

Awakening your Authentic Self: Enhancing Multicultural Awareness through Interactions with Horses

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Abstract

Purpose: Our creation of the workshop is informed by the recognition of the lack of attention in the literature to multicultural family therapists' struggles and strengths, as well as the importance of therapists' cultural awareness in the therapeutic context (Banaja, 2019).

Design/methodology/Approach: This article describes an equine facilitated experiential workshop developed by the authors to facilitate deepened understandings of clinicians' struggles and strengths.

Findings: The experiential, equine facilitated workshop shed light on multi-cultural awareness through allowing the therapists to intentionally explore their struggles of adapting their multicultural self with their therapeutic knowledge of family therapy. This workshop also helped multicultural therapists to discover and utilize their authentic resources. To do so, we invited the participants to examine and process their unique multicultural elements of the self, (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, knowledge, etc.), in relation to the therapeutic process.

Originality/value: Being aware of personal epistemology can allow therapists to process how their personal and cultural aspects of self are present in their work with clients. Therapists then can further their curiosity about their cultural presence and influence in the therapeutic context and consider ways they can utilize these cultural aspects as therapists.

Keywords: multicultural, authenticity, self-of-the- therapist, cultural awareness, equine facilitated workshop, therapist's identity, training,

Introduction

It all started with the equine class that was offered by my co-author (SG) in my family therapy graduate program. I (RB) registered in the intro to equine assisted therapy class as an elective for my PhD studies. I picked that class because I was curious about the idea of putting together animals and therapy. I wanted to know more about the relationship and connections between, to me then, two different and incompatible worlds, therapy and horses. The professor of this class, Dr. Green (SG), was clear that the class is experiential, meaning that a big part of it depends on the interaction with horses as well as exploring and discussing the meaning of students' unique individualistic experiences in classes regularly conducted at a barn. All the students' views, explorations, and experiences were accountable as a learning experience.

I fell in love with the equine facilitated therapy when I started to absorb the richness of the encounter with horses within the therapeutic context, and also when I started observing how this work has benefited me personally and professionally. This made me not only interested in the topic, but also wonder how we can benefit from this magical relationship in different ways. Not only was experiencing the equine class within my family therapy program an eye opener for my understanding of family systems, and of myself as a therapist, it also deepened my understanding of the therapist/client relationship.

The relationship between animals and humans is not new. I am assuming that at one point we all have heard stories of ancients around the world and their animal partners—from horses, dogs, cats, dolphins, or even monkeys. But utilizing this relationship into the mental health field is fairly new. In her research about animal assisted therapy, Walsh (2009a) discusses the development of research in this area. She notes that there is a rising research body about the vast benefits of animal assisted therapy and its contribution to well-being, and how this

can possibly aid in constructing valuable clinical interventions. In a different paper, Walsh (2009b), continues the discussion about the benefits of human/animal relationship, this time highlighting the benefits of animal/human relationships in a family system.

This article offers an experiential clinical training approach that draws from Walsh's (2009a; 2009b) attention to the potential benefits of human/animal relationship. However, this article extends these ideas to explore the possible benefits for multicultural clinicians in the field of family therapy. As a multicultural family therapist myself, the idea for this training came to me as I noticed that it was not easy for me to build my therapeutic identity. In particular, the training that I received as a family therapist at times stood against my personal identity and vice versa. Attempting to integrate two differing world views and two different epistemologies made me interested in juxtaposing them in relation to who I really am as a person and/or as a therapist, which then led me to think of the multicultural therapist's authenticity. With the emerging research about benefits of animal assisted therapy, I could not find a better medium than horses to help therapists to become self-aware of their multicultural self. Green (2019, 2018) described the rationale for partnering with horses in supervision and training as she explained how her students experienced a shift in awareness toward their identity as therapists through working with horses. This experiential framework, developed through the equine assisted family therapy courses developed by SG, provided the foundation for the development of the training described here.

As a PhD student trying to figure who I am as a therapist, I (RB) wondered about what I took from my culture as a therapist—mining for beliefs, ideas, values, words, traditions—but I didn't know what it is that I utilized from my culture. I realized more recently and through being part of this training, that I did not have an answer to that question because the answer is not necessary a particular thing. I realized that being present, mindful, and aware of the process is being authentic—is being yourself. I recognized that just as techniques are considered only a part of family therapy, cultural traits are only a part of personal culture and world view. But to balance the knowledge of family therapy with cultural beliefs and at the same time be sensitive to clients' worldviews, therapists need to draw their own boundaries and with their own understandings, awareness, and flexibility they can find ways to ground their own authentic self. And when they do, then the focus can be toward sensitivity toward the client. Therapist's clarity regarding their own identity can then allow them to welcome, rather than be threatened by, client's differences.

Teaching and learning such a unique and sensitive topic as the therapist's authenticity and cultural awareness is not easy to deliver nor to absorb. However, through intentional interactions with horses, participants were able to safely address different aspects of themselves personally and professionally. Much like utilizing a poem, a story, or a metaphor in therapy can make it safe for the client to explore a difficult topic, the equine facilitated training model made it safe for the therapists to explore and handle this delicate topic. The metaphoric nature of this work allowed the participants to make personalized meaning of their own experiences. Through this metaphoric work, the participants had the opportunity to create embodied understandings of their multicultural selves and were offered a unique way of understanding and absorbing new ideas.

This workshop invited participants to acknowledge rather than contain the multicultural understandings they bring with them into therapy sessions—bringing curiosity to the ways they handle challenges and honor their sometimes competing world views. Through experiential activities involving horses, therapists were encouraged to attend to their authentic ways of handling complex clinical situations and to explore personal and cultural resources that can be utilized in the therapeutic context.

The Significance of Multicultural Awareness for Family Therapists

Combining two different cultures, values, or points of view can be challenging; equally challenging is the blending of Western knowledge with non-Western cultures (Banaja, 2019). According to Shurina-Egan (1986), graduate students can experience confusion and frustration through the learning process, especially when they are introduced to new ideas or perceptions. This frustration seems to be true for family therapy students especially if the new understandings differ significantly from their original epistemology, whether a different culture, language, belief system, or philosophy. Increasing students' awareness of these challenges can be the first step in developing effective ways to manage epistemological contradictions.

Several studies have explored the importance of therapists' cultural awareness in relation to the therapeutic relationship, emphasizing the importance of family therapists being culturally aware of their own assumptions (Mojita, Falconier, & Huebner, 2014; Pedersen, 2009). In the following section we will present notions of multicultural awareness in relation to neutrality, authenticity, and sensitivity.

Therapist's Awareness and Neutrality

Cultural self-awareness is critical when working cross-culturally (Taylor & Smith, 2011). According to Baker (1999), studies have shown that therapists' racist and discriminatory attitudes may slip into a blind spot; therapists who develop cultural awareness expand the size of the lens through which they view the therapeutic relationship and thus reduce this potential blind spot. A cultural blind spot here can be seen as taking sides without even being aware of it. This means that being culturally aware expands the chance for therapists to be neutral and to avoid taking sides in the therapeutic context. Cecchin (1987) clarified the meaning of neutrality in the therapeutic context by stating, "I propose that we describe neutrality as the creation of a state of curiosity in the mind of a therapist" (p. 1). In order for therapists to remain neutral, they must be aware of their position as therapists and be mindful of their personal agenda. Lopez-Bemstein (1997) declared that in order for therapists to be culturally self-aware, they need to look within and question their own personal agenda, including their biases, values, and expectations.

Therapists' Awareness and Authenticity

The term authentic means known to be real and genuine and is further defined as "representing one's true nature or beliefs" (dictionary.com). Authenticity in the therapeutic context is being true to yourself in relation to the client in front of you. Rogers (as cited in Lietaer, 1993) explained, "Genuineness in therapy means that the therapist is his (sic) actual self during his encounter with his client . . . This involves self-awareness" (p. 1). This means that authenticity in the therapeutic context is not studied separately from the relationship of the therapist and the client. Through this lens, authenticity is considered a way of being and relating rather than a distinct personal trait of a therapist. Donaghy (2002), explaining authenticity from an existential point of view, states that therapists who focus on how they constantly change and take different directions are practicing therapy in an authentic way. Being an authentic therapist means being constantly aware of self, and thus, the self-of-the-therapist-work is a continuous process that never ends.

Donaghy (2002) states that the more therapists are not themselves in their relationships with clients, putting up no professional mask nor personal cover-ups, the more their clients appear to benefit from therapy. Authenticity here is not only viewed as a way of communicating to clients but also a tool for healing and change. Authenticity can also be viewed in relation to empathy. As Dudley and Walker (2003) clarify, "Empathic interpretation and authentic self-expression by the therapist are distinct, yet inseparable, elements in a successful therapeutic process" (p. 9). While being authentic in the therapeutic relationship with clients helps the therapist to empathically understand the client, self-awareness and cultural awareness help the therapist to understand themselves and to be authentic in relation to their clients. Even when the client and therapist are from different backgrounds, cultural sensitivity can allow the therapist to be empathic. Similarly, Wieling, and Mittal (2002) note that incompatible differences between therapists and clients—in terms of gender, ethnicity, or other factors—cannot be easily fixed with clinical models, but they can be addressed by therapists committing to continually trying to understand the other's culture and challenging themselves and their perspectives in search of a wider outlook.

Therapists' Awareness and Sensitivity

In order for family therapists to develop cultural competency, they need to raise both their cultural awareness and sensitivity (McDowell, Fang, Yong, Khanna, Sherman, & Brownlee, 2006). Hardy and Laszloffy (1995) identified cultural awareness as a consciousness of the culture, and cultural sensitivity as a delicate and respectful responsiveness to this culture. Pedersen, Crethar, and Carlson (2008) underscore the importance of racial awareness as part of cultural sensitivity:

Whether we know it or not, we are all taught to assume certain things about who we are and how to behave. Most of these assumptions are unspoken but can be brought to a level of consciousness whereby we can articulate them. (p. 59)

Wiggins (2009) proposes that therapists can be better prepared to work with diverse clientele when they better understand their own cultural, spiritual, and religious views.

Multicultural Equine Facilitated Training

As Bermudez (1997) notes, “the key to learning is to focus on your experiences so that they can be translated into symbols or internal representations so that they can [be] meaning[full]” (p. 255). This training was developed to help therapists bring attention to their own personal epistemologies and to relate their unique cultural identities to their work as therapists. The training intentionally explored challenges therapists experience as a result of the intersection of their cultural background and their clinical work.

Experiential learning can take many forms, and learning that incorporates the organic, spontaneous use of the body offers participants access to embodied understandings of their internal processes. The second author (SG) has spent the past 10 years developing an equine facilitated training approach that incorporates horses within the learning and supervisory context (Green, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2019; Green, Rolleston, & Schroeder, 2018; Green, Schroeder, Rolleston, Penalva, & Judd, 2018). According to Green (2019) The goal of the equine facilitated training process is:

to create a context where students and supervisees can maintain an openness to learning about themselves, both personally and professionally, while interacting with horses in an experiential group setting. This requires a level of vulnerability and trust that is not unlike that which our clients experience in session.
(p. 150)

Participants are invited to engage with horses in simple but often personally challenging activities; finding ways to create collaboration with a 1,000 lb. prey animal often requires creativity and an ability to transcend one’s own fears. Trainees are asked to make note of their unique ways of responding to these challenges, and to examine how their responses to the horses reflect their typical ways of responding to others in their daily lives. Within this generative context, therapists-in-training can “explore their personal assumptions, examine their responses to the horses and to each other as well as the values that inform those responses, and experiment with new ways of relating through their interactions with the horses” (Green, 2019, p. 150)

As prey animals, horses are exquisitely sensitive to their immediate environment, noticing small changes in their surrounding context, as well as in non-verbal communication patterns, in order to readily assess danger. Horses intuitively read body language and are attuned to the most minute changes in those around them (equine or human). This hyper vigilance has allowed them to survive for thousands of years, and it makes them phenomenal partners in the process of enhancing therapist self-awareness. We have also found consistently over the years that simply being in the presence of these majestic, fascinating creatures inspires awe, curiosity, and a sense of wonder in our trainees.

Description of activity

For this particular training, our facilitators welcomed 8 participants to the workshop; all participants were from different cultural backgrounds. After welcoming all participants, we gathered in a circle under a massive banyan tree at the barn. Everyone introduced themselves and described what brought them to the workshop. A discussion ensued about therapists’ cultural background, and the relevance of culture in the therapeutic context was explored. The questions asked during the workshop were initiated to bring curiosity to the ways the participants handle and adapt their authentic multicultural self in sessions with clients, (e.g. What challenges do you experience from having both your culture and clinical knowledge with you in therapy sessions?). The participants responded spontaneously and organically to questions regarding this theme. As part of delving into their own sense of culture, participants were asked to think about aspects of their culture that they often bring to the therapy room; these aspects could be something precious and meaningful to them. The intent behind asking them this was to help them look for cultural aspects of their identity not as limitations but as resources to open up ways to find and honor their own assets.

To begin the activity (adapted from Faa-Thompson, 2012) facilitators handed an egg (hardboiled) to every participant, asking them to write, draw or somehow represent the multiple cultural aspects they bring with them to the therapy room. This activity gave the participants a chance to bring cultural awareness of their own personal

heritage to the foreground of their thinking. Participants were then handed a sticky note and were asked to think and write about the challenges that they experienced or were still experiencing in the therapy room due to the intersection between their clinical knowledge and their cultural beliefs. This allowed participants to acknowledge and explore the intersection between their personal and professional beliefs and biases. The participants were then asked to share and process what their responses, if they so desired. This process invited both introspection and a sense of sharing and vulnerability to the experience, creating an openness to the equine assisted activities to follow.

After completing this experience of identifying and discussing personal and professional aspects of cultural identity, the participants were introduced to our professional equine specialists (ES's) who then brought everyone to the paddock where the horses, Lalo and Cookie, were quietly grazing. After inviting participants to observe the horses for a few moments, the ES's explained some simple safety rules for working with the horses and we all entered the paddock. As the therapists began to mingle with the horses and discover their own comfort level in being in their presence, the facilitators briefly described the activity. Each participant was asked to place their sticky note along a simple obstacle course of plastic poles, pool noodles, hoola hoops, cones, etc. The notes described a challenge that they have experienced from being a multicultural therapist practicing in a Western clinical setting. They then were asked to place their egg (a representation of their cultural aspects and identities) on the horse in any way they chose, using a variety of items such as saddle pads, halters, lead ropes, towels, etc. Then they were invited to walk the horse through the obstacle course, ideally without allowing the egg to fall from the horse. This required the participants to find a way to invite the horse to cooperate with them in walking through the course while simultaneously monitoring the safety of their egg. Throughout this process, the ES was continually in close proximity, attending to both horse and human safety and interaction.

Participants were asked to be aware and fully present while they considered this exercise as a metaphor of what typically happens in the therapy room with clients. The instructions of the exercise were left relatively vague to open up potential meanings and to engage the creativity of the trainees.

Participants' Processes

Below we present transcripts from the audio-recorded training session, offering participants' voices while maintaining their confidentiality by using a pseudonym for each participant. The participants were from a wide range of different countries and continents (e.g. Russia, China, Brazil, Jamaica, Cuba, etc.). They were all from different cultures, countries, and religions. They all knew what a horse is, they all had some stories about horses. Each expressed interest in the topic of cultural awareness and they were fully engaged throughout the activity and discussions. During the workshop and specifically throughout the conversations before and after the activity, the participants were invited to process and make meaning of their own experiences. In the following section we explore the phases of the authenticity awakening process that participants experienced and expressed through the workshop. The participants articulated four different phases: differentiating, acknowledging, grounding, and defining who they are as multicultural therapists in the therapeutic context. By bringing forth cultural awareness and sensitivity, the participants expressed their understanding of their own authenticity in the therapeutic context and negotiated the emphasis of multicultural aspects of their self. Delving into these conversations allowed the participants to be aware and mindful of the identities they embrace as multicultural therapists.

Within the domain of differentiating, participants negotiated how they differentiate themselves from their clients as they discussed therapists' judgments in different ways. They then expressed acknowledgment of the challenges and struggles that they experienced as multicultural therapists. After that they discussed ways of grounding and balancing the differing components of their self and their clients. At the end of the workshop, the participants shared with each other the meaning and definition of authenticity for each of them as multicultural and relational beings.

Differentiating

In the early discussion that the participants engaged in prior to the horse activity, the participants discussed their way of differentiating themselves from their clients as an initial realization in therapeutic encounters—juxtaposing who they are in relation to their clients. They negotiated how they form an opinion about their client and how this opinion is a way of distinguishing their own epistemology from their clients'. For example, Sara

states, “being aware that the client is different than me, being curious about my judgment of the client, and trying to understand clients themselves is part of relating to clients.” Participants presented the idea of therapists’ judgment with an emphasis on therapists’ awareness of their own opinion. Bermudez (1997) stated:

It is clear that it is important for therapists to have assumptions about people and to have personal values. However, what is most important is to be aware of these biases and values and to acknowledge the way in which they transpire in the therapy room (p.266).

Some participants explained the efficacy of being aware and of recognizing their own judgments, cultural values, and biases in the therapy room. Nancy, one of the participants, processed what awareness can bring in the therapeutic context. She stated,

It gives you more options like ok here is my judgment. If you are aware of it and if you put it in your back pocket instead of fighting it, you can open yourself to a new option and think what you want to do with it. I have never thought about that, your focus now is not on judgment; now that you have acknowledged it, your focus can be on more.

Some participants took a step further, stating not only the benefits of being aware of their own judgments, but also explaining how they view judgments as a first step to identifying their biases and cultural values. They utilize their judgments as information or a primary signal to be able then to go forward and either change or reposition. Valery expressed how judgment can be useful for therapist as it can be considered as collecting information and with the client’s feedback a therapist can get a better understanding in relation to the client. Valery stated (while looking at one of the participants who was petting a cat that was in her lap during our conversation), “You don’t want the cat to bite you so you can know how much lighter or stronger you need to pet her, you take it as an opportunity to readjust for you”.

Acknowledging

During and after interacting with the horses, the participants started engaging in a deeper conversation that involved acknowledging being different, unique, and multicultural. Some participants openly expressed their struggles of being a minority as they shared the challenges and consequences that come with being a multicultural therapist. Gorgy opened up and processed what triggers her feelings as being a multicultural in the therapeutic context, stating,

I work in a rehab center with teens. Most of the team are Caucasian. One of the challenges is being judged as a minority so that something that I continuously struggle with. Sometimes I do sit back and not have my voice be heard because I feel like at times, I struggle of feeling less than.

Another participant continued the conversation about challenges that multicultural family therapists deal with. Expressing how therapists get judged too, based on the way they look,

Caiti stated, “There is a large difference of how people get treated based on the way they look.” Another participant (Adam) acknowledged his own struggle through the interaction with horses. Adam experienced some reluctance to engage with the horse as he noticed the horse using body language to maintain distance. Explaining how the knowledge of a particular culture can make him unconsciously prejudge based on this knowledge, Adam stated, “My knowledge of horses made me more aware of the danger. . . and I think I can see that in the therapy room where I can prejudge like I have seen this.”

Another participant, Nancy, also was trying to make the horse move forward through the obstacle course. She encouraged, joined, and cheered the horse to move, but the horse didn’t respond to her at the beginning. Suddenly Nancy looked at the obstacle course, changed her position, led the horse, and both walked together straight to the end of the obstacle course path. Following, Nancy explains her process of acknowledging her own way of considering both her challenges and resources through her experience with the horse.

Nancy: Our culture tells us don’t think of your challenges, think of your positives. But when I looked at my challenges (in the sticky note on the obstacle cores) I realized that when you do think of not only your values but also the challenges you will be able to balance and go forward.

This participant shared her experiential way of acknowledging and learning how being mindful of what is happening and what is present even if it is something challenging it helped her step forward.

Grounding

In the later discussion while still processing their experiences with the horses, the participants engaged in a much deeper conversation where they not only acknowledged their selves as multicultural therapists, but also added their culture and their clients to the equation. Some participants discussed ways they adapt their cultural influence with their knowledge and work as therapists, while other participants shared their ways of balancing their cultural background in relation to their client's culture. Pam, one of the participants, was processing how therapists can balance their own culture with being sensitive to the client's culture without losing their own cultural identity. She stated,

It resonates with me because of different gender orientation and sexual orientation. I struggle with it because my world view as a Christian is just contradict. And so, what that taught me is that I can still have my world view and be present with the client. Because I don't have to embrace what it is that you are. What I need is being present and deal with the presenting problem or the issue that you have. I mean I was talking to my husband about it and he was saying 'P. you don't have to; you just be there and do what you do nobody is saying change your world view you don't need to do that.'

The instructor replied to Pam saying, "and you didn't have to be perfectly aligned with the horse, he has his own opinion." Pam continued, "and even for me just having to take off my cargo (the egg with her multicultural identities represented) from the back of him and it was intact it just spoke to me that I can still be my authentic self." In this example, Pam, was able to process and punctuate her position and role as a therapist. Through the experiential activity, Pam stopped being protective of her own identity when she acknowledged that she can safely be sensitive and at the same time be herself. She was able to confidently place her egg on the horse and lead him while maintaining a safe (for her) distance from his body. This grounding phase seems to bring both differentiating and acknowledging the cultural self of the therapist. As a furthering step, in this phase, participants seem to ground and identify their position as a therapist—locating who they are in the midst of their culture and their client's culture.

Another participant raised a question about when the therapist breaks the balance toward the client's culture when they decide to take a radical action.

Valery: When I was watching you (the ES) I had a question of when you say "it's ok, eat the grass" to "no you have to stop" and I started thinking if somebody is suicidal and talking about how they are going to get the gun you are not going to nourish that conversation. . . at one point you will have to take a radical action and make a switch from its "ok" to "no, it's not safe." "No, stop eating the grass you will get a belly ache."

This exemplar shows how Valery was questioning and processing her position as a therapist—giving a different way of relating to grounding and safety.

Defining

Through the post-discussion, most participants implicitly processed a sense of who they are as therapists through the workshop, but some participants expressed it explicitly. Nancy explained how she now views herself by stating:

Sometimes the laws or the culture set out a rule that people relate to and this is not necessarily a bad thing. It just shows how we are relational beings and who we are is not as individualistic as we think it is, who I am in relation to my culture.

Another participant, Valery, stated how watching all the participants' experiences and interactions with the horses led her to think about a deep question. "For me this experience was all about epistemology and going back to where do I stand? What's my ground?" Valery continued sharing her thoughts about therapists' cultural boundaries utilizing a metaphor of coloring books.

I don't buy coloring books for my child because I don't want my child to color between the lines. I want her to be able to color across the lines and make decision for herself what her boundaries are going to be, and you can only learn that by trial and error. For me this is what I believe in as a therapist and as a person.

With therapist's openness and flexibility, they can continually try to find, reshape, understand, and make sense of who they truly are in the therapy room. This process and these phases seem to happen in a different pace and rhythm for each participant. As an example, one of the participants who was still processing her experience in the workshop sent an email to one of the instructors to share her experience of awakening authenticity two weeks after the workshop. Eva stated, "the experience at Stable Place (where the training was held) brought up many feelings to me. I have been thinking these days with the hope that a more settled reflection could take shape." In her reflection it seemed that she went through some of the phases that other participants went through at the barn but made sense of it much later. In Eva's experience with the horse, she repeatedly positioned herself in a way that was potentially risky; she did not create boundaries for the horse, allowing herself to be quite vulnerable, even as the ES and her colleagues questioned whether she felt safe. In her subsequent email message, she processed her sense of acknowledging the challenges and struggles by saying, "my not-knowing, lack of awareness, and inability to take lead quickly enough are all the obstacles I need to conquer. And sometimes these are just hard to overcome." This is an example of acknowledging, accepting, and at the same time contributing space for growth and learning.

After processing the experiences and new understandings that the participants encountered during the workshop, we understand that authenticity can be considered as a state that a therapist decides to embrace and learn from. Whenever a therapist stops being aware, mindful, and present and when they decide to stop contributing to the process of defining and/or refining their identity as therapists is when they may no longer be in an authentic state. But this also means that to sustain the authentic state, a therapist has a choice to proactively maintain and develop self-awareness and mindful presence.

Reflections and Implications

Attention to cultural identities within self of the therapist work is increasingly relevant with the rapid growth of diversity in the United States among both clinicians and clients. Multicultural family therapists (therapists who encounter more than one set of cultural identities) who practice in the United States are often informed by at least two different worldviews—their family therapy epistemology learned in their Western clinical training and their own personal epistemology which can include their culture, gender, age, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, spirituality, religion, and social context. Both worldviews shape the way therapists work, think, and ask questions in therapy sessions. In their attempts to fit their non-Western cultures with the Western knowledge of systemic thinking and family therapy, these multicultural family therapists are likely to face some significant challenges. Thus, a multicultural family therapist is advised to cultivate cultural awareness and sensitivity when attempting to find common ground between two such different epistemologies.

This work has significant implications for future cultural awareness training approaches. As discussed in the introduction, the topic of culture is mostly presented in family therapy focusing on particular populations and/or social justice issues. This workshop, in contrast, brought forth the multicultural therapists' voices through their experiential work with horses. Through this authentic and experiential training, we shed light onto the multicultural self of the therapist as one of the main components in therapy. Focusing on this point is important since therapists from different cultures are mainly trained in ways, models, theories of therapy where their struggles of being from a non-Western culture is not discussed widely. Other innovative trainings and workshops about specific topics like sexuality and religion in relation to therapist's cultural awareness and authenticity can also be beneficial, especially as both of these topics can be sensitive in some cultures. These trainings can also be part of family therapy diversity course curricula to provide support for multicultural therapists, helping them grapple effectively with challenges in an experiential way. These ideas can be adapted not only for multicultural therapists in the US, but also for international therapists overseas either with the use of equine facilitated training or through utilizing other innovative and culturally-friendly experiential methods. We invite others to expand on these ideas and develop unique means for approaching the intersections of culture and clinical work.

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