

Research Paper Assignment

Counseling Navajo Native Americans: General Characteristics and Gender Roles

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Introduction

Any study in multicultural counseling is an attempt to discover, distill and narrow down some specific characteristics that are strongly representative of a group. This allows us to make generalizations which we can put to some use when working with these populations. This is particularly true in the case of groups oppressed by a dominant society. The danger that we face is that by overgeneralizing we can end up not paying attention to other (e.g. non-cultural) factors that may be involved also. In the case of Native American Indians, this is magnified to an enormous extent because of the within group differences between the different tribes. We lump together this highly heterogeneous group made up of 530 distinct tribes (Sue, 1990) under a single name (i.e. *Native American Indians* or Indians or Native Americans), as if giving the group a unified designation will force its characteristics to be similar. In the same way, we need to consider that the gender effects specific to the tribal unit may result in *doubling* the number of different aspects we need to consider to relate to this particular cultural group. This paper will explore firstly: Native American Indians, and where possible, we will narrow down the presentation to account for Navajos specifically. To aid in this discussion, we will substantiate how this group is categorized as “oppressed” , we will review the world views and value orientations of this group to aid in understanding barriers in counseling, summarize communication styles and how these are misinterpreted as well as how to interpret, describe identity models for this group, and

develop a counseling critical incident case. In addition, there will be a summary of some gender specific information within the Navajo culture.

But Before we Begin - Why Are These Issues Important?

Three items make these issues important for Native Americans. Firstly, the uniqueness of their oppression and history. Evidence of importance of gender is very culture based. And lastly due to the vastness of tribal diversity.

While certainly not the only oppressed cultural group in the United States today, Native Americans represent a particularly unique group because compared to the other groups typically studied (African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Latinos), they have legally specific territories (i.e. in a sense - their own “country”) that they may reside in within the United States. Many studies have shown that even “assimilated” Native Americans who have left the reservation have a dream of returning in later years (Fox, 1992). Because of these unique characteristics and ties to not only a culture, but a “land”, the Native Americans are bound to have very different values, beliefs, and difficulties brought on historically and by society. Our considerations for counseling must be open to the many differences that exist and expect that if we do not share the same tribal experiences as a Native American client, must work hard at understanding, awareness and continued pursuit of specific skills for helping.

Gender issues are crucial for study of Native American counseling. Not only because the different tribal variants create a myriad we must try to understand, but because the Native American is very family oriented, with family members contributing in all aspects of life, from puberty rites (Roessel, 1991) to healing methods (Fox, 1992). Discord in social relationships, especially male-female, is recognized as a fundamental

component in disease, including mental disorder (Quintero, 1995). It is evident that we must be extremely aware of many of these details specific to the tribal culture we study.

While it is true that many characteristics are common to Native Americans, diversity between tribes is very important. To illustrate what kind of tribal diversity we should expect, we can compare it with European diversity. Diversity in Europe is well accepted. It (depending on where you measure it from) only occupies roughly half of the space of the United States, yet has many extremely different countries, languages, foods, and cultures within it. In addition, the European communication technology was far more efficient than the Native American's prior to colonization therefore resulting in much easier combining of cultural information and hence there should be more "common ground" between Europeans than their Native American counterparts. Yet we almost expect Native Americans, when asked what race they belong to, to say Indian instead of Navajo, Hopi, Gila or Chumash. Have you ever heard of a German saying he was a European? Even these names are not the "real" names either. For example, Navajo itself is a name given by a Spaniard, Father Zarate Salmeron in 1626, while their name for themselves is Dine'h or "The People" (Quintero, 1995). In conclusion, we can see by our European example, that we should expect tribal diversity to be even greater than the major differences in Europe. Another illustration is that while their population accounts for less than one percent of the total, Native Americans represent about "fifty percent of the diversity of the United States" (Garrett, 1994).

Native Americans as an Oppressed Group - A Historical Illustration

It is well documented that Native Americans are one of the most oppressed groups our history has had. Ever since the first Europeans came to the New World (Bruchac, 1993) anglo racism has pushed Native Americans to the fringe of society. The Native American has had to withstand this for over 300 years, and while the face of the oppression has changed, it still exists in society today. Each tribe has had a unique history and we will focus on the Navajo specific concerns.

In the early stages of European settlement, Navajos in particular have had to adjust to many changes. The ancestor of the Navajo probably lived in the area of northwestern North America near present day Alaska. The migration to the southwest occurred sometime prior to 1500 AD. Following this, these people had more and more contact with non aboriginal cultures - first with the Spanish and Mexicans and later with the Anglo-Americans of the United States. (Quintero, 1995) As the white settlers started to exploit the traditional land of the Navajo, hostility broke out between them, particularly when white people started owning land that the Navajo believed was sacred.

An important event, and one of the ultimate forms of oppression, was "The Long Walk". As a result of hostilities between Navajo and non-Indian settlers, the United States instituted a policy to put all Navajo on a reservation. They were ordered to submit or they would be "Considered at war with the United States" (Roessel, 1993). Led by Kit Carson, who was aligned with the Navajo's enemies (the UT's and Pueblos), a seek-and-destroy mission was started that left hogs, corrals and cornfields in ashes. As many surrendered, they were first taken to Fort Defiance in northeastern Arizona. But later, more than 8,000

Navajos were forced on a 350 mile march to Bosque Redondo near Fort Sumner. Four years later, this plan was deemed a failure. The living conditions were so poor that while in the custody of the U.S., Navajos were raided and killed by the Comanche and other enemies. Many starved or died from disease - over 3,000 would never return to their homeland. The treaty of 1868 finally allowed the people to return to their homeland. Each family was given five sheep and could begin a new life (Roessel, 1993) but the scars from this still exist today and are told as stories and fables handed down to the next generation.

The tragedy doesn't end here however. Navajo people were also part of the institutionalized oppression prevalent across all Native American tribes. In the 1900's the Navajo reservations were solidified, and cultural traditions were highly disrupted. Following this was a phase intended to annihilate the Native American population. Firstly, the removal of Native Americans from reservations to the cities. Then forced schooling in English only boarding schools (the irony is that the code speakers during world war II were speaking the Navajo language and helped win the war!). Finally, the attempt to control the fertility rate of women where 25% of American Indian women were forced to undergo *sterilization* (Herring, 1989). Needless to say, the Navajo culture and people survived, though these incidents have caused much distrust of whites.

Regarding the current oppression, a portion can be blamed on the misinformation the dominant white society has regarding this group. Many people, especially young children, still think of Indians as savages. In an interview with an Arizona fourth grade teacher she reports, "prior to instruction on Native American culture, students think that Native American Indians wear warpaint, live in teepees, and have nothing in common

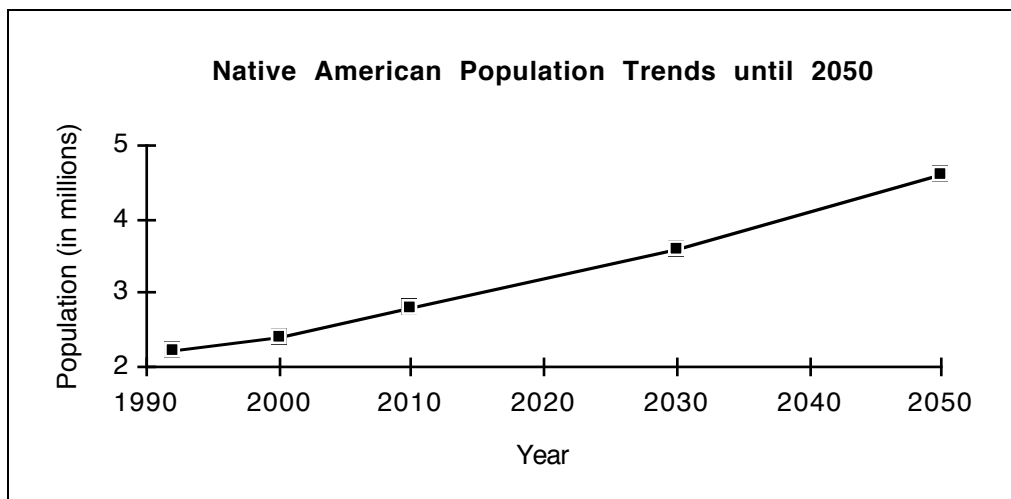
with white society” (Moody P., 1995). While part of that school’s curriculum is to inform them of the truth regarding this, and show actual instances of realistic life on the reservation, this is an example of how even 9 year olds are misinformed regarding Native American life. I would guess that it is not common -especially in states with a lower population of Native Americans than Arizona- for districts to have this in their curriculum. Oppression is also due to some more insidious factors at early ages. Long term study has shown that racism between anglo and Native Americans is based on culture but *also* to power relations in the larger community. The same study has shown that Navajos are more academically successful when secure in their traditionalist values(Deyhle, 1995).

Today, more than 180,000 people are Navajo, or Dine’eh, making them the largest single tribe in the United States. They continue to endure hardship, poverty, prolonged unemployment, substandard housing, inadequate health care, alcohol abuse, suicide, illiteracy, and delinquency at much higher rates than white society (LaFromboise, 1988). And despite their history and the current pressures placed on them, they continue to hold strongly to their heritage, and cultural values (Quintero, 1995).

Population Trends - A Look Into the Future

Population trends provide us a view of where the Native Americans are going. To understand this, it is important to know that there are differences in how Native Americans are classified by the various government agencies. The U.S. Census Bureau only requires that the person identifies himself as such (on the questionnaire). By that definition, I could call myself a Native American Indian (I am part Cherokee). The Bureau of Indian Affairs requires that you must be an enrolled member of a tribe, or be at least one fourth Native American (Thomason, 1991). In this case I would not classify as a Native American (only a sixteenth). These facts must be considered when looking at any population data yet are not easy to break out from the raw information.

Future projections for are for continued growth both numerically and proportionately. The Census Bureau recorded that in 1992, there were over 2.2 million Native Americans in the U.S.. This is projected to grow to 2.4 million in 2000, 2.8 million in 2010, 3.6 million in 2030, and 4.6 million in 2050.



This currently represents 0.6% of the total U.S. population, and is projected to account for 1.2% by 2050. (Day, 1992). This is a doubling of the proportional population and will certainly have effects in political, economic and social realms.

Cultural Views and Value Orientations

The Native American cultural view and outlook on the world is very different from that defined by eurocentric literature. This has been true for hundreds of years, and has changed little on the past fifty (Richardson, 1948). Native Americans do have many common characteristics that we can study and at least get a “starting point” for reference in counseling. It is helpful to cross-reference these characteristics to “white” values. The following table describes 8 comparative values (Sue, 1990):

Native American Value	White Value
Sharing	Ownership
Tribe and extended family is first	Individual is first
Respect for elders	Youth is valued
Live in the present	Look to the future
Cooperation	Composition
Non-interference	Take charge
Harmony with Nature	Control/exploit nature
Learning through legends, stories	Learning is in school, from book

These are obviously very different and can rise in conflict during White / Native American interactions. In addition, we can see how counselors who expect the Native American to have the White view will be poorly equipped to understand their client.

The more specific Navajo values are important for this discussion as well. Though the above is somewhat descriptive, there are some studies that clarify and expand further. Family, including aunts, uncles, cousins are all responsible for raising the family member. They help each other in times of need, even providing nursing care for parents or providing financial assistance (McWhirter, 1991). Because of this it is not usually acceptable to go outside the extended family if there is a problem. This illustrates the importance of building rapport and involving family members in the counseling relationship (McWhirter, 1991). Tribe is the focus, and for a Navajo, the individual is merely an extension of the tribe (Garrett, 1994). Finally, spirituality is central to all of these issues. All things are seen as working in harmony and the counselor needs to understand how this fits into the clients views - in a sense, they must actually become part of this "whole"!

For a counselor to properly work with a Navajo client, they must understand how the client views life. They must be sensitive to the clients plight of having to live in two very different worlds, and how their own values may be different from the clients. Everything starts with spirituality so therefore maybe the following quote sums it up; "Spiritual being essentially requires only that we seek our place in the universe: everything else will follow in good time. Because everything and everyone was created with a specific purpose to fulfill, no one should have the power to interfere or to impose on others the best path to follow" (Garrett, 1994, p.138). We must "be on the clients path" if we are to be helpful.

Communication Patterns

Native Americans in general, and Navajos in particular, have a unique communication style that has many tribal specific aspects. Evidence persists (drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence) that this is very often poorly understood by counselors. There are various general characteristics that are common to Native Americans.

High reliance on non verbal communication is one of the essential parts involved. Even very young children learn that to show respect, they are not to look directly at an elder or person of authority like a teacher (or counselor) . The counselor should expect this and also may need to instruct other white people interacting with the client to expect this also (e.g. discuss these styles with teachers). Other non-verbal items are the “turn-switching” pause between the counselor and client. Counselors need to learn to be patient and wait for a response (Brandis, 1994).

What the Native American is comfortable to discuss often conflicts directly with common counseling strategy. Confrontation is avoided at all costs, especially to an elder. This causes the Native American client to agree with the counselor rather than potentially cause a disruption. There is little or no encouragement to analyze or ask questions, and they are not taught to express deep feelings (Sue, 1990). Observing the environment with patience is the valued learning method (Garrett, 1994). A useful strategy for dealing with this is to use role playing and modeling, which allows the client to observe and learn. In addition, the counselor may want to try to discuss the roles of the client and counselor and their mutual responsibilities during the first session (Thomason, 1991).

Traditional Native Americans are used to the Medicine man to provide solutions, and therefore are passive in dealings with them. The counselor has a similar role and therefore a more directive approach will tend to work better with the client.

As hard as it is for white middle class society to understand, many traditional peoples do not know much or any English. This results in a graduation of English ability that may cause difficulty in dealing with Native Americans. The client may not know how to express or what to express to describe a need or feeling. In addition, that translation from “thinking Navajo” to “talking English” (for example) may cause loss of meaning and understanding (McWhirter, 1991). Here is another instance where the client’s non verbal behavior is of utmost importance.

With all of these factors in mind, we can begin to see not only why we have such a large chasm between the peoples, but hopefully how to cross over and initiate communication in a counseling relationship. Though counseling itself is but a small part of the larger need for improved communication, there is hope that research findings can extend to the larger facets of society.

Identity Development Models - An Aid in Counseling

Some studies have supported identifying the “household” that an American Indian may come from as an aid in determining the Native American’s relationship to the dominant society (Garrett, 1994). The scale moves from traditional to acculturated, as described below:

1. Traditional or “Isolated” - these Native American Indian clients think and speak in their specific native language. They do not speak English. These people hold very traditional values and beliefs. Usually their homes were in a remote area of the reservation.
2. Transitional or Traditional - these people are bilingual and they participate in tribal ceremonies. They do not fully identify with either culture.
3. Bicultural - these people are accepted by the majority culture and usually live on the reservation. They practice both their traditional beliefs as well as the majority values. They engage in traditional tribal ceremonies but prefer to speak English.
4. Assimilated - these people accept only the majority culture and are accepted by the dominant society. Their primary language is English. Some of the Native Americans who live and work in the city return home to visit family or to take part in ceremonies. Many of the people in this category have never lived on the reservation. They may never have used a medicine man and may not have ever received tribal benefits.

Because this is highly related to lifestyle, the counselor can determine quite a bit by asking where and in what manner the client is living. As pointed out previously, the dichotomy between other “American” cultures, and Native American culture makes this

distinction valuable. As we can see, the ends of the scale are very different(Garrett, 1994). In determining a “position” on the above scale, we must also ask what tribe the client comes from otherwise we will have no hope of understanding what the traditions they hold are (i.e. if they are at stage 1, we better know what these beliefs are specific to the tribe).

Navajo Gender Roles

Tribe and family are central to Navajo people. Much has been said on these points, but I would like to focus on gender differences and issues. These are only portions of the whole (family or tribe), but perhaps this insight from the center of the family unit can illuminate the tribulations faced today. Women and men in Native American culture have very different roles and very different expectations placed on them by society and their traditions. I hope to provide a small illustration of these differences with short descriptions of these viewpoints.

Navajo religious life illustrates via many stories and traditions. Male/Female Symbolism pervades Navajo philosophy. The hogan, the cardinal light phenomenon, the human body and just about everything else are viewed as having both male and female parts. Most aspects of the Navajo world are divides such (i.e. mother earth, father sky). Sexual desire is seen as the impetus behind the pairing of male and female and therefore is sacred because it results in creation. Two of the main characters in all creationist legend are *First Man* and *First Woman*. Discord between the sexes is a major theme in creation of disease, and legendary monsters (one example - too long to repeat here - is the "Where People Moved Opposite" story - Quintero, 1995, p76). Joining of the genders is a primal requirement for harmony and well being and there is documented evidence to suggest that discord here has a significant impact on physical illness(Quintero, 1995).

Women have had an equal or higher status to men in Navajo society though in truth, both seem to feel that the roles are neither better nor worse - just the way they are supposed to be. Women have long held many personal traditions (though these often

involve male family as well). At puberty, women engage in the *Kinaalda* ceremony. This involves a complex ritual of physical exertion, family celebration and spirituality patterned after events that happened to First Woman in stories (Roessel, 1991). In the Native American tradition, a story will best serve to illustrate female status:

“ *Altse hastiin* the First Man became a great hunter in the fourth world. So he was able to provide his wife *Altse asdzaa* the First Woman with plenty to eat. As a result, she grew very fat. Now one day he brought home a fine fleshy deer. His wife boiled some of it and together they had themselves a hearty meal. When she finished eating, *Altse asdzaa* the First Woman wiped her greasy hands on her sheath. She belched deeply. And she had this to say: ‘Thank you *shijoozh*, my vagina,’ she said, ‘Thank you for that delicious dinner.’

To which *Altse hastiin* the First Man replied this way: ‘Why do you say that?’ he replied. ‘Why not thank me? Was it not I who killed the deer whose flesh you have just feasted on? Was it not I who carried it here for you to eat? Was it not I who skinned it? Who made it ready for you to boil? Is *nijoozh* your vagina the great hunter, that you should thank it and not me?’

To which *Altse asdzaa* offered this answer: ‘as a matter of fact, she is,’ offered she. ‘In a manner of speaking it is *joozh*, my vagina who hunts. Were it not for *joozh*, you would not have killed that deer. Were it not for her you would not have carried it here. You would not have skinned it. You lazy men would do nothing around here were it not for *joozh*. In truth, *joozh* the vagina does all the work around here” (Deyhle, 1995, p. 135-136)

We can see here that women are placed at the foundation of society. Women have almost the opposite position in the matriarchal Navajo culture that they do in the western “white” culture. Schools, media, politics, and work create a tug of war that few of the dominant class understand. It is too orthogonal to what they are used to.

"Unable to protect by killing buffalo or by 'making a killing' on Wall Street the Indian man became disposable" (Farrell, 1993). This quote illustrates that men in Navajo culture not only have the dominant society providing cultural stress, they have a historical past that may haunt them today. The man's job was to protect the "sacred" female, to bring in food, water and provide safety. But when the white man's superior technology (i.e. guns, etc.) forced his family to be confined on the reservation, he was no longer able to protect them. The aforementioned and well accepted problems of suicide, alcohol abuse, etc. are clear evidence that stresses are enormous on the Navajo man, yet in reviewing literature on the subject, I could find no specific Navajo male literature published in the past five years. The only reference to male issues is either in female specific literature as a comparison, or in the study of specific illness (e.g. Drug Abuse). None of these accounts for a study of what tears apart at the insides of the Navajo male. It is clear that we need more balance in research spent studying both Navajo males and females.

In examining the integration of these two roles, we can see that Navajo gender discord is largely due to changing environment (i.e. a dominant culture forced change in the roles). Historically the Navajo have enjoyed egalitarian gender relationships which (as we can see) stemmed from divergent bases and stressed integration and important contribution of both male and female. As an example, Navajo men and women owned sheep independently and combined their animals into a family herd. Similarly, male violence against women was extremely rare (Bonvillain, 1989). As white society tries to push these roles to fit their "mold", they are really asking the Navajo to throw away and

make an “about face” from a tradition that has been much more workable and cooperative than what we have in the mass of society today.

In conclusion, male-female roles in Navajo society are very different from white society. In fact, the specifics are very different from other Native Americans (e.g. the Plains Indians males were the focus of the wealth and status in the family) (Bonvillain, 1989). The cultural forces that the Navajo has to experience while off the reservation, watching television or in school is enormous. Counselors need to appreciate and have as much information as possible on gender roles when approaching Navajo clients. While I hope that this is a helpful bit of information, much more research and education needs to be done on these issues.

Critical Incident CaseDescription of Incident and Events

John Scott, a 19 year old Navajo American Indian college student, was referred to a university counseling services program because of problems with failing grades, lack of interest, tardiness to classes, and depression. The counselor assigned was a white male who had just graduated from a masters degree program in counseling from a university that had few American Indian students.

In the first counseling session, the counselor tried to spend time establishing a “relationship” with John. To do this he spent time asking him about his family, his life on the reservation, etc. He found out that John had two older brothers and two older sisters, and that his family all lived together in the same house on the reservation in northern Arizona. John did not seem interested in any further discussion, and, as much as the counselor tried to ask, he would not get a “straight” answer. An example of this is when he asked John how he felt about his grades being poor, he responded with simple answers such as “I don’t know”. John was reluctant to even schedule the next appointment.

A week later, when the next appointment came up, John was 15 minutes late. The counselor continued to ask about family and school,

Counselor: “how has school been?”

John: “About the same” (looking down at his feet)

Counselor: “ya know, I also had difficulties in school. Why I actually got a D in one of my classes too!”

John: “really..”

Counselor: "Yeah, it took a lot of hard work, but I re-took the class and ended up with an A!"

John: "wow..." (still looking at shoes - counselor is wondering whether client has a foot fixation)

Counselor: "It just goes to show that anybody can do well in school. I'm sure I felt the same way about my bad grades as you do"

John: "oh.. well I guess I should just work harder.."

The counselor continued to try to find out why John felt he was getting poor grades. He described that school was "just hard" and that it wasn't interesting. The counselor noticed that John rarely looked at him and he was uncomfortable because he wasn't sure John was listening or interested.

The next week, John was also late. Since the counselor felt he had spent enough time establishing a relationship (after all, his other clients warmed up to him after a few sessions), he proceeded to try and assess the specific problem (i.e. poor grades), and help John find a solution. Since John was late, however, the session ended after 35 minutes so the counselor could see his next client on time.

The next week, John didn't appear for his session and didn't return to counseling or to school - he returned to the reservation.

Race/Culture of the Persons Involved

John Scott, is a reservation born and raised Navajo from north eastern Arizona. The university John was attending was 76% Caucasian, 8% African American, 7% Asian American, 7 % Hispanic, and 2% American Indian so there was not much of a support network for John. In addition, only 10% of the American Indian population was Navajo.

The counselor was a white male who had grown up without a lot of diversity in culture around him, either at school or at home. His training touched on issues with American Indian clients, but he had not counseled any or met many.

How the Counselor Handled the Situation

The counselor handled the situation as if John was a white male and assumed that John would be responsive to the same types of counseling methods and interventions.

Cross Cultural Issues the Situation Raised

The situation raised the following issues:

- Individualism vs. Family Focus: American Indians have much more interdependence with the family unit. The counselor did not attempt to bring the family into the sessions or even ask John if he would like to have a family member join. The counselor incorrectly assumed that he would be more comfortable discussing the situation alone.
- White Therapist: The counselor would automatically be further removed from this client because of his race. The counselor might have tried to find a compatible American Indian, or better yet, a Navajo counselor.
- Counseling In General: In many American Indian cultures, (including Navajo), speaking to a stranger is the last thing they would do about personal problems. Outside research about Navajo cultures would have helped.
- Lack of Role Models: Because none of the rest of his family members have left the reservation for college, John must have felt very alone, not just

because he was away from his family, but because he was going down a different path than them. If he is successful and gets a degree, he might be worried that the family members would make him somewhat of an outcast (e.g. say he's better than them).

- Lack of Assertiveness: American Indians do not value assertiveness. It must be up to the counselor to direct the client. American Indians expect the counselor to offer alternatives and solutions to problems (i.e. some behavioral emphasis)

How the Counselor Should have Handled the Situation

The counselor should have:

- Seen if there was an available American Indian (preferably Navajo) counselor available that would be able to work with John. Possibly use of tribal elders as appropriate for either consultation or direct help.
- Done research about Navajos
- Possible change in setting (i.e. maybe meeting outdoors or on the reservation).
- Considered discussing both the client and counselor responsibilities during the first session.
- Use role playing and modeling to take advantage of the Native American characteristic of learning by observation.
- Consulted family members (i.e. brought them into counseling if possible)
- Avoided doing a lot of disclosure (unless it was very appropriate) about his similar experiences because John isn't going to believe that they are similar

(and they were **way** off!). Instead suggest alternatives and solutions to some of the problems presented - even ones that sound indirect like lack of family support, or role models, etc.

- Spent some time up front clarifying goals and responsibilities of the counselor and the client (preferably after doing research on Navajo's)

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