Jolly, in press; Tracey, Lingo, & Glidden, 1986; and Webster & Fretz, 1978). Each study will be analyzed according to the same criteria, addressing the research problem, methods, analyses and results, interpretation of the findings, and questions remaining. The goal is to provide university counseling centers with the information necessary to develop more culturally responsive services for Asian American college students. It is believed that if counseling centers are going to adequately address the needs of Asian American college students, they must know about the problems confronting these students and their attitudes towards seeking help.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

To prepare this review, two primary sources were used to search the literature. The first was a published bibliography on Asian Americans by Lingo and Whitfield (1992). This bibliography contains references to 1,057 articles cited in the PsycINFO database through 1991. The references were classified in 17 major areas: psychometrics & statistics & methodology; human experimental psychology; physiological psychology & neuroscience; communications systems; developmental psychology; social processes & social issues; social psychology; personality psychology; psychological & physical disorders; health & mental health treatment & prevention; professional psychological & health personnel issues; educational psychology; industrial & organizational psychology; sport psychology & leisure; consumer psychology; engineering & environment psychology; and forensic psychology & legal issues. The bibliography (Lingo & Whitfield, 1992) also contained references to 136 books and book chapters on Asians in the United States.

The PsychLIT computer database was also used to obtain articles, books and book chapters published after 1991. Computer searches were done on Asians and help-seeking; Asians and mental health; and Asians and counseling and psychotherapy. From both of these sources, a total of 62 articles and two books were found that pertained to aspects of Asian American mental health problems and

utilization of mental health services. Out of this number, nine studies were found that pertained specifically to this thesis topic: help seeking attitudes and self-identified problem concerns of Asian American college students. Fourteen articles and the two books were cited as background in preparing this thesis. The remaining 37 articles were not used because they did not study the population of Asian American college students; were not related to help-seeking attitudes; or did not identify problems through self-report methods of students' concerns.

CHAPTER 3

PROBLEMS

This chapter will review four studies that have used methods other than personality tests to assess the problems perceived by Asian Americans, since it has been suggested that earlier studies using objective personality tests have overestimated Asian American problems (Sue and Sue, 1987). The discussion of each study will address five general areas: the research problem or questions being addressed; the methods used; the analyses performed on the data and the results; implications of the findings; and what questions are raised by the study.

Help-Seeking and Problem Perception Among Asian Americans

Research problem: Tracey, Lingo and Glidden (1986) examined the problem perceptions of Asian American and Anglo college students who were seen at a university student development center. Their primary question was whether there are differences in the help-seeking process, i.e., the presenting problems, for Asian Americans. Besides ethnicity, the authors also hypothesized that client gender and previous counseling experience would affect how clients perceived their problems.

Methods: A total of 3,050 student clients seen at a university student development center were included in this study. The breakdown by ethnic group was 1,300 Anglo students, 332 Chinese Americans, 102 Filipino Americans, 126

part Hawaiians, 47 Korean Americans, 980 Japanese Americans, 131 Asian American-white mix, 104 Asian-Asian mix. All of the clients were asked to complete demographic information sheets prior to intake, which included questions relating to age, class standing, employment status, previous counseling experience, marital status, and ethnicity. On the questionnaire, students were also asked to review a list of eight problems and to endorse all those that applied as well as the problem of greatest concern. The eight problem areas were vocational choice, occupational informational, vocational decision-making, academic skills, academic motivation, interpersonal/social, intrapersonal, and educational/personal.

Analyses and results: Chi-square tests on the number of problems endorsed by each group revealed significant differences for each of the eight problem areas. It appears that the Asian American students disproportionately overendorsed the five academic/career areas while the Anglo students underendorsed them. (Filipino and Asian-white mix students lay between the Anglo and other Asian students in most of their endorsements.) An examination of the percentage of presenting problems endorsed by members of each ethnic group revealed the following. Between 62-70% of most of the Asian groups endorsed vocational choice, as compared to 50% of Anglo students. Between 46-57% of most Asian groups endorsed occupational information as a problem, as compared to 30% of Anglo students. Vocational decision making was endorsed as a problem by 22-31% of most Asian groups and 21% of Anglo students. Between 20-40% of all Asian groups endorsed academic skills as a problem, as compared to 12% of Anglo students. Academic motivation

was endorsed by 11% of Anglo students and between 18-25% of Asian groups.

It also appears that Anglo students disproportionately overendorsed the interpersonal and intrapersonal problem areas while the Asian American students underendorsed these areas. Interpersonal problems were endorsed by 33% of Anglo students, as compared to 18-28% of Asian students. Intrapersonal problems were endorsed by 37% of Anglo students, as compared to 22-30% of most Asian groups, excluding Filipino and Asian-white mix.

Based on student responses, two dichotomous variables were created: the number of problems endorsed (one or more than one) and the most central problem endorsed (personal or academic/vocational). Loglinear analyses were then conducted to determine interactions between ethnicity, gender, problem, and previous counseling experience. These analyses revealed a number of differences between Anglo and Asian American students. Anglos endorsed fewer problems than Asian Americans and women were more prone than men to perceive many problems as relevant. Asian American men were less likely to endorse more than one problem than Anglo men, while Asian American women were more likely to endorse more than one problem than Anglo women. Asian American clients were less likely than Anglos to have had previous counseling experience; while women were more likely to have had previous counseling than men.

Regarding primary concerns, Anglo clients were more likely to endorse a personal concern as paramount, especially if they had received previous counseling. Asian Americans were more likely to endorse academic/vocational problems as most

important, but less so if they had previous counseling. Although, overall, the effect of previous counseling on choosing a personal concern as most important was not as strong among Asian Americans as it was among Anglos.

The same variables were examined for differences among the different Asian American groups. There was no difference among the number of problems experienced; however, Filipino American and Asian American-white mix clients were more likely to endorse personal concerns, while the other Asian American groups (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Asian-Asian mix) were more likely to endorse academic/vocational concerns.

Interpretation of findings: Tracey et al. (1986) interpret these findings as supporting their belief that help-seeking is different for Asian American students. Under the same stressful conditions, they say that Asian Americans will attribute their problems to different concerns than Anglo students, either because of the increased importance Asians place on academic success or because of the stigma of admitting to personal problems. They believe this lends support to Sue and Kirk's (1975) hypothesis that Asian Americans find it more acceptable to seek help for academic/vocational problems. Tracey et al. (1986) suggest that, because Asian Americans may be manifesting personal problems through their academic concerns, it may no longer be useful to maintain distinctions between academic/career counseling and personal/emotional counseling. Thus, they recommend that counselors advertise their efforts to help Asian Americans with academic issues, but to use this as an opportunity to indirectly help with personal/emotional issues.

Questions remaining: Three questions arise when reviewing this study by Tracey et al. (1986). First, since a random sample of students was not used for the study, the results need to be interpreted in a more limited manner. Only those students who actually sought counseling for their problems were included in the study. Thus, it provides information about the problem perceptions of those students who are willing to seek help, but it does not provide information about students who have not sought counseling. Given the belief that many Asians do not seek counseling for their concerns (Sue & Morishima, 1982), a survey that only examines Asian American students who have sought counseling cannot be generalized to speak to the concerns of all Asian American students. Second, the authors appear to generalize these findings to the Asian American population as a whole, which may not be appropriate given the vast differences between the concerns of college students and adult, working populations.

The third question has to do with an underlying assumption that appears in Tracey et al.'s (1986) interpretation of the findings. The assumption is that, while Asian American students are overendorsing vocational concerns, they are actually suffering from personal concerns. While the study appears sound in its analyses of the problem perceptions and the differences between Asian American and Anglo students, the methods used in this study do not allow us to determine whether the Asian American students who endorsed vocational concerns are actually suffering from personal concerns but are just not willing to admit to them. The data clearly indicate that Asian American students endorsed more vocational than personal

concerns, but another interpretation is that because of their culture's value on education, they are genuinely suffering anxiety about these academic/vocational issues.

Asian American Acculturation, Severity of Concerns, and Willingness to See a Counselor

Research problem: A study by Gim, Atkinson, & Whiteley (1990) also examined the problem perceptions of Asian American college students but used a different approach than Tracey et al. (1986). Gim et al. (1990) were interested in examining the relationship of Asian American students' acculturation level to severity of problems and willingness to seek help. They hypothesized that less acculturated students would indicate more severe problems than the higher acculturated students.

Methods: Instead of a comparison to Anglo students, the study only examined Asian American students. A questionnaire was mailed to the entire population of 1,550 Asian-American undergraduate students at a West Coast university. Of the 816 students (399 males, 417 females) whose responses were used in the study, the ethnic breakdown was: 268 Chinese Americans, 186 Filipino Americans, 151 Japanese Americans, 108 Korean Americans, and 103 Southeast-Asian American.

To assess acculturation, the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA) was used; which consists of 21 questions regarding language preference, friendship choice, behaviors, generation and geographic history, and

attitudes. Scores are rated as low, medium, or high acculturated. To assess problems, a modified version of the Personal Problems Inventory (Cash, Begley, McCown, & Weise, 1975) was used, which consisted of 15 problems of concern to college students, as well as an additional nine problems of concern either to minority students in general or specifically to Asian American students. Students were asked to rate the level of severity of each problem as it affected them on a four-point scale (1=not a problem to 4=major problem).

Analyses and results: Factor analysis was used to consolidate the students' 24 responses into a smaller number of concerns. Three factors were identified, when using a criterion of .50 or above for including an item in a factor. These factors were identified as relationship concerns, academic or career concerns, and health or substance abuse concerns. To obtain an average severity score for each of these concerns, the ratings for individual items in each factor were summed and divided by the number of items in the factor. Five additional problems from the original scale (conflicts with parents, financial, insomnia, roommate, and ethnic identity confusion) did not load over .50 on any factor and were included as separate concerns, creating a total of eight concerns that were considered the dependent variables.

Scores for the acculturation scale were collapsed into two categories, low-medium and high, rather than low, medium, and high, because there were no low-acculturated Japanese American men and there were also other low frequencies for low acculturation (Gim et al., 1990).

Repeated measures analysis of variance revealed significant main effects for acculturation, ethnicity, and problem concerns; and significant interactions between acculturation and concerns and between ethnicity and concerns. Tukey's honestly significance difference test (HSD) revealed that the financial concerns were rated significantly higher than the other concerns, followed by academic/career, relationship, conflicts with parents, ethnic identity confusion, roommate, insomnia, and health or substance abuse. Low-medium acculturated students had consistently higher severity of concern ratings than the high acculturated students and they gave their highest severity of concern ratings to financial problems and second highest ratings to academic/career problems. High acculturated students rated academic/career problems as their highest source of problem severity followed by financial concerns. Across ethnicities, Southeast-Asian students gave the highest ratings to all concern areas except for "conflict with parents." Japanese Americans gave the lowest rating to all concern areas except "health or substance abuse problems." Chinese American and Japanese American students gave their highest concern ratings to academic/career and financial problems respectively, while this order was reversed for the Korean, Filipino, and Southeast Asian Americans.

Interpretation of findings: Overall, the results of this study by Gim et al. (1990) suggest that Asian Americans perceive their greatest problems to be financial and career concerns; that acculturation may be inversely related to severity of concerns; and that Southeast Asian Americans may experience the greatest severity of concerns. Gim et al. (1990) suggest that the less acculturated students may have

greater concerns because they experience more conflict between the Asian and American cultures and might also be less fluent in English. Gim et al. (1990) also suggest that the severity of concerns experienced by Southeast Asians may be related to the effects of war on these immigrants, many of whom experience symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder.

Questions remaining: As with the Tracey et al. (1986) study, the results of this study indicate that the Asian American students' concerns were less focused on personal issues: however, in Gim et al. (1990), results indicate that the highest severity of concern rating was financial, followed by academic or career. A new problem was the most highly rated concern in this study, which was not even assessed in Tracey et al. (1986). Thus, it becomes difficult to compare the results of these studies because they asked about different problems.

In reviewing the analyses for the Gim et al. (1990) study, the choice for using a Tukey's HSD seems appropriate to further examine the significant concerns effect. However, for the remaining results that the authors identify, (acculturation, ethnicity, acculturation x concerns, and ethnicity x concerns), the determination of what is accounting for the effect is made by examining the mean ratings of concerns, not through a statistical procedure such as the Tukey's HSD. This raises the question of how accurate and true these determinations were.

The authors do mention that, because of the college student sample, the results may not be generalizable to non-college populations of Asian Americans. However, they suggest that to the degree that the results are generalizable, they may

provide information about the group as a whole. As with the Tracey et al. (1986) study, the concerns of college students cannot be assumed to be the same as non-college populations, hence the generalizability of these findings is called into question.

Asian American Students' Severity of Problems and Willingness to Seek Help from University Counseling Centers

Research problem: A study by Solberg, Ritsma, Davis, Tata, & Jolly (in press) sought to extend the work of Gim et al. (1990) in investigating the relationship between background variables such as ethnicity and gender and Asian American college students' problem concerns. Solberg et al. (in press) hypothesized that there would be some differences in problem concerns between ethnicities, as found in Gim et al. (1990), however, the study also examined whether previous counseling from university counseling centers had an effect on students' perceptions of their problems.

Methods: A random sample of 1,300 Asian American students at a midwestern university was mailed the survey instrument. Out of 705 returned surveys, 596 responses were selected for this study due to their falling into a major ethnic group for which there were at least 75 survey responses. The ethnic breakdown of study participants was: 135 Chinese Americans, 138 Korean Americans, 107 Filipino, and 77 Taiwan Americans. Thus, unlike Gim et al. (1990) who surveyed an entire university population, this was a representative sample randomly selected. In addition, there were differences in the ethnic groups included

in each of the studies. Gim et al. (1990) surveyed Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Southeast Asian Americans, thus, there was overlap of only the Chinese, Filipino, and Korean American populations in both studies.

Like Gim et al. (1990), Solberg et al. (in press) used a modified version of the Personal Problems Inventory (Cash, Begley, McCown, & Weise, 1975) that included 22 problem severity items. Of the 24 items used by Gim et al. (1990), four were dropped after student leaders expressed concern over the clarity and cultural appropriateness of the items, and two additional items were added. Students were asked to indicate how much of a problem each of the 22 concerns was for them on a four-point scale. Students were also asked whether they had ever sought counseling from the university counseling center.

Analyses and results: Like Gim et al. (1990), factor analysis was used to consolidate the 22 problem severity items. Like the Gim et al. (1990) results, which yielded three subscales (academic, interpersonal, and health or substance abuse concerns), a principal components analysis with a varimax rotation resulted in three subscales. However, not all of the items met the loading criteria of .50, resulting in four items being dropped from the health or substance abuse concerns subscale, which led to reinterpreting this subscale as substance abuse concerns. Unlike Gim et al. (1990), the items that did not load on any of the three factors were not used in the analyses as separate dependent variables. Thus, Solberg et al. (in press) used three dependent variables instead of the eight concerns identified in Gim et al. (1990).

Instead of the repeated measures analysis of variance performed by Gim et al. (1990), Solberg et al. (in press) used an initial multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to assess the relationship between gender, counseling experience, ethnicity, and problem concerns. Results indicated significant main effects for both gender and previous counseling experience. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed that the gender effect was related to problem severity ratings for academic concerns and the previous counseling effect was related to problem severity ratings for substance abuse concerns. Examination of the means for the severity of concerns revealed that women reported higher severity ratings for academic concerns and that students who had previous counseling experience indicated higher ratings of concerns for substance abuse. Overall, the mean severity of concern ratings by all students was highest for academic concerns, second highest for interpersonal concerns, and third for substance abuse.

Interpretation of findings: Overall, the results of this study seem to indicate that women have greater academic concerns than men, that students who have had previous counseling experience have greater concerns about substance abuse; that ethnicity does not seem to play a role in severity of concern ratings; and, generally, students' greatest concerns are related to academics.

Regarding the finding that students who have had previous counseling experience indicate higher concern ratings for substance abuse, Solberg et al. (in press) suggest two possible interpretations. One interpretation is that students who have acknowledged problems with substance abuse were more likely to have already

sought help. The other interpretation is that students became aware during earlier counseling of how substance abuse may be a part of their problems.

Questions remaining: It is important to point out that the differences in results between Gim et al. (1990) and Solberg et al. (in press) could be due to the differences in analyses, i.e., repeated measures analysis of variance versus MANOVA. Repeated measures analysis of variance is not as effective in controlling for Type I errors as is the MANOVA, hence, some of the effects found in the Gim et al. (1990) study may have been due to chance. Further replication would be necessary to determine whether the different results are due to the analyses employed by each.

Another difference was that Gim et al. (1990) used Tukey's HSD to determine that there were significant differences in the order of the problem severity ratings. Solberg et al. (in press) did not perform this analysis, although from examining the mean severity of concern ratings, it seems possible to interpret that the ratings for academic concerns were higher than those for interpersonal concerns, which were higher than the ratings for substance abuse concerns.

Establishing Credibility Among Asian American Student Populations

Research problem: As part of the larger study by Solberg et al. (in press) described above, students' written comments about their college experiences were analyzed (Solberg, Davis, & Ritsma, in press). The goal was to identify additional concerns or issues that may not have been included in the quantitative assessment strategies used by Gim et al. (1990) and Solberg et al. (in press).

Methods: A random sample of 1,300 Asian American students at a midwestern university was mailed a survey instrument that included the quantitative measures described above in Solberg et al. (in press), as well as an open section at the end of the survey for students to provide comments. Out of the 596 surveys used in the Solberg et al. (in press) study, a total of 136 students provided written responses.

Analyses and results: A preliminary analysis of this qualitative data was conducted by categorizing the responses into three general areas, one of which was identified as "source of problems." Out of the 136 responses, over 50% of the students discussed problems of Asian American college students. Under this broad category of source of problems, 13 specific issues were identified.

The problem most often identified was resentment that the university provided Asian American students with less financial resources and support services than other minority groups on campus. The second highest reported problem was the students' experiences with racism and discrimination on campus. Other problems included not feeling part of the students' own ethnic group; conflicts over balancing the parent's culture with American culture; feeling isolated from both Asian and Anglo groups; being rejected by Asian peers because of "Americanized" behavior; discrimination toward one Asian ethnic group by another Asian ethnic group; interpersonal/social problems related to Asian values; problems identifying with either of two cultural heritages; difficulty in meeting members of students' own ethnic group to date; and resentment of being considered a model minority.

Interpretation of findings: The results of these findings, described in Solberg, Davis, & Ritsma (in press), provide additional insight into the problem concerns of Asian American college students. Solberg et al. (in press) believe that the comments may be a more accurate reflection of the full range of problems the students are actually facing than the quantitative assessment strategies used by Tracey et al. (1986), Gim et al. (1990), and Solberg, Ritsma et al. (in press), which may provide a limited range of concerns that the students are assumed to have.

The most significant difference in the results of these students' comments is that, except for the financial concerns, they could all be considered personal or interpersonal problems, as opposed to academic/vocational concerns. This is in contrast to Tracey et al. (1986), Gim et al. (1990), and Solberg et al. (in press), who all found academic/vocational concerns to be more highly rated than personal concerns. The one area of overlap among the studies pertains to financial concerns. The highest number of written responses in Solberg, Davis, & Ritsma (in press) indicated concerns about inequities in financial aid, as well as other services, for Asian American students; while Gim et al. (1990) found that all students rated financial concerns significantly higher than any other concerns.

Questions remaining: One limitation of these findings is that the qualitative data were not subjected to a more thorough content analysis and to tests of interrater reliability and agreement. Thus, the categorizations in this preliminary analysis may not accurately reflect the problems identified by the students.

Summary

In sum, the four studies described here have revealed a range of problems that Asian American college students have identified. One area that consistently appears to face Asian Americans is a concern with academic/vocational concerns. The question raised by Tracey et al. (1986), however, is whether this area is the only one that Asian American students feel comfortable expressing even if there may be underlying personal problems facing these students as well. Gim et al. (1990) brought a new issue to light, with the finding that less acculturated students expressed higher severity of concern ratings for all types of problems, however, with both high and low acculturated students, financial and academic concerns were the top two rated problem concerns. Solberg, Ritsma et al.'s (in press) findings were consistent with the others in that academics was the top rated concern.

Solberg, Ritsma et al. (in press) also raised another new issue with the finding that students with previous counseling experience reported higher concerns about substance abuse. However, unlike Gim et al. (1990), Solberg, Ritsma et al. (in press) did not find an effect for ethnicity, but did find an effect for gender, with women reporting higher ratings for academic concerns. The qualitative survey of Solberg, Davis, & Ritsma (in press) was consistent with Gim et al. (1990) in that financial concerns (not receiving financial aid like other minorities) were the most highly rated concern, however, these findings also identified other issues not addressed in the quantitative studies, suggesting most significantly that racism and discrimination are serious problems for these students.

Overall, the most consistent result across the four studies was that

academic/vocational or financial concerns were the most highly rated. While not consistent across all studies, other results also suggest that lower acculturation levels and previous counseling experience may be related to increased concerns.

Conflicting results pertained to whether or not ethnicity and gender are related to increased problems.

CHAPTER 4

HELP-SEEKING ATTITUDES

This chapter will review eight studies in the Asian American college student literature that have begun to ask students about their attitudes toward seeking help. As in the previous chapter, the discussion of each study will address five general areas: research problem, methods, analyses and results, implications of the findings, and questions remaining.

Asian American, Black, and White College Students' Preferences for Help-Giving Sources

Research Problem: One early study by Webster and Fretz (1978) examined Asian American, African American, and Anglo students' expected use of various help sources for educational/vocational and emotional problems. The authors were also interested in examining gender differences in preference rankings, as well as interactions between ethnicity and gender.

Methods: Out of 1,090 students from five undergraduate courses who completed a questionnaire regarding help preferences, the responses of 250 students were used for this study: 18 Asian Americans, 116 African Americans, and 116 Anglos. The sample was comprised of 66% females and 34% males.

The questionnaire focused on two categories of problems: educational/vocational and emotional concerns. Students were asked to assume they

had a problem regarding a future job or major and to rank order, from a list of 12 help sources, those that they would go to from first to last. Students were then asked to give a second set of rankings assuming they had emotional problems characterized by nervousness. The list of help sources that students ranked included: faculty, physician, university counseling center, parent, relative, nonstudent friend, clergyman/minister, community mental health service, residence hall counselor, health center mental health service, private practice psychotherapist, and help crisis center.

Analyses and results: The Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance by ranks for independent samples was used to analyze differences in students' rankings across gender and ethnicity. The rankings of the total student sample for the two problem types were analyzed for differences using the Friedman two-way analysis of variance. The findings did not reveal significant differences in rankings of help providers across ethnicity, gender, or problem type. The only difference regarding Asian American students' preferences was that they ranked relatives first for addressing emotional problems, while both African American and Anglo students ranked parents first.

All students identified parents, non-student friends, relatives, and counseling centers among the top five most preferred sources of help for both types of problems. The only difference in help source rankings across problem types was that faculty members were ranked in the top five for addressing educational and vocational problems, while physicians were included in the top five for addressing

emotional problems. In addition, the rankings showed that all students would be more likely to seek help from counseling centers for educational/vocational problems than for emotional problems, having ranked counseling centers third for educational/vocational and fifth for emotional problems.

Interpretation of findings: Webster and Fretz (1978) suggest that, despite the lack of statistical significance in the findings, the slight variations between groups may still be worthwhile to consider. They suggest that Asian Americans' ranking of relatives as their first choice for help with an emotional problem, as opposed to parent, allows for the conclusion that the Asian culture fosters a closed community for help seeking and that extended family members might be viewed as highly acceptable sources of help.

The authors also suggest that an empirical basis for certain counseling center outreach services can be found in the rankings of parents and faculty as top choices for educational/vocational problems and the higher rankings of counseling centers for addressing educational/vocational rather than emotional problems. They suggest that outreach efforts should focus on providing parents and faculty with the information and resources that will better enable them to be primary help givers but also to help them understand how to refer students to counseling services.

Questions remaining: This study provides useful information about the preferences Asian Americans may have for helpers; however, the extremely small number of Asian Americans in the study (18) raises concerns about how generalizable these results are to all Asian American college students. In addition,

attitudes may have changed in the 15 years since this study was published.

Attitudes of Vietnamese and Anglo-American Students Toward Counseling

Research problem: Atkinson, Ponterotto, & Sanchez (1984) were interested in examining the attitudes of Vietnamese and Anglo students toward counseling as well as their preferences for help providers.

Methods: A questionnaire was distributed to the entire group of Vietnamese students (40 males and 23 females) and Anglo students (17 males and 35 females) enrolled in the Extended Opportunity Program and Services at a west coast community college. Of the total 115 surveys distributed, completed questionnaires were received from 74 students: 22 male and 17 female Vietnamese; and nine male and 26 female Anglos.

Two instruments were used in the questionnaire to address issues pertaining to attitudes towards and preferences for help. The first was an adaptation of the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help scale (ATSPPH) (Fischer & Turner, 1970). This scale consists of four subscales: recognition of need for help; tolerance of stigma associated with professional help; openness regarding discussing one's problems; and confidence in a professional to help. The 29 items in the scale are statements that are to be responded to on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). High scores indicate a positive attitude toward seeking professional help. The scale was modified to substitute the words psychologist-counselor and counseling center for psychiatrist and mental health center, because the latter terms are not familiar to many Vietnamese.

The second instrument asked students to rank order who they would see first for a personal problem out of a list of seven help providers: psychologist/counselor, religious leader, older relative, oldest person in the community, friend, medical doctor, and teacher.

Analyses and results: A repeated measures analysis of variance was used to analyze the ATSPPH data. One main effect, ethnicity, and one interaction, subscale by sex, were significant. An examination of the mean item ratings and standard deviations on the subscales by ethnicity and sex indicated that the ethnicity main effect was accounted for by the Anglo students consistently scoring higher on each of the four subscales than the Vietnamese students (except for the stigma scale in which Anglo males scored lower than Vietnamese females). The interaction effect can be seen in the higher scores for both Anglo and Vietnamese females on the stigma scale.

A repeated measures analysis of variance was also used to examine the rankings of help providers. This revealed a significant interaction effect for ethnicity x ranking. An examination of the mean rankings by the two ethnic groups revealed that Anglo students ranked psychologist-counselors second, while the Vietnamese students ranked them fourth; and that Vietnamese ranked oldest person in the community as their third choice, while Anglo students ranked them last. Despite the differences, both groups ranked friend as their first choice in a help provider.

Interpretation of findings: The authors suggest that attitudes toward help

identified by the Vietnamese may indicate that traditional college counseling services may not be sought during times of stress. These students' higher rankings of friend, oldest relative, and oldest person in the community before psychologist-counselor also reflect this as well. The authors suggest that the Vietnamese students' less positive attitudes toward seeking help and lower rankings for professional counseling help have important implications for college counseling centers in that specialized services may need to be developed to address these students' concerns.

Questions remaining: One limitation of this study is that the sample of students included was not randomly selected from the overall student population, which the authors did acknowledge. As members of a special program at a college, this group may not be representative of the student population as a whole. In addition, the interpretations of the significant effects were not made through post-hoc statistical analyses, but through the examination of mean scores. For both of these reasons, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

Asian American Cultural Identity and Attitudes Toward Mental Health Services

Research problem: Atkinson and Gim (1989) assessed the relationship between the acculturation level of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean American students and their attitudes toward mental health services. It was hypothesized that the Asian Americans who strongly identified with their ethnic culture would have negative attitudes toward mental health services, and that the more acculturated students would have relatively positive attitudes.

Methods: A questionnaire was mailed to all undergraduate Chinese

Americans (357), Japanese Americans (294), and Korean Americans (209) at a major west coast university. A total of 557 useable surveys were returned, resulting in the following participant breakdown for the study: 263 Chinese Americans (136 males, 127 females); 185 Japanese American (77 males, 108 females); and 109 Korean Americans (61 males, 48 females).

This study used the adaptation of the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help scale (ATSPPH) (Fischer & Turner, 1970), which was previously used in Atkinson, Ponterotto, and Sanchez (1984). This scale consists of four subscales: recognition of need for help; tolerance of stigma associated with professional help; openness regarding discussing one's problems; and confidence in a professional to help. The 29 items in the scale are statements that can be responded to on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). High scores indicate a positive attitude toward seeking professional help. The scale was modified to substitute the words psychologist-counselor and counseling center for psychiatrist and mental health center, because of its use with college students.

To assess acculturation, a modified version of the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA) was used; which consisted of 16 questions regarding language preference, friendship choice, behaviors, and identity. Three versions were developed, substituting Chinese, Japanese, and Korean for Asian American, and the appropriate forms were distributed to students in the respective ethnic groups.

Analyses and results: Respondents were initially categorized into low,

medium, and high acculturation levels; however, this resulted in no low-accultured Japanese Americans males and females in some cells of the planned 3 x 2 x 3 (ethnicity, gender, acculturation) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Therefore, the acculturation scores were divided at the midscore to create low and high acculturation categories. A 3 x 2 x 2 (ethnicity, gender, acculturation) multivariate analysis of variance was then performed with the ATSPPH subscores serving as the dependent variables. This resulted in a significant effect for acculturation. No other main or interaction effects were found to be significant.

Because acculturation was the only significant effect with the first MANOVA, the data were collapsed across ethnicity and gender, and a one-way MANOVA was performed with the acculturation levels again grouped into low, medium, and high. This resulted in a significant acculturation effect. Univariate F tests resulted in significant differences for three of the four dependent variables: stigma, need, and openness. The only subscore that was not significant was confidence. An examination of the means for all the scores indicated that the low accultured students had the lowest mean scores and the high accultured students had the highest means scores across all subscales.

Interpretation of findings: Atkinson and Gim (1989) suggest that these findings provide strong evidence that Asian American attitudes toward psychological help are positively related to level of acculturation, with significant differences found in three of the four dependent variables. They suggest that the findings support the view that there is a conflict between traditional Asian values and psychological

services as they are offered in the United States. The authors suggest that for low acculturated students, services may need to be modified to be more culturally responsive as defined by Sue and Zane (1987), while high acculturated students may find mainstream psychological help to be appropriate.

The authors expressed surprise over the lack of differences due to gender and suggested that, combined with results of the earlier Atkinson, Ponterotto, and Sanchez (1984) study, the socialization of Asian American males and females may be similar in regard to the use of professional psychological services.

Questions remaining: As this study was conducted with only college students, the findings cannot be generalized to the Asian American population as a whole, which, though briefly acknowledged by the authors, stills seems to be done. In addition, the scale assessing attitudes toward help in general may not provide information that is as meaningful as students' preferences for help regarding their own particular problems.

Asian American Acculturation, Severity of Concerns, and Willingness to See a Counselor

Research problem: In the Gim, Atkinson, & Whiteley (1990) study described in Chapter Three of this thesis, the authors also were interested in examining the relationship between ethnicity, gender, acculturation, and willingness to see a counselor for problems experienced by Asian American college students. The authors hypothesized that less acculturated students would be less willing to see a counselor than more acculturated students and that women would indicate a greater

willingness to see a counselor than would men.

Methods: A questionnaire was mailed to the entire population of 1,550 Asian American undergraduate students at a West Coast university. Of the 816 students who responded (399 males, 417 females), 268 were Chinese American, 186 were Filipino American, 151 were Japanese American, 108 were Korean American, and 103 were Southeast-Asian American.

To assess acculturation, the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA) was used; which consists of 21 questions regarding language preference, friendship choice, behaviors, generation and geographic history, and attitudes. Scores are rated as low, medium, or high acculturated. To assess willingness to seek help, a modified version of the Personal Problems Inventory (Cash, Begley, McCown, & Weise, 1975) was used, which consisted of 15 problems of concern to college students, as well as an additional nine problems of concern either to minority students in general or specifically to Asian American students. Students were asked to rate the level of severity of each problem as it affected them on a four-point scale and then to indicate their willingness to see a counselor for the problem.

Analyses and results: Students' scores for the acculturation scale were collapsed into two categories, low-medium and high, because there were no low acculturated Japanese Americans and there were other low frequencies for low acculturated students. The 24 willingness to see a counselor ratings were consolidated into the same eight areas found through the factor analysis of the

severity ratings (described in Chapter Three). Thus, the analyses examined the students' willingness to see a counselor for relationship, academic or career, health or substance abuse, parent conflict, financial, insomnia, roommate, and ethnic identity confusion concerns. These eight willingness to see a counselor ratings were analyzed using a 2 (gender) x 2 (acculturation) x 5 (ethnicity) x 8 (severity ratings) repeated measures analysis of covariance, with the eight severity ratings as covariates. Significant main effects were found for gender, acculturation, and concerns. No interaction effects were found.

The gender effect was identified as being due to women having consistently higher adjusted mean willingness to see a counselor ratings than men. The acculturation effect was identified through the consistently higher adjusted mean ratings for low-medium acculturated students than for the high acculturated students. The concerns effect indicated that willingness to see a counselor ratings were a function of the type of concern rated. The highest adjusted mean willingness to see a counselor rating was for academic or career concerns, followed by financial, conflicts with parents, relationship, ethnic identity confusion, roommate, health or substance abuse, and insomnia. Tukey's honestly significant difference test revealed that the mean adjusted willingness to see a counselor rating for academic concerns was significantly higher than for all other ratings; that ratings for willingness to see a counselor for financial concerns was significantly higher than ratings for all concerns but academics; and the mean ratings for both parental conflict and relationship were significantly higher than the rating for insomnia concerns.

Interpretation of findings: In contrast to Atkinson and Gim (1989), the results of this study revealed an inverse relationship between acculturation and willingness to see a counselor, with low acculturated students expressing more willingness to see a counselor for each of the eight general areas of concern. The authors suggest that the different assessment measures may explain the conflicting results. The Atkinson and Gim (1989) study assessed general attitudes toward seeking professional help, not whether students had specific problems at that time. In Gim et al. (1990), students were asked about specific problems and whether they would seek help for them. The authors suggest that once less acculturated students acknowledge a problem, they may be more likely to seek professional help than high acculturated students because they may have higher respect for authority.

The results also showed that students' willingness to seek help was a function of the type of concern, with students most willing to see a counselor for academic or career and financial concerns, followed by conflicts with parents. Students were least likely to seek a counselor for help with ethnic identify confusion, roommate problems, health or substance abuse and insomnia problems. Gim et al. (1990) suggest that this provides important information for counseling centers. They need to be prepared to deal with concerns for which the students are most willing to seek help but they also need to promote their services more for ethnic identify confusion, roommate problems, health or substance abuse and insomnia problems, since these are also areas in which counseling centers can be of service to students.

In contrast to Atkinson and Gim (1989), gender was also found to be related

to willingness to seek a counselor, with women more likely to seek help for all types of problem concerns. The authors suggest that this supports the similar finding by Tracey et al. (1986) that Asian American women were more likely endorse multiple problems and to have had previous counseling than men.

Questions remaining: The scaling method in this study allows students to have the same score for problem severity as for willingness to seek help. In all categories, the mean scores for willingness to seek help were lower than the mean scores for severity of problems. This could be interpreted as more students experiencing problems than are willing to seek help for them, which could certainly be cause for concern. However, the important question would be whether this is a difference of practical significance. This study does not address the point at which students should seek help from counselors for problems and when it is appropriate to seek help from other sources. For example, a problem with a relationship may often be solved by talking about it with a friend. Therefore, depending on the type of problem, the inconsistencies in the means for the severity of a problem and willingness to see a counselor may not be important but the instruments used in this study do not allow for this determination to be made.

As previously mentioned in Chapter Three regarding this study, the findings cannot be assumed to be generalizable beyond the college student population to the larger population of Asian Americans.

Asian American Acculturation and Preferences for Help Providers

Research problem: This study by Atkinson, Whiteley, & Gim (1990) sought

to determine if Asian American students' preferences for help providers are a function of their acculturation level. The authors hypothesized that there would be a direct relationship between acculturation level and ratings given to counselors/psychologists as a source of help. The authors also hypothesized that there would be an inverse relationship between acculturation level and ratings given to older relatives and community members as help sources.

Methods: A questionnaire was mailed to the entire population of 1,550 Asian American undergraduate students at a West Coast university. Of the 816 questionnaires useable for this study, the ethnic breakdown of the students (399 males, 417 females) was: 268 Chinese Americans, 186 Filipino Americans, 151 Japanese Americans, 108 Korean Americans, and 103 Southeast-Asian Americans.

To assess acculturation, the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA) was used; which consists of 21 questions regarding language preference, friendship choice, behaviors, generation and geographic history, and attitudes. Scores were rated as low, medium, or high acculturated.

To assess ratings for helpers, students were asked to rank the three help providers, from a list of 11 options, with whom they would be most likely to discuss a problem. The list of 11 help providers was developed from Atkinson et al. (1984), with the modification of four family roles being added. The 11 options were: mother, father, sister, brother, other older relative (e.g., grandparent, aunt, uncle), religious leader (e.g., monk, priest, minister), oldest person in the community, friend, teacher, counselor/psychologist, and medical doctor.

Analyses and results: To conduct the analyses, the weightings for the ranks assigned to the three help providers were reversed (a 1, or first choice, was weighted as a 3) and a score of 0 was assigned to the remaining eight help providers not ranked. Thus, the rating scale used for help providers was 0 (no preference) to 3 (highest preference). The low and medium acculturated categories were collapsed into one category, due to low numbers of low-acculturated Japanese Americans, and a 2 x 2 x 5 multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was computed with gender, acculturation level, and ethnicity as the independent variables and help provider ratings as the dependent variables. A significant main effect was found for gender; while all other main and interaction effects were nonsignificant. However, Atkinson et al. (1990) stated that the F value for the main effect of acculturation was elevated sufficiently, with a p value of .057, to warrant further investigation.

Since ethnicity was not related to the help-provider ratings, further analyses were conducted with the data collapsed across ethnic groups. This allowed for the acculturation level to be divided into low, medium, and high categories and a 2 x 3 (gender x acculturation level) MANOVA was computed. Significant main effects were obtained for gender and acculturation level. Subsequent univariate analysis revealed main effects for gender on the ratings for mother, father, sister, brother, oldest person in the community, and teacher. Main effects were found for acculturation level on ratings for mother, oldest person in community, friend, teacher, and counselor/psychologist.

The source of the significant gender effects was determined through

examination of the higher ratings by women for mother and sister; and higher ratings by men for father, brother, religious leader, oldest member of the community, and teacher. The source of the significant acculturation effect was determined using Tukey's HSD test, which revealed that high acculturated students rated mother higher than did the medium or low acculturated students. They also rated friend higher than did low acculturated students. The low acculturated students rated oldest person in community and teacher higher than did medium acculturated students, and both ranked them higher than did high acculturated students. Low acculturated students also rated counselor/psychologist higher than did high or medium acculturated students.

Interpretation of findings: Atkinson et al. (1990) state that the results of low acculturated students giving higher ratings to counselor/psychologists than medium and high acculturated students was not as hypothesized and in direct conflict with the Atkinson and Gim (1989) results. The authors suggest that the different results may be due to the different dependent measures used in the studies, i.e., that Atkinson and Gim (1989) assessed attitudes toward mental health services while this study asked students to assume they had a problem and to rank the providers they would be willing to see for it. The authors suggest that, while low acculturated students may have less positive attitudes in general about seeking help, they may wish to see a person of authority once they acknowledge a problem. The high acculturated students may have more positive attitudes toward Western style methods of help but may assign less credibility to counselors than do the low acculturated students. As

support for this idea, the authors mention that in the Atkinson and Gim (1989) study, the subscale for confidence in the ability of the professional to help was the only one for which there was not a direct relationship with level of acculturation.

The authors suggest that given the higher rankings for friend than for counselor/psychologist, counseling centers may need to increase efforts to inform Asian American students that counselors are trained and available to help with personal concerns. If future research confirms the differences found in this study, they suggest this has implications for how counseling centers promote their services for both traditional and acculturated students.

Questions remaining: One concern with this study is generalizability, which the authors point out may not be merited since the population studied was college students. However, they seem to still suggest that to some extent the results may be reflective of the population as a whole.

Another concern relates to the method in which the rank ordering of help providers was treated. The students were asked to rank order only three of the 11 help provider options. This resulted in losing important information about the students' attitudes toward all sources of help. In addition, given that only three of the 11 sources were ranked, a score of 0 was assigned to all those not ranked. This method is questionable in that a score was assigned that students did not assign themselves. The values of the dependent variables would have had more meaning if each provider had been ranked and received an actual score.

Asian American Students' Severity of Problems and Willingness to Seek Help from

University Counseling Centers

Research problem: Solberg, Ritsma, Davis, Tata, & Jolly (in press) used a method similar to Gim et al. (1990) to assess the willingness of Asian American college students to see a counselor. However, the authors extended the work of Gim et al. (1990) by examining whether previous counseling experience increases the likelihood of seeking help from a counselor in the future. The authors also hypothesized that women would be more likely to indicate willingness to seek help than men.

Methods: A random sample of 1,300 Asian American students at a midwestern university was mailed the survey instrument. Out of 705 returned surveys, 596 responses were selected for this study due to their falling into a major ethnic group for which there were at least 75 survey responses. The ethnic breakdown of study participants was: 135 Chinese Americans, 138 Korean Americans, 107 Filipino, and 77 Taiwan Americans. Thus, unlike Gim et al. (1990) who surveyed an entire university population, this was a representative sample randomly selected. In addition, there were differences in the ethnic groups included in each of the studies. Gim et al. (1990) surveyed Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Southeast Asian Americans, thus, there was overlap of only the Chinese, Filipino, and Korean American populations in both studies.

Like Gim et al. (1990), Solberg et al. (in press) used a modified version of the Personal Problems Inventory (Cash, Begley, McCown, & Weise, 1975) that included 22 problem severity items. Of the 24 items used by Gim et al. (1990), four

were dropped after student leaders expressed concern over the clarity and cultural appropriateness of the items, and two additional items were added. Students were asked to indicate how much of problem each of the 22 concerns was for them on a four-point scale and then to indicate their willingness to see a counselor for the problem. Students were also asked whether they had ever sought counseling from the university counseling center.

Analyses and results: As described in Chapter Three, factor analysis was used to consolidate the 22 problem concern/willingness to see a counselor ratings into three areas: academic, interpersonal, and substance abuse. In response to the question regarding previous counseling experience, eight percent of the students indicated that they had sought personal counseling at the university counseling center.

A $2 \times 2 \times 4$ MANOVA was conducted to assess the relationship between gender, counseling experience, ethnicity, problem concerns, and willingness to see a counselor. Results indicated a main effect for previous counseling experience. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed that the previous counseling effect was related to willingness to seek help for academic, interpersonal, and substance abuse concerns. An examination of the means indicated that previous counseling experience was related to higher willingness to seek help ratings for these three concern areas. The Bartlett-Box method was used to review the homogeneity of variances for the previous counseling experience comparisons. This indicated that there was more variability in the responses among those who had sought counseling than for those

who had not.

Interpretation of findings: Those students who had received previous counseling indicated higher willingness to seek help for academic, interpersonal, and substance abuse concerns. However, given the variance in responses in the previous counseling group, the authors interpret this as suggesting that many of the students who had sought previous counseling might not seek these services again. It is also important to note that, unlike Gim et al. (1990), the results did not indicate that gender had any effect on willingness to see a counselor. Overall, the authors suggest that outreach efforts targeted toward Asian American students may result in students being willing to seek help for academic, interpersonal, and substance abuse difficulties. However, the authors caution that these efforts should be focused on programming that is culturally responsive since the results of this study indicated that some students who had sought counseling previously were less likely to indicate a willingness to see a counselor in the future.

Questions remaining: An important aspect of this study was the consideration of previous counseling experience. Atkinson et al. (1990) suggested that a limitation of their study, which found an inverse relation between acculturation and willingness to seek help, may have been the operation of a sampling bias in which individuals with previous counseling experience may have been overrepresented. Thus, they suggested that actual counseling utilization rates should be included in future examinations of willingness to seek counseling help. This study was able to add this dimension; however, it would have provided a deeper understanding of the issue if it

had also examined the relationship of acculturation level to previous counseling experience.

Establishing Credibility Among Asian American Student Populations

Research problem: As part of the larger study by Solberg et al. (in press) described above, students written comments about their college experiences were analyzed (Solberg, Davis, & Ritsma, in press). The goal was to identify additional concerns or issues that may not have been included in the quantitative assessment strategies used by Gim et al. (1990) and Solberg et al. (in press).

Methods: A random sample of 1,300 Asian American students at a midwestern university was mailed a survey instrument that included the quantitative measures described above in Solberg et al. (in press), as well as an open section at the end of the survey for students to provide comments. Out of the 596 surveys used in the Solberg et al. (in press) study, a total of 136 students provided written responses.

Analyses and results: A preliminary analysis of this qualitative data was conducted by categorizing the responses into three general areas, one of which was identified as "attitudes toward seeking help." A total of 31 of the 136 responses was found to express attitudes related to help-seeking. The responses were categorized into two areas: attitudes toward the university counseling center or toward counseling in general; and students' beliefs in solving problems without professional assistance. Of the 19 responses that reflected attitudes about the university's counseling services, 47% reflected interest in using the services if they were needed

or felt it was important to have them available for others; and 37% indicated they would never use the counseling center or seek help in general. Of the 12 responses that addressed solving problems without professional help, students indicated that they would solve problems by themselves, would go to family or friends but not strangers, or were concerned about confidentiality in seeing a professional counselor.

Interpretation of findings: As with the qualitative findings related to problem concerns described in Chapter Three, these responses provide additional insight into the attitudes of Asian American college students regarding help-seeking. The responses of those who stated they would not use counseling services tend to support the hypothesis that underutilization of services is due to the Asian culture's value of maintaining honor by not discussing problems outside the family as well as the stigma and shame that the culture associates with mental health problems (Toupin, 1980). However, nearly half of the responses reflected positive attitudes toward seeking help, thereby supporting other studies described in this thesis in which many Asian American students indicated positive attitudes toward counseling and willingness to seek help for their problems.

Questions remaining: These findings provide deeper insight into Asian American college students' attitudes about either seeking or not seeking help from a counseling center. While the qualitative data were not subjected to a more thorough content analysis and to tests of interrater reliability and agreement, the data do provide a basis for future quantitative studies to further address issues pertaining to help-seeking.

Asian American College Students: It Is Time to Reach Out

Research problem: Solberg, Choi, Ritsma, and Jolly (1993) replicated the work of Atkinson et al. (1990) with significant modification. Similar to Atkinson et al. (1990), the authors were interested in assessing the rank order preferences of Asian American college students for university and non-university sources of help and in evaluating the responses with regard to acculturation differences. Solberg et al. (1993) hypothesized that less acculturated students would be more likely than acculturated students to give higher rankings for counseling centers and other university sources of support.

Methods: A random sample of 1,300 students at a midwestern university was mailed a survey as part of a larger study investigating mental health issues among Asian American college students. Out of 705 returned surveys, 596 responses were selected for this study due to their falling into a major ethnic group for which there were at least 75 survey responses. The ethnic breakdown of study participants was: 135 Chinese Americans, 138 Korean Americans, 107 Filipino, and 77 Taiwan American.

Students were asked to evaluate a list of help-seeking sources by referring to a list of interpersonal issues, described above in Solberg et al. (in press), that were immediately preceding the help-seeking sources list. Students were asked to keep these issues in mind and to rate on a three-point scale (1=unlikely, 2=maybe, 3=likely) how likely they would be to seek help from two lists of help providers. The first list included 13 non-university sources of support: father, counselor, friend,

mother, psychologist, sisters, medical doctor, brothers, depend on self, relatives, teachers, religious leader, and community elder. The second list included 17 university sources of support: faculty member, academic advisor, ombudsman, counseling center, career services center, student organization, minority student affairs office, YMCA, church group, financial aid office, health center, office of international student affairs, residence hall director, resident assistant, dean of students, peer advisors.

To measure acculturation, five items were selected from the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale, which related to language preference, peer group affiliation, and self-identification. Items were rated on a five-point scale with 1 indicating low identification with the majority culture and 5 indicating high identification with the majority culture. High and low acculturated groups were created by summing the five items and dividing at the median.

Analyses and results: Since the assumption of normal distribution was not met, due to skewed responses to sources of help-seeking, the parametric procedures of MANOVA or ANOVA were not used. Instead, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance by ranks was used to assess whether cultural identity was related to likelihood of using university and nonuniversity sources of support. Results showed that students with high majority culture identification indicated more likelihood of using friends and peer advisors to deal with interpersonal concerns than students with low identification with the majority culture. However, the low acculturated students indicated greater likelihood than the high

acculturated students of using a religious leader or community elder from the nonuniversity sources of support and, from the university sources of support, student organizations affiliated with their ethnic group, church groups, and other registered student organizations. While the results did not reveal a significant difference between high and low acculturated students regarding ratings for seeking help from mental health providers, the students with low identification with the majority culture consistently rated more willingness to seek help from a counselor, psychologist, or counseling center than did the high acculturated students.

Interpretation of findings: The authors suggest that targeting outreach services to counseling centers and student organizations may have an impact on less acculturated Asian American students, because the results of this study suggest that these students may not be as stigmatized to seek help for interpersonal concerns as once thought. While these students did highly rank community elders and religious leaders as sources of help, which are well-known sources of help for this population, the low acculturated students also expressed preferences for seeking help from a variety of university sources of support. Thirty-seven percent of low acculturated students indicated willingness to seek help from counseling centers, which was slightly higher than the high acculturated students, of which 34% indicated willingness to seek help from this source of support. This supports the Atkinson et al. (1990) results that less acculturated students were more likely to indicate willingness to seek help from counselors for problems.

Questions remaining: It does seem important to note that for non-university

sources of support, both high and low acculturated groups ranked friend, self, father, mother, brothers, and sisters more highly than they did counselor or psychologist. For university sources of support, however, both groups ranked the counseling center more highly than any other source of support. This suggests that the important issue may not be differences between high and low acculturated students, but rather from whom all Asian American students are most inclined to seek help when needed.

Summary

Four approaches were used to measure students' attitudes toward help-seeking in these eight studies. Atkinson et al. (1984), Atkinson et al. (1990), and Solberg et al. (1993) had students rank order the professional and non-professional help providers they would utilize for a problem. Atkinson et al. (1984) and Atkinson and Gim (1989) measured general attitudes toward mental health providers, not students' willingness to actually seek help for a real problem. Gim et al. (1990) and Solberg, Ritsma et al. (in press) asked students about a range of problems they were actually experiencing and their willingness to see a counselor for each identified problem. Solberg, Davis, and Ritsma (in press) used a qualitative approach, in which students expressed a range of attitudes about their willingness to use a counseling center or other sources of help.

Overall, there were no consistent findings across all of the studies, yet a number of different issues have emerged from the various studies that are important to consider. From the studies of general attitudes toward mental health providers, it

appears that Asian Americans have less positive attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help than Anglo students and that low acculturated Asian American students have less positive attitudes than highly acculturated Asian American students (Atkinson and Gim, 1989; Atkinson et al., 1984). However, the results of other studies directly conflicted with these findings, suggesting that low acculturated Asian American students were more willing to see a counselor for a problem or ranked counselor/psychologist more highly than did high acculturated students (Atkinson et al., 1990; Gim et al., 1990; Solberg et al., 1993).

Two variables that appeared to affect willingness to see a counselor were previous counseling experience and gender. Students who had previous counseling were more willing to see a counselor for their problems (Solberg et al., in press); and women were more willing to see a counselor than men (Gim et al., 1990).

Finally, two studies showed that students were more likely to seek help for vocational/educational problems than for emotional/interpersonal problems (Gim et al., 1990; Webster and Fretz, 1978); while, overall, students still preferred to seek help from friends and relatives before using a counseling center or other mental health care provider (Atkinson et al., 1984; Atkinson et al., 1990; Solberg et al., 1993; and Webster and Fretz, 1978).

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter will briefly summarize the findings of the studies discussed in Chapters 3 and 4; discuss the implications for counseling centers; and suggest directions for future research.

Summary of Findings

The findings presented in this thesis have centered on five major areas: types of problems; attitudes toward help-seeking; and effects of acculturation, ethnicity, previous counseling, and gender. Each area will be briefly summarized in this section.

Types of problems: Academic/vocational concerns appear to be the most consistently rated concern among Asian American college students. Financial concerns also appear to be important. In most cases, both of these concerns were more highly rated than personal/emotional concerns. The key question that arises from these studies is whether academic/vocational concerns are truly the students' primary concerns or whether personal problems are being manifested through concerns that may be more culturally acceptable to experience.

Attitudes toward help-seeking: In keeping with the above-mentioned findings, it appears that students are more likely to seek help from a counselor for academic/vocational concerns than for personal/emotional problems. However, in

all cases in which professional and non-professional help sources were ranked, friends and relatives were more highly rated than counseling centers or other mental health care providers. The key questions that arise from these findings are: 1) whether students are presenting academic concerns in place of underlying personal concerns, as addressed above; and 2) the degree to which friends and relatives are being appropriately sought for help first.

Acculturation: Some researchers hypothesized that acculturation level would have an effect on problems and attitudes toward help-seeking. Conflicting results have been found in this area, with one study showing that low acculturated students held less positive attitudes toward mental health providers, while other studies show that less acculturated students expressed more willingness to see a counselor than high acculturated students. One study suggests that low acculturated students are experiencing more problems than high acculturated students. The key issue that arises from these findings is the need to resolve the conflicting results in order to determine if special outreach efforts are needed for one group or the other.

Ethnicity: Most of the studies have examined whether there are differences among Asian ethnic groups regarding problems and help-seeking; while a few studies have looked for differences between Asian and Anglo students. Regarding the latter, there do appear to be differences. Results indicate that Asian American students have less positive attitudes toward counseling than Anglo students; and they tend to overendorse educational/vocational concerns and underendorse personal concerns in comparison with Anglo students. In most cases, studies did not find

significant differences among Asian ethnic groups regarding problems experienced or willingness to seek help; however, one study did find that Southeast Asian Americans indicated higher severity of concern ratings than other Asian ethnic groups. The key issue that arises from the discussion of differences between Asian Americans and Anglos is the need to keep in mind the differing values that may occur in different cultures. These values can produce different evaluations of problems and attitudes toward help and, hence, what may be considered a problem in Western culture may not be viewed as a problem in the Asian culture.

Previous counseling experience: Only two studies examined the effects of previous counseling on problems or help-seeking attitudes of Asian American college students. Results indicated that Asian American students with previous counseling experience: 1) were less likely to endorse academic/vocational concerns as most important; 2) reported higher concerns about substance abuse; and 3) were more likely to seek help for academic, interpersonal, and substance abuse concerns than students without previous counseling experience. With only two studies reporting these findings, the key issue here is that there is a need for more research to better understand the effects of previous counseling.

Gender: Most studies looked for gender effects, with the common hypothesis that women are more willing to seek help than men. The results however were not consistent. While one study found that women had higher academic concerns than men, another similar study found no differences between genders. The same was true for help-seeking, with some studies reporting more willingness to see a

counselor among women than men, while other studies found no differences.

Implications for Counseling Centers

While there is still more to understand about the problems and help-seeking attitudes of Asian American college students, the nine studies discussed in this thesis, when examined together, provide information that university counseling centers can use to guide future efforts for this population. This section will address the types of counseling services and outreach efforts that may be useful for university counseling centers to consider in order to provide more culturally responsive services.

Types of services: Given the finding that Asian Americans seem to have greater academic/vocational concerns than interpersonal concerns, Tracey et al. (1986) suggested that counseling centers promote their services for addressing academic concerns, but use this as an opportunity to indirectly help with personal or emotional problems as well. This seems to be the primary issue to resolve regarding counseling services for Asian American college students. Additional research needs to be done to resolve whether or not Asian American students are in fact experiencing more personal distress than they are indicating, as suggested by Tracey et al. (1986). Yet, even if they are, to use academic or career counseling to indirectly address other possible underlying personal issues raises the ethical concern of informed consent. Counselors still need to proceed with caution in working with these students on the issues they present for counseling. Yet, another consideration for counseling centers is that academic/vocational issues may be genuine concerns for Asian American students, given the culture's high value on academic

achievement, and this may be creating additional stressors for these students. Thus, an important role for counseling centers is to help not only with the actual academic/career skill development but with managing the stress that goes along with these concerns.

While academic/vocational concerns were rated highly in most studies, many other issues were also identified as concerns, which counseling centers should be prepared to address, such as interpersonal concerns, experiences with racism and discrimination, and bicultural conflicts. While many concerns fall under the normal domain of counseling center activities; others, such as financial concerns, may not seem to be a part of counseling centers. Yet counseling centers may want to consider expanding their services to serve a case manager role in helping Asian American students negotiate the university system, e.g., dealing with the financial aid office or filing complaints of discrimination, while also helping the students manage the stress and other feelings they may be experiencing with these difficulties.

Outreach efforts: Given that most students ranked friends and relatives more highly than counseling centers as a source of help, one important consideration for counseling centers is to conduct different outreach efforts for these potential help providers. The purpose of this is twofold: 1) to educate friends and relatives on how to effectively provide support for a range of problems; and 2) to help friends and relatives have a better knowledge of when the student should be referred for professional counseling help and to have a list of appropriate referrals. This type of outreach could be done through informational mailings, special meetings with parents

when they visit campus, and through the development of peer counseling training programs.

Directions for Future Research

In discussing the findings of the studies reviewed in this thesis, a number of concerns have been raised that need to be resolved through additional research. This section will discuss these concerns and suggest directions for future research.

Comprehensive scale addressing problems: Given the qualitative findings described in this thesis, it appears that the existing quantitative methods to measure problems may not be comprehensive enough to include all of the concerns facing Asian American students. Therefore, a new scale should be developed that incorporates the concerns of the qualitative findings, such as racism, discrimination, intraethnic conflicts, and bicultural difficulties.

Academic/vocational versus emotional problems: One implication in some of the studies is that Asian Americans express more concern for academic/vocational concerns but may actually be experiencing underlying personal concerns that they are not comfortable expressing. This issue needs to be resolved through future research, either through the development of a scale that can distinguish more clearly between the two types of concerns or through qualitative research, such as interviews, to more thoroughly investigate the underlying issues that may be involved. While this may seem similar to the above mentioned scale, the primary emphasis here would be to get beyond self-reports, since the issue may be that Asian American students will not self-identify personal concerns. This seems to be an

especially important issue to resolve because the perpetuation of this assumption by Tracey et al. (1986), if untrue, would be culturally inappropriate and would undermine efforts of counseling centers to achieve credibility with this population.

Methodological inconsistencies: Among the studies described in this thesis, different measures have been used to address problems and help-seeking attitudes. Different samples have also been used in the studies. Given that there were a number of conflicting findings, such as the effects for acculturation and gender, an important goal for future research would be to utilize more consistent measures.

Assessing seriousness of problems: The methods used in some of the studies do not allow for an assessment of the seriousness of a problem and whether it warrants help from a counselor or help from a friend. Additional research should be done to develop a scale that can weight varying concerns to give a better idea of whether or not students are seeking professional help when necessary.

Overall, the findings discussed in this thesis have provided important information for counseling centers to use in developing culturally responsive services for Asian American college students. However, the findings also suggest that there is much that is still unknown about this population that needs to be addressed through future research.

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