



Review of William Ming Liu, Derek Kenji Iwamoto, and Mark H. Chae (eds.), *Culturally Responsive Counseling with Asian American Men* (New York: Routledge, 2010) xxi + 346 pp.

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This is the fifth volume in a continuing series from Routledge devoted to issues of interest to scholars in Men's Studies, as well as to psychologists, counselors, psychotherapists, social workers, and clergy. I wrote a review of volume 3 in this series, which was published in JMMS 4(1). At least seven more volumes are projected in the series.

The 24 male and female contributors to the 16 chapters in this volume have done a consistently fine job. The writing is clear and lively, and well supported by academic references and standard counseling theory, especially cognitive behavioral practices. Each chapter is illustrated throughout with a specific case study. Some of the cases are real, and some are manufactured. The final chapter in the book, "On Becoming an Asian American Man" by Jeffrey Scott Mio (son of a pre-WWII Japanese immigrant who was interred during the war), is an autobiographical essay about growing through the confusion of hybridity into a comfortable and mature, self-valuing identity. Since one of the conventions that holds these essays together is the case studies associated with each chapter, to complete this book with such a strong autobiographical piece is most fitting.

Asian Americans, comprised of over 30 specific ethnic groups, presently number 14 million in the United States, a number that is expected to triple within the next five years. Similar proportional statistics hold true for England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Yet oddly, in my own ten years as a psychotherapist in private practice in New Zealand, I only saw two Asian clients, and only taught three Asian therapists-in-training. The Asian community is private (see the issue of "face" as discussed later) and is unfamiliar with the usefulness of counseling as it is defined in the West, and its members are often struggling to acculturate, assimilate, and even survive, to the point that there is little time to call on non-Asian professionals for help and support.

There is no overt discussion of spirituality in this book that would automatically qualify it for review in *Journal of Men, Masculinities, and Spiritualities*. But four chapters in particular lend themselves to themes often discussed within the domain of existential spiritualities, and it is to these four themes that I will devote the rest of this review. My "take" on existential spiritualities is very much informed by Irvin D. Yalom's *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980).

To begin his chapter on Meaninglessness, Yalom quotes an anonymous suicide note:

Imagine a happy group of morons who are engaged in work. They are carrying bricks in an open field. As soon as they have stacked all the bricks at one end of the field, they proceed to transport them to the opposite end. This continues without stop and everyday of every year they are busy doing the same thing. One day one of the morons stops long enough to ask himself what he is doing. He wonders what purpose there is in carrying the bricks. And from that instant on he is not quite as content with his occupation as he had been before.

I am the moron who wonders why he is carrying the bricks. (Yalom, 1980, p. 419, citing Cantril & Bumstead, 1960, p. 308)

Chapter 14 of *Counseling*, by Y. Joel Wong and Mai-Lin Poon, is entitled “Counseling Asian American Men Who Demonstrate Suicidal Behavior.” The case study exemplar is a 25-year-old Vietnamese American man in a midwestern city in the United States. Asian/Pacific Islander Americans of retirement age and older have the highest rate of completed suicides in the U.S., and American college students of the same ethnic grouping report more suicidal ideation than their Anglo counterparts. The four most common reasons given in the chapter for the suicidal activity among Asian American males is (a) family conflict, (b) racism, (c) masculinity concerns, and (d) the “model minority” stereotype, that is, that Asian Americans are the “foreigners among us” whom Anglos find the least offensive (p. 287). Repeated studies have shown that, in contrast to White American men, Asian American men are often stereotyped as being asexual, effeminate, nerdy, passive, and physically unattractive (p. 289). For some, it is only a small jump from there to suicidal ideation, particularly when they have not had the opportunity to construct and claim some sense of meaning and problem-resolution in their lives. The chapter ends with eight recommendations for specific ways of working with suicidal Asian American male clients.

The opposite of meaninglessness is meaning-making, a form of spirituality to which many people turn when the doctrines and dogmas of organized religion have lost their appeal. The process of making meaning within the relationship between counselor and client is the subject of Chapter 3, “A Domain- and Context-Specific View of Acculturation: Implications for Counseling Asian American Men,” by Matthew J. Miller and Robert H. Lim. The chapter focuses in particular on issues of “face”—one’s social standing or representation within social contexts. “Men are traditionally viewed as the primary leaders or figures representing [the collectivist family group] and, by default, are responsible for their and their group’s positive and negative actions” (p. 21, citing D. Sue, 1990). When an individual, a family, or even an extended family, suffers some form of shame that becomes known to the wider world, it is usually the male head-of-family who becomes the public carrier of that shame. The work of the therapist is to support the Asian American client to contain levels of loss of face so that constructive interpretations can be derived from the crisis, thus allowing the family to maintain a healthy cohesion, and the male client to structure a more satisfying sense of self-worth.

Within the wider field of Men’s Studies, the issue of “coming out” as gay, lesbian, or bisexual has often been described as one of the most important spiritual journeys in life. Chapter 11, “Sexual Orientation Identity Development and Mental Health Experiences of Gay and Bisexual Asian American Men: Implications for

Culturally Competent Counseling,” by Kevin L. Nadal, walks mental health workers through the complexities of being gay or bisexual within communities where homosexuality is unspoken of, and a whole family’s future is determined by children and grandchildren. The subject of the case study is a young Filipino American man who is in relationship with a White American man at the university where both are students. Before continuing the case study further, the author cautions that:

there is a presumed “universal” LGBT experience. Indeed, multicultural scholars have suggested that most LGBT research concentrates primarily on White American gay man... However, both of these models [Cass (1979) and Troiden (1989)] are based on research samples of gay White man and do not mention how race, ethnicity, or gender may affect one’s sexual orientation identity development processes. (pp. 215-216)

The author then summarizes “the very few studies” that have focused on LGBT Asian Americans, and speaks of the importance of a therapist understanding the intersection of sexual orientation identity, racial identity, and ethnic identity when working with gay or bisexual Asian American clients (p. 225). Much of the previous writing on gay identity development, and indeed, on “coming out” as a spiritual process, has limited relevance when viewed through the construction of Asian American cultural needs and values. A series of culturally responsive interventions are then offered.

The fourth category that makes this book useful for those interested in the spirituality of their clients is liminality. I first learned the term when reading *The Priest in Community*, by Urban T. Holmes, III (1978). Holmes defines one critical role of the religious priest, drawing on the history of shamanism, as being to go to the dangerous or unknown places “at the edge” (Greek: *limen*, meaning the place where the harbor meets the open sea) to discover how dangerous it is there, and how one can be there and remain safe. Asian Americans often stand at the limens of identity, not knowing whether they are safe, or how to be, and it is the counselor’s job to go there with them and teach them self-care in uncharted waters. This struggle to be safe at the limens is particularly apparent in Jeffrey Scott Mio’s closing autobiographical chapter.

For a long time, most of us in the counseling profession relied on the writings of David Sue and Derald Wing Sue for our knowledge of how to work with the identity journeys of Asian American clients, gained through reading their book *Counseling the Culturally Different*. Rarely did Sue and Sue adopt a specific hermeneutic of gender in their seminal texts. For that reason alone, *Culturally Responsive Counseling with Asian American Men* is a most welcome addition to the growing field of working therapeutically with men from many cultures.

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