COUNSELING APPLICATIONS OF RET IN A CHINESE CULTURAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: To explore the potential of Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) with clients of Chinese background, a brief review is conducted with respect to parallels between RET philosophy and some key components of Chinese culture and ways in which Chinese think. Arguments are advanced as to why RET is particularly suitable for use within a Chinese cultural context. Issues involved in using RET with Chinese clients are addressed including the appreciation many Chinese have for the logical and rational aspects of RET, the most appropriate type of client-counselor relationship to facilitate RET therapeutic progress, appropriate ways to dispute, and some cautionary words on the use of "emotive methods." Areas where the RET counselor needs to be particularly sensitive to the cultural background of the client are highlighted.

As one of the main approaches in counseling and psychotherapy, rational-emotive-therapy (RET) has shown its vitality in practice as well as its effectiveness in outcome research (e.g., Lyons & Woods, 1991; Engels & Garnefski, 1993; Silverman & McCarthy, 1992; McGovern & Silverman, 1986). Despite the evident fruitfulness of RET in the field of counseling psychology in mainstream western society, little attention has been given to the value and applicability of RET to Asian culture in general, and Chinese culture in particular. As both the underlying principles and therapeutic techniques of RET are actually...
quite appealing to the grass-roots thinking in Chinese culture, it is very intriguing and appropriate to explore the applicable aspects of RET in counseling clients with a Chinese cultural background. While this paper does not intend to review all aspects of RET which might be relevant to counseling Chinese clients, it discusses (a) the primary norms in Chinese culture; (b) parallels between these norms and key notions of RET; and (c) counseling implications of RET in a Chinese cultural context.

It should be noted that this paper discusses "Chinese culture" in a very general sense. The terms "Chinese clients" and "Chinese people" used during the following discussion include Chinese people in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, and Singapore as well as overseas Chinese. Chinese people who live in different places have different subcultures because of historical, social, economic, and political reasons. However, since Chinese people all over the world share the same basic philosophies and core values derived from Chinese culture, it is relevant to use the generalized terms in this discussion to encompass people of Chinese cultural origin living on other continents.

CONCEPTUAL PARALLELS BETWEEN RET AND CHINESE THINKING

RET is conceptualized and constituted on the rudimentary premises of western ideology, and the rationale of its basic conception has been actively tested and utilized within mainstream western society. However, RET's potential efficacy goes well beyond the Western cultural milieu in which it is currently most widely used. RET, in fact, has its great potential to cross western-eastern cultural boundaries, and to play a much more vigorous and influential therapeutic role in a Chinese cultural context. By comparing the basic assumptions and key concepts of RET with some of the primary components which form the philosophical framework of Chinese culture, many similarities become apparent. Applying RET to help clients of Chinese cultural background thus not only appears possible, but also holds a substantial promise for success.

Logical Thinking as a Principle of Life

The central theme of RET is its focus on the formation and function of a belief system, namely, irrational and rational thinking, in a per-