

Communication Styles, Cultural Values, and Counseling Effectiveness With Asian Americans

Bryan S. K. Kim and Yong S. Park

This study examined counseling intervention designed for Asian Americans. Participants ($N = 158$) rated session effectiveness after viewing a videotape of a counselor using a culturally congruent or incongruent communication style. Analyses of variance showed that the incongruent style was viewed as more satisfying and credible than the congruent style. Factor analysis showed that participants perceived “being direct” and “maintaining harmony” styles, and multiple regression analyses revealed that these perceptions had a positive relationship with effectiveness.

Keywords: communication style, enculturation, acculturation, cultural values, Asian Americans

The field of counseling has a long history of commitment to providing culturally competent services to diverse client populations, including Asian Americans (Leong et al., 2006). As a minority group within the United States, Asian Americans face psychosocial stressors such as racism, acculturative stress, and microaggressions, all of which can contribute to mental health problems (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014). Despite these risk factors, Asian Americans tend to underutilize counseling services (e.g., Gloria, Castellanos, Park, & Kim, 2008), and even when they do seek services, they exhibit a relatively high dropout rate (e.g., Cheng, Kwan, & Sevig, 2013).

In light of this information, researchers have examined ways in which the problems of underutilization and premature termination can be addressed, one of which is the use of culturally adapted therapies. For example, Griner and Smith (2006) conducted a meta-analytic review of culturally adapted interventions for racial minority clients, including Asian Americans, and found that the cultural adaptations (e.g., matching client–counselor language and race/ethnicity, incorporating clients’ cultural values, increasing access to treatment, facilitating indigenous support) were important predictors of counseling effectiveness.

In line with these findings, one type of cultural adaptation that might lead to increased counseling effectiveness with Asian Americans is in the realm of culturally congruent communication style by the counselor. In their meta-analysis, Griner and Smith (2006) found that studies examining com-

munication styles focused only on language match between clients and counselors. However, most counseling professionals do not speak the language of their Asian American clients; thus, it could be useful to study whether there are other communication styles that could lead to counseling effectiveness. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to examine whether Asian Americans would view a communication style that is congruent with Asian culture more favorably than a communication style that is incongruent with Asian culture.

Asian cultural norms differ from Western norms with respect to the use of direct and indirect communication styles. In a study by Gudykunst (2001) that compared Asian Americans with European Americans, Asian Americans used a more indirect communications style that included an emphasis on maintaining interpersonal harmony, whereas European Americans used a more direct communication style that is characterized by being dramatic, open, precise, and contentious. Similarly, Trubinsky, Ting-Toomey, and Lin (1991) found that when Asian college students were in a conflict situation, they used more obliging and avoiding styles than their counterparts in the United States, who were more direct in addressing the conflict.

These differences in communication behavior of indirectness versus directness can be attributed to the following five factors: (a) cultural differences between low- and high-context communication styles, (b) interdependent and independent self-construal, (c) conversational constraints between Asian and European American cultures, (d) avoidance of loss of

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face, and (e) influence of traditional Asian and European American cultural values in terms of maintaining interpersonal harmony and emotional self-control.

The first factor, low- versus high-context communication, refers to how people use the context of the interaction to exchange meaning over and beyond the verbal channels (Hall, 1976). Asian cultures tend to use high-context communication, in which “most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message” (Hall, 1976, p. 79). In contrast, Western cultures tend to communicate in a low-context fashion, in which the “mass of the information is vested in the explicit code” (Hall, 1976, p. 79); that is, an attempt is made to explicitly express all details of the communicated information. Norton (1983) identified major communication styles that exist in Western cultures that may be representative of low-context communication: being contentious, dramatic, dominant, animated, relaxed, attentive, open, friendly, and impression-leaving. On the other hand, Gudykunst et al. (1996) noted that high-context communication is characterized by being indirect, inferring meaning, attending to interpersonal sensitivity, using feelings to guide behavior, and using silence.

The second factor that may influence the level of indirect versus direct communication among Asian Americans relates to interdependent and independent self-construal. Interdependent self-construal refers to self-perception that is dependent on the social context, in which emphasis is placed on social status, roles, relationships, belongingness, and being in harmony with the social environment (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Conversely, independent self-construal refers to perceiving the self as an entity with dispositional attributes that are detached from context and emphasize internal abilities, thoughts, and feelings (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Asian Americans in general tend to maintain an interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 2010), and this is associated with preference for and use of indirect communication styles (Hara & Kim, 2004). Gudykunst (2001) found that interdependent self-construal was associated with being sensitive and making inferences in communication, which characterize the maintenance of the interpersonal harmony aspect of indirect communication, whereas independent self-construal related positively with being contentious, dramatic, animated, open, and precise, all of which characterize direct communication.

The third factor, conversational constraints, refers to the choice of strategies to achieve conversational goals, such as self-disclosure, requesting, and conflict resolution. Orientations toward the relationship and toward tasks were identified as broad categories of conversational constraints (M.-S. Kim, 1994, 2005). The relationship orientation consists of three specific conversational constraints: concern for avoiding hurting the hearer’s feelings, concern for minimizing imposition, and concern for avoiding negative evaluation by the

hearer. The task orientation consists of concern for clarity and concern for effectiveness. When asked to report which communication tactics they used when making a request in a conversation, Korean college students more strongly emphasized the importance of not hurting the listener’s feelings and of minimizing imposition in comparison with their counterparts in the United States (M.-S. Kim, 1994). M.-S. Kim, Sharkey, and Singelis (1994) found that, given the influence of conversational constraints, Asian Americans who have high interdependent self-construal tend to engage in indirect communication characterized by emphasis on interpersonal harmony, whereas those with high independent self-construal tend to be willing to risk having a contentious communication for the goal of gaining clarity.

The fourth factor that may cause Asian Americans to engage in a higher degree of indirect communication than European Americans is the idea of maintaining face (Zane & Yeh, 2002). Face represents the individual’s sense of positive image in a social interaction (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). In the counseling setting, Asian Americans may talk about their problems in an indirect manner as a way to maintain their face. If the counselor tries to pry for more direct and precise articulation about the problem based on her or his need to have an accurate understanding, Asian American clients may feel threatened and could experience a loss of face. In a study supporting these ideas, Yi (1995) described a counseling situation in which an Asian American client experienced a loss of face caused by the counselor’s emphasis on precise and open communication.

The fifth factor that could encourage Asian Americans to engage in a higher level of indirect than direct communication is their adherence to traditional Asian cultural values, specifically maintaining interpersonal harmony and emotional self-control. In the counseling setting, Asian Americans may not openly disagree with the counselor to maintain harmony (B. S. K. Kim & Atkinson, 2002). Because Asian American clients tend to perceive the counselor as a benign authority figure, they may defer to the counselor’s guidance even when they disagree with the counselor. Also, the traditional counseling approach of emphasizing emotional expression can conflict with the Asian cultural value of emotional self-control (B. S. K. Kim & Atkinson, 2002). Many traditional Asian Americans may not be as conspicuous in their presentation of their emotions and may communicate their emotional state in an indirect fashion. Counselors who do not understand this value of emotional self-control may misinterpret the stoic presentation as a sign that the client is inept at expressing emotions.

The attention to adherence to cultural values as they relate to preference for communication styles is important because it also allows for the consideration of within-group variability. Given the conceptual relations between indirect communication styles and traditional Asian values such as maintaining



interpersonal harmony and emotional self-control, Asian Americans who have a strong adherence to traditional Asian values (highly enculturated) may have a greater preference for an indirect communication style than those who are less enculturated to traditional Asian values. Similarly, Asian Americans who strongly adhere to European American values (highly acculturated) may prefer a direct communication style over an indirect communication style. Given that Asian Americans constitute a diverse group with varying levels of enculturation and acculturation, it is important to examine the adherence to cultural values as a possible influencing force on the preference for an indirect communication style. Hence, the second goal of the present study was to investigate whether Asian Americans' adherence to Asian and European American values moderate the relationship between the counselor's communication style and ratings of the session.

For the present study, we made the following hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that Asian American participants who view a counselor engaging in an indirect communication style (i.e., culturally congruent) would rate the counseling more positively than a counselor engaging in a direct communication style (i.e., culturally incongruent). Second, we hypothesized that the relationship between a counselor's communication style and counseling effectiveness would depend on Asian Americans' adherence to traditional Asian cultural values. The positive relationship between a counselor's indirect communication styles with counseling effectiveness would be stronger for Asian Americans with high adherence to traditional Asian cultural values than those with low adherence to these values. Finally, we examined the possible moderating role of participants' adherence to European American cultural values on the relation between communication style and counseling effectiveness. We hypothesized that the positive relationship between a counselor's indirect communication styles with counseling effectiveness would be weaker for Asian Americans with high adherence to European American cultural values than those with low adherence to these values. In terms of the counseling effectiveness, we assessed the following four dependent variables: communication satisfaction, session smoothness, empathic understanding, and counselor credibility.

Method

Design and Procedure

We used a videotape analog design to assess the impact of counselor communication style (indirect vs. direct) on counseling effectiveness while also examining the possible moderating roles of participants' adherence to Asian and European American values. We implemented two approaches to investigate the impact of communication style. First, we manipulated the counselor's communication style by showing participants a videotape of a counseling session in which the counselor communicated

in either an indirect or a direct fashion. Second, participants completed a measure that asked them to rate their impressions of the counselor's communication style in the videotape; we then analyzed these ratings in terms of counseling effectiveness. Thus, the first approach operationalized counselor communication according to an external stimulus that varied dichotomously (indirect or direct), whereas the second approach measured the participants' perceptions of the counselor's communication style that varied on a continuous scale (the degree to which the communication was indirect vs. direct).

We created two videotapes of a mock counseling session in which the counselor's communication style represented indirect (congruent) or direct (incongruent) communication: being passive resistant or contentious, being reserved or dramatic, being private or open, being general or precise, showing interpersonal sensitivity or being forthright, and inferring meaning or being nonassuming. In both conditions of the videotaped counseling session, a European American female student in her 2nd year of a doctoral counseling program played the role of the counselor and an Asian American female undergraduate student played the role of the client.

Because a counselor's communication style represents *how* a message should be transmitted as opposed to the content of the message, the message content of the counselor's communication was the same across both conditions. However, on the basis of the condition, each counselor's intended message was expressed differently in dichotomies of six specific communication behaviors that represented congruent and incongruent communication styles as described earlier. Each of the counseling sessions was approximately 8 minutes long, and the sessions were reviewed by an Asian American advanced graduate student in a counseling program who has an extensive knowledge about counseling Asian Americans.

The videotape captured the first session in which the Asian American client presented with depressive symptoms, career concerns, and a lack of social support. The first session was chosen to represent the information-gathering stage of counseling in which the Asian American client was asked to disclose potentially face-threatening information. We hoped that the effects of the communication style would be more salient when the Asian American client's face was threatened. In the videotape, the counselor intervened consistently across both conditions by assessing the client's depressive symptoms, providing support, and giving advice. The client responded to the counselor in the same way in both mock sessions—by disclosing personal information hesitantly in a soft voice, showing little bodily movements, and being responsive to the counselor. The client's back was to the camera in the lower right-hand side of the screen because we wanted the client to be as generic as possible, thereby increasing the likelihood that participants could imagine themselves as the client. When completing the dependent measures, participants were asked to imagine that they were the client in the video.

Participants were recruited from an Asian American Studies course and were offered course credit for participation. After informed consent was obtained, participants attended one of the two screenings of the mock counseling sessions, either culturally congruent or culturally incongruent. Participants completed measures of adherence to Asian values and adherence to European American values prior to viewing the videotaped counseling session. After viewing the videotape, participants completed the measures of dependent variables, the rating form that measured their impressions of the counselor's communication style, and a measure of manipulation check. Throughout the study implementation, we followed American Counseling Association research ethical standards.

Power Analysis

We conducted an a priori power analysis with an alpha of .003, power of .80, and six predictors (based on the number of predictors for each additive model) to determine the appropriate sample size. A Bonferroni correction led to the alpha level of .003 (.05 divided by 20) and reflected the 20 multiple regression analyses (four additive models and 16 interaction models). The results suggested 176 participants for a small effect size and 79 for a large effect size.

Participants

A total of 158 Asian American undergraduate students from a large West Coast university participated in the study. Fifty-five percent of the sample was female ($n = 87$) and 45% was male ($n = 71$). Participants' age ranged from 18 to 32 years, with an average age of 19.66 years ($SD = 1.93$). The largest Asian ethnic group was Chinese ($n = 42$, 26.6%), followed by Koreans ($n = 36$, 22.8%), Filipinos ($n = 14$, 8.9%), Vietnamese ($n = 9$, 5.7%), Japanese ($n = 8$, 5.1%), and other Asian Americans ($n = 49$, 31.0%). (Percentages do not total 100 because of rounding.) Nearly all of the participants were either first ($n = 44$, 27.8%) or second generation ($n = 89$, 56.3%). The first-generation participants have been in the United States for an average of 11.39 years ($SD = 6.18$). Of the sample, 13.4% had previous counseling experience, with a median duration of six sessions. Of participants who received counseling, 20.3% felt extremely satisfied, 15.2% felt satisfied, 34.2% felt neutral, 20.8% felt little satisfaction, and 9.5% were not satisfied.

Measures

Asian American Values Scale–Multidimensional (AAVS-M). The 42-item AAVS-M (B. S. K. Kim, Li, & Ng, 2005) assesses one's adherence to the following subscales of Asian cultural values: Collectivism, Conformity to Norms, Emotional Self-Control, Family Recognition Through Achievement, and Humility. Evidence of validity of the AAVS-M scores was ascertained based on significant positive relationships with measures of concern for loss of face and interdependent self-

construal (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2005). For the present study, we used only the Collectivism, Emotional Self-Control, and Humility subscales because they were closest to the main variable of interest, communication style. Participants rated each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Coefficient alphas of .79 for the Collectivism subscale, .74 for the Emotional Self-Control subscale, and .76 for the Humility subscale were observed in the present study.

European American Values Scale for Asian Americans–Revised (EAVS-AA-R). The EAVS-AA-R (Hong, Kim, & Wolfe, 2005) is a 25-item measure of an Asian American's adherence to European American values that are salient for Asian Americans. Hong et al. (2005) applied the Rasch model to improve the psychometric properties of the original instrument. This led to a 25-item scale from an original pool of 180 items, which adequately captured the person trait and item difficulty levels. Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. The coefficient alpha was .71 for the EAVS-AA-R score in the present study.

Communication Satisfaction Inventory (CSI). The 19-item CSI (Hecht, 1978) measures the satisfaction people experience when their positive expectations are fulfilled in communications with other people. The initial pool of 253 items was generated from information collected via self-report data, observational studies, interviews, and a literature review. The final version of the CSI comprised 19 items. Hecht (1978) obtained evidence of validity in the form of a higher CSI score for positive facial expressions compared with negative expressions. The CSI identifies the other participant in the interaction as "the other person"; for the present study, the words were changed to "the counselor." Participants rated each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. A coefficient alpha of .89 was observed for the CSI score in the present study.

Smoothness subscale of the Session Evaluation Questionnaire. The Session Evaluation Questionnaire was designed by Stiles (1980) to measure the immediate effects of the counseling and the clients' affect during and after the session. Stiles conducted a factor analysis with a varimax rotation for 113 client and counselor dyads and discovered four factors: Session Depth, Smoothness, Positivity, and Arousal. The present study used only the six-item Smoothness subscale (Stiles & Snow, 1984) because it measures how comfortable, relaxed, and easy the client's interaction is perceived to be with the counselor and corresponds with having a harmonious relationship versus having a contentious relationship. Each of the items is rated on a 7-point semantically differential scale. Evidence of validity of the Smoothness subscale score was obtained in its correlations with measures of session impact (Stiles et al., 1994). This scale had been used successfully in past studies with Asian Americans (e.g., B. S. K. Kim & Atkinson, 2002). The coefficient alpha was .79 for the Smoothness subscale score in the present study.

Empathic Understanding subscale (EUS) of the Relationship Inventory. The 16-item EUS of the Relationship Inventory (Barrett-Lennard, 1962) assesses client perception of the counselor’s empathic understanding as derived from the person-centered theoretical orientation and was content validated by expert reviewers who determined that the items accurately represent empathy. Each item is rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *I strongly feel that it is not true* to 6 = *I strongly feel that it is true*. This measure had been used successfully in past studies with Asian Americans (e.g., B. S. K. Kim & Atkinson, 2002; B. S. K. Kim, Ng, & Ahn, 2009). The coefficient alpha was .88 for the EUS in the present study.

Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale (CERS). The 10-item CERS (Atkinson & Carskaddon, 1975) measures a client’s perception of counselor credibility. Evidence of concurrent validity was found by comparing the CERS with the Counselor Rating Form, a measure of counselor effectiveness. Each item is rated on 7-point bipolar scale that ranges from *bad* to *good*. This scale had been used successfully in past studies with Asian Americans (e.g., B. S. K. Kim & Atkinson, 2002; B. S. K. Kim et al., 2009). In the present study, the CERS score yielded an alpha coefficient of .86.

Rating of counselor communications style. Given that the impact of the counselor communication style may be relevant to the extent that the client perceives the communication style, we constructed a scale measuring impressions of the counselor communication styles for the present study. Participants were asked to respond to items about communication behaviors with the prompt, “In this session, the counselor was . . .,” based on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *disagree* to 4 = *agree*. Each of the 14 items represented the descriptions of low-context and high-context communication. The items representing high-context communication were being indirect, inferring meaning, being interpersonally sensitive, being calm, being agreeable, being reserved, being general, avoiding conflict, and being private. The items representing low-context communication were being direct, contentious, precise, forthright, and nonassuming.

To examine whether the factor structure of the scale captured the high- and low-context communication styles, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation with direct oblimin rotation and an eigenvalue above 1. The results suggested two primary factors that explained 16.84% and 10.83% of the variance, respectively. Items that had factor loadings above .40, that did not have a factor loading above .40 on a separate factor, and that conceptually fit with other items in the factor were retained. The first factor was labeled Direct Style and reflected communication styles of being direct (loading = .88), precise (.54), and forthright (.47). The second factor was labeled Maintaining Harmony Style and reflected communication styles of being calm (.67), agreeable (.59), reserved (.55), and interpersonally sensitive (.45). These factors correspond with past literature that indicates that the two primary motivating factors in communication are concern for clarity and concern for support (M.-S. Kim, 1994). The correspondence of the factors to the concern for clarity and support provides initial evidence of their content validity. Reliability analyses of the factors showed that the Direct Style and Maintaining Harmony Style scores yielded coefficient alphas of .64 and .63, respectively.

Results

Preliminary Data Analysis

For all analyses, IBM SPSS was used. The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations are shown in Table 1. In terms of whether the manipulation was successful, a one-tailed, independent samples *t* test showed that the items representing the direct (incongruent) condition had significantly higher scores, $t(156) = 1.81, p = .036, d = 0.29$, for the direct condition ($M = 4.34, SD = 0.68$) than the indirect (congruent) condition ($M = 4.14, SD = 0.66$). Ratings for items representing the indirect condition had significantly higher scores, $t(156) = -3.05, p < .01, d = 0.48$, for the indirect condition ($M = 4.17, SD = 0.75$) than the direct condition ($M = 3.81, SD = 0.68$).

TABLE 1
Coefficient Alphas, Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Independent and Dependent Variables

Variable	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Collectivism	.79	4.17	0.94	—									
2. Emotional self-control	.74	3.58	0.86	.14	—								
3. Humility	.76	3.91	0.97	.14	.24*	—							
4. EAVS-AA-R	.71	2.81	0.32	-.06	-.52**	-.16*	—						
5. Direct style	.64	2.35	0.58	-.05	-.18*	.08	-.02	—					
6. Maintaining harmony	.63	2.79	0.61	.09	.07	.01	.04	-.01	—				
7. Communication satisfaction	.89	3.04	1.07	.07	.28**	.07	-.26**	.49**	.18*	—			
8. Session smoothness	.79	3.26	1.19	.01	.25**	.08	-.20*	.25**	.24**	.58**	—		
9. Empathic understanding	.88	0.91	1.03	.12	.36**	.04	-.28**	.43**	.16*	.72**	.56**	—	
10. Counselor credibility	.86	3.56	1.11	.04	.22**	.08	-.20*	.50**	.16*	.78**	.54**	.66**	—

Note. EAVS-AA-R = European American Values Scale for Asian Americans–Revised.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

Main Analysis

Four separate analyses of variance examined the differences on the four dependent variables across the two conditions. Considering that participants' responses on the dependent measures may be a function of their enculturation and acculturation levels, we included the Asian and European American values variables as covariates in the analyses. Among the four dependent variables, counselor communication style had a significant effect on communication satisfaction, $F(1, 154) = 4.47, p = .036, \eta^2 = .029$, and credibility, $F(1, 154) = 5.78, p = .017, \eta^2 = .038$. Contrary to our expectations, however, the culturally incongruent group ($M = 3.20, SD = 1.11$) reported higher satisfaction than did the congruent group ($M = 2.90, SD = 1.03$) on communication satisfaction. Similarly, the incongruent group ($M = 3.77, SD = 1.03$) rated the counselor as more credible than did the congruent group ($M = 3.40, SD = 1.09$).

Prior to examining the relations between the second set of independent variables (direct style and maintaining harmony style) and the dependent variables, we examined the relations between the demographic variables and the dependent variables to identify possible control variables in the multiple regression analyses. There was a significant relation between age and empathic understanding ($r = .23, p = .004$). In addition, there were significant differences by sex on empathic understanding, $t(156) = -2.94, p = .004$, and credibility, $t(156) = -2.19, p = .030$. Thus, age was controlled in multiple regression analyses for empathic understanding, and sex was controlled for analyses on empathic understanding and credibility. The sex variable was dummy coded so that 1 represented male and 0 indicated female.

Four additive models were assessed that regressed each of the four dependent variables on collectivism, emotional self-control, humility, adherence to European American values, direct style, and maintaining harmony style. Sixteen interaction models were assessed in which each model included standardized cultural value scores (e.g., collectivism), standardized direct style and maintaining harmony style, and an interaction term that consisted of a multiplicative product of the standardized cultural value variables and the counselor communication style variables (i.e., direct style and maintaining harmony style). As noted earlier, given that there were 20 multiple regression analyses, a Bonferroni correction was made on the family-wise alpha level for the set of analyses so that the per comparison alpha was adjusted to .003 (.05/20). The significance level for each omnibus model was assessed at the adjusted alpha level, whereas the individual predictors were assessed at the .05 alpha level.

All four of the additive regression models were significant at the .003 alpha level (see Table 2). The linear combination of the predictor variables explained 34% of the variance in communication satisfaction, $F(6, 146) = 12.69, p < .001$; 18% of the variance in session smoothness, $F(6, 146) = 5.38, p < .001$; 24% of the variance in empathic understanding, $F(8,$

145) = 9.11, $p < .001$; and 28% of the variance in counselor credibility, $F(7, 149) = 8.70, p < .001$. Across the four models, adherence to European American values, direct style, and maintaining harmony style were significant predictors. When we examined the semipartial correlation (sr) values in Table 2, direct style had a higher correlation with communication satisfaction (.48 > .18), empathic understanding (.35 > .16), and counselor credibility (.47 > .16) compared with the maintaining harmony style. In contrast, the semipartial correlation with session smoothness was similar between direct style ($sr = .24$) and maintaining harmony style ($sr = .25$).

TABLE 2
Multiple Regression Analyses on the Four Dependent Variables

Variable	B	sr	t	ΔF^2	F	p
Communication Satisfaction						
Model 1				.34	12.69	.001
COLL	.07	.06	0.92			.389
ES-C	.06	.04	0.59			.567
HUMIL	-.05	-.05	-0.71			.472
EAVS-AA-R	-.75	-.20	-2.92			.004
DIRECT	.90	.48	7.13			.001
HMNY	.32	.18	2.74			.007
Empathic Understanding						
Model 1				.09	7.88	.001
Age	.12	.23	2.96			.004
Sex	.38	.18	2.34			.021
Model 2				.24	9.11	.001
Age	.09	.16	2.31			.022
Sex	.06	.03	0.42			.676
COLL	.09	.08	1.20			.233
ES-C	.19	.13	1.95			.054
HUMIL	-.90	-.09	-1.25			.214
EAVS-AA-R	-.53	-.14	-2.10			.037
DIRECT	.65	.35	5.09			.001
HMNY	.27	.16	2.37			.019
Session Smoothness						
Model 1				.18	5.38	.001
COLL	-.06	-.05	-0.63			.530
ES-C	.16	.09	1.25			.213
HUMIL	.00	.00	0.02			.988
EAVS-AA-R	-.50	-.12	-1.55			.124
DIRECT	.51	.24	3.25			.001
HMNY	.48	.25	3.32			.001
Counselor Credibility						
Model 1				.03	4.63	.033
Sex	.38	.17	2.15			.033
Model 2				.28	8.70	.001
Sex	.00	.00	0.03			.979
COLL	.04	.03	0.48			.633
ES-C	.03	.02	0.31			.757
HUMIL	.00	.00	-0.01			.998
EAVS-AA-R	-.62	-.15	-2.25			.026
DIRECT	.94	.47	6.84			.001
HMNY	.30	.16	2.41			.017

Note. All predictor variables were centered except for sex and age. Sex was dummy coded 0 = women, 1 = men. COLL = collectivism; ES-C = emotional self-control; HUMIL = humility; EAVS-AA-R = European American Values Scale for Asian Americans-Revised; DIRECT = direct communication style; HMNY = maintaining harmony.

Only five of the 16 interaction effects that were tested had a significant beta weight coefficient for the interaction term (see Table 3). There were significant interactions between emotional self-control and maintaining harmony style ($B = -.15, t = -2.27, p = .025$) and EAVS-AA-R and maintaining harmony style ($B = .23, t = 2.97, p = .003$) on communication satisfaction. There was an interaction between collectivism and direct style ($B = .20, t = 2.11, p = .037$), EAVS-AA-R and direct style ($B = -.23, t = -2.96, p = .004$), and EAVS-AA-R and maintaining harmony style ($B = .26, t = 2.75, p = .007$) on session smoothness (see Figures 1 to 5).

Discussion

Contrary to our hypothesis, the comparison of the communication styles indicated that Asian Americans viewed the culturally incongruent communication (direct) style as more satisfying and more credible than the congruent (indirect) style. Although it is difficult to explain these results given the strength of the theory, one possible explanation is that the findings represent the perception among many Asian Americans that counseling is a Western form of help seeking. In this respect, the Asian American participants may have

TABLE 3
Significant Interaction Multiple Regression Models

Variable	B	sr	t	R ²	F	p
Communication Satisfaction						
Model 1				.32	14.13	.001
ES-C (A)	.20	.18	2.64			.009
DIRECT (B)	.52	.47	6.92			.001
HMNY (C)	.19	.18	2.62			.010
A × B	-.01	.00	-0.07			.947
A × C	-.15	-.15	-2.27			.025
Model 2				.36	17.88	.001
EAVS-AA-R (A)	-.31	-.27	-4.10			.001
DIRECT (B)	.51	.47	7.24			.001
HMNY (C)	.19	.18	2.80			.006
A × B	-.03	-.03	-0.49			.626
A × C	.23	.19	2.97			.003
Session Smoothness						
Model 1				.15	5.26	.001
COLL (A)	.04	.04	0.46			.644
DIRECT (B)	.32	.26	3.49			.001
HMNY (C)	.27	.23	2.99			.003
A × B	.20	.16	2.11			.037
A × C	-.02	-.01	-0.17			.863
Model 2				.22	8.40	.001
EAVS-AA-R (A)	-.18	-.13	-1.85			.066
DIRECT (B)	.33	.27	3.71			.001
HMNY (C)	.30	.25	3.46			.001
A × B	-.23	-.22	-2.96			.004
A × C	.26	.20	2.75			.007

Note. All predictor variables were standardized. The interaction terms are the multiplicative product of standardized predictor variables. ES-C = emotional self-control; DIRECT = direct communication style; HMNY = maintaining harmony; EAVS-AA-R = European American Values Scale for Asian Americans–Revised; COLL = collectivism.



FIGURE 1

Relationship of Maintaining Harmony With Communication Satisfaction at Low and High Levels of Emotional Self-Control

expected that the norms for the counseling context should follow a more direct style of communication. However, this reasoning is speculative at best and more research is needed.

A factor analysis of the ratings of the counselor’s communication behaviors indicated that the participants observed two predominant communication styles: being direct and maintaining harmony. The results indicated that both styles had positive relationships with each of the four dependent variables. The relatively strong effect of the direct style is

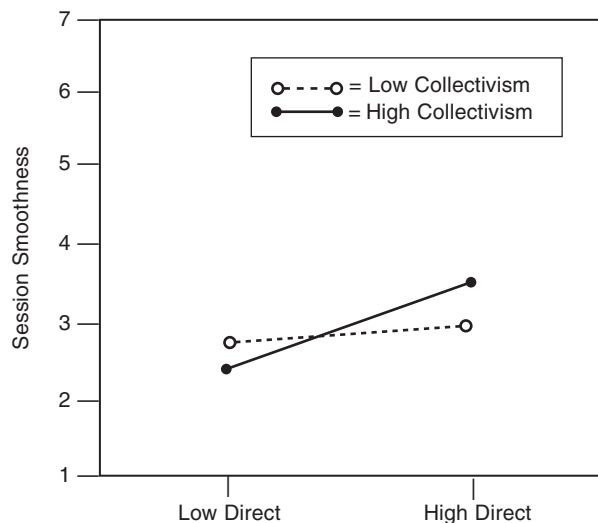


FIGURE 2

Relationship of Direct Style With Session Smoothness at Low and High Levels of Collectivism

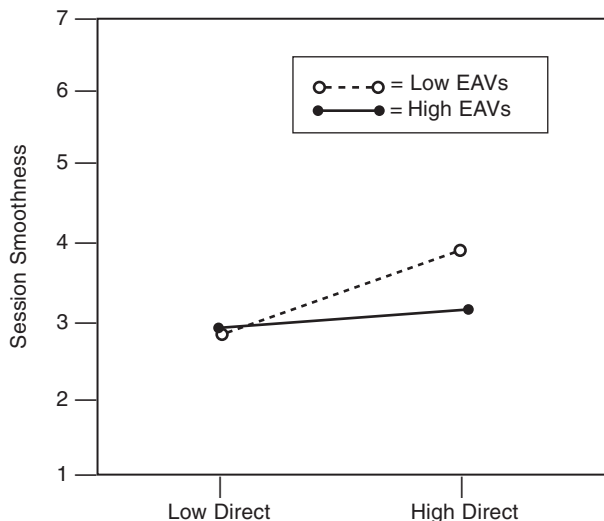


FIGURE 3

Relationship of Direct Style With Session Smoothness at Low and High Levels of European American Values (EAVs)

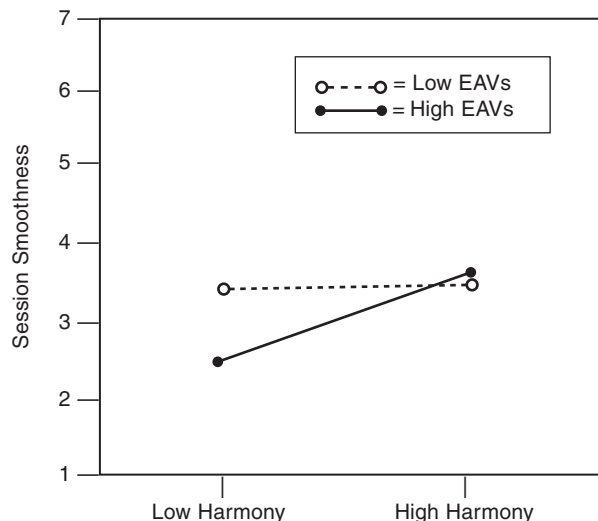


FIGURE 5

Relationship of Maintaining Harmony With Session Smoothness at Low and High Levels of European American Values (EAVs)

consistent with results from Li and Kim's (2004) study, which showed that a direct counseling style was rated as more empathic and culturally competent and contributed to stronger working alliance than a nondirect counseling style. Maintenance of harmony may serve the purpose of protecting an Asian American client's face in counseling. As noted in the introduction, attention to face may be particularly important in the counseling context because it is a setting where clients disclose their personally sensitive information to the counselor. The counselor's practice of maintaining harmony (being

agreeable, calm, reserved, and interpersonally sensitive) may ameliorate the threat of losing face for Asian American clients.

The positive effects of the direct style and maintaining harmony style were found when controlling for the Asian American participants' cultural background. However, there may also be cultural differences based on the participants' enculturation and acculturation levels. We had hoped that the analyses of the interactions between the client's cultural background and communication styles would provide further understanding of the cultural bases for how the counselor's communication style affects the counseling process. We found five interaction effects.

The first interaction effect involved maintaining harmony style and emotional self-control on communication satisfaction. Although all participants were more satisfied with the communication as the level of maintaining harmony increased, participants who placed less value on emotional self-control were less satisfied with the communication at lower levels of maintaining harmony than those who placed higher value on emotional self-control. This finding conflicts with the original hypothesis that stipulates that the primary purpose for emotional restraint in Asian culture is to maintain harmony in interpersonal relations. This finding may suggest that this cultural norm may be expressed differently within the counseling context. Individuals who place a high value on emotional self-control may still be relatively satisfied with a counselor who is disagreeable because they perceive the counselor as an expert whose advice is meant for the resolution of their psychological problems.

The second interaction effect indicated that, at lower levels of direct communication, the high collectivism group had lower ratings of session smoothness compared with the

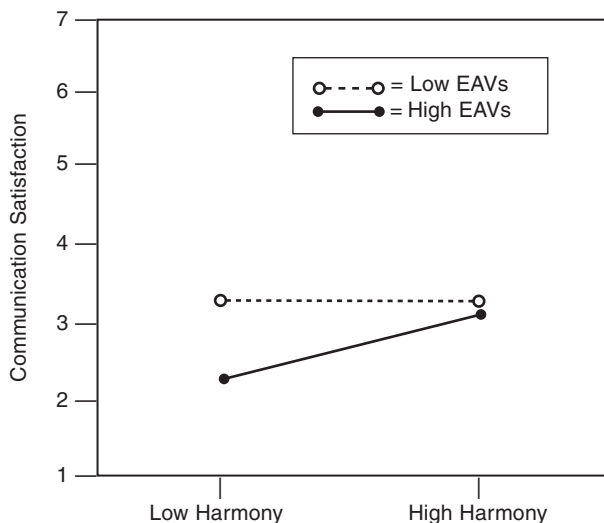


FIGURE 4

Relationship of Maintaining Harmony With Communication Satisfaction at Low and High Levels of European American Values (EAVs)



low collectivism group. However, as direct communication increased, the high collectivism group rated the session as smoother than did the low collectivism group. Past literature suggests that traditional Asians may prefer a direct counseling style (Li & Kim, 2004). The present finding suggests that the reason for this preference may be due to the cultural value of collectivism. The Asian value of collectivism emphasizes the importance of hierarchical relations and prioritizing group needs over individual ones. Within a therapeutic relationship, the Asian client who values collectivism may perceive the counselor to be the expert and authority figure. Because the goal of the counseling dyad takes precedence over individual ones within the collectivistic framework, the client may defer the direction of the counseling to the counselor. In other words, the client may expect the counselor to take charge in order for there to be a smooth transaction.

The third interaction effect revealed that Asian Americans with lower adherence to European American values rated the counseling to be smoother at high levels of the counselor's direct communication. This finding is surprising in that Asian Americans with low adherence to European American values would have been expected to prefer indirect communication because being indirect is congruent with Asian cultural norms. However, past studies suggested that Asian American clients who adhere to traditional Asian values may perceive the counselor to be the expert and authority figure (Gim, Atkinson, & Whiteley, 1990). Thus, they may prefer the counselor to be direct because indirect communication is usually offered to individuals of higher status in an attempt to maintain their face.

The fourth and fifth interaction effects indicated that individuals with higher adherence to European American values rated the communication as less satisfying and less smooth than individuals with lower adherence to European American values, and this difference increased as the maintaining harmony style decreased. This finding is consistent with past findings that suggested that less acculturated Asian Americans, who are presumed to be more enculturated, tend to rate the counseling process as more positive than more acculturated Asian Americans, who are presumed to be less enculturated (B. S. K. Kim & Atkinson, 2002). Less acculturated Asian Americans may be less critical or not as open to expressing criticism of the counseling process because they may want to maintain a harmonious relationship with the counselor. The interaction suggests that individuals who endorse higher European American values may be just as satisfied with the communication as their counterparts at higher levels of counselor maintenance of harmony. Maintaining harmony may have the effect of validating and affirming clients' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that may satisfy their individualistic needs.

Limitations

There were several limitations to the present study. First, the study's design was a videotape analog type in which partici-

pants were asked to rate their impressions of the counseling process. Although participants were asked to imagine themselves as the client in the video, the majority of the participants (81.2%) had no previous counseling experience. It is uncertain how comparable the findings are for clients who have actually participated in a counseling session. In addition, because the client in the videotape was visibly a female Asian American, it may have been difficult for Asian American male participants to imagine themselves as the client. Second, we exclusively recruited participants from an introductory Asian American Studies course. Although the participants varied with regard to academic major because most students took the course to fulfill a general education requirement, the enrolled students may be particularly interested and invested in issues concerning Asian Americans. Hence, it is unclear if the responses would be different for Asian American students who are enrolled in other courses. Finally, the two measures of counselor communication styles yielded relatively low coefficient alphas. Although these scores were used given the exploratory nature of the analyses, future studies should use measures with higher internal consistency.

Implications for Research and Practice

Notwithstanding the aforementioned limitations, this study's findings suggest that "face" management may be an underlying factor for the communication norms within Asian culture. Future studies can examine the interaction between face and communication style on the counseling process and also examine how effective communication might differ by context. For example, researchers can examine whether the effects of counselor communication style differ within the context of other cross-cultural and ethnically similar counseling dyads as well as different counseling center settings (e.g., university vs. ethnic enclave settings).

In terms of implications for practice, given the intricate relationship between communication style, clients' cultural values, and counseling process, counselors should be careful not to make crude assumptions that a particular communication style works well with Asian American clients. The present findings suggest that effects of direct style and maintaining harmony style related to counseling effectiveness depend on the participant's adherence to cultural values. Therefore, counselors should vary their use of both communication styles depending on their knowledge of the cultural background of Asian American clients. The findings suggest that counselors' use of the direct style leads Asian American clients who value collectivism to perceive the session as smooth, whereas counselors' use of maintaining harmony style may be more effective with Asian American clients with low adherence to emotional self-control and higher adherence to European American values. Given the complex relationship between counselor communication styles and the counseling process, counselors should be flexible in how they communicate with Asian American clients based on differences in their cultural backgrounds.

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