

Increasing the Knowledge Base: Utilizing the GAIN in Culturally Sensitive Landscapes

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ABSTRACT

Background: Assessment instruments used in human services settings are often normed for majority populations. The importance of increasing the evidence-based validity of assessment tools in unique populations is essential to providing relevant evaluation, successful treatment, and, ultimately, individual and societal wellness. The Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN) is a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment used with both adolescents and adults being admitted to substance abuse treatment in outpatient, intensive outpatient, partial hospitalization, methadone, short-term residential, long-term residential, therapeutic community, and correctional program settings. The GAIN has been used by agencies and systems of care in communities ranging from large urban areas to moderate-sized and small urban communities, rural areas, and Indian reservations. Over the past 10 years, several culturally focused workgroups have convened and given separate presentations about their use of the GAIN and related GAIN findings for their culturally distinct groups. Recently, those groups came together collectively--for the first time--to discuss GAIN administration and interpretation with diverse populations. **Methods:** Using qualitative methods based in grounded theory, this study identified the commonalities, themes, processes, experiences, and perceptions represented by the multiple diverse workgroups sharing their "in the field" or "practice based" knowledge of the GAIN process from a cultural standpoint. **Results:** Findings suggest the importance of assessment flexibility, the use of storytelling to improve communication-style differences, the importance of diversity trainings and respectful community relationship-building to increase the acceptance, utilization, and validity of the GAIN among diverse population groups. **Conclusions:** The findings provide multi-cultural and culturally distinct settings with meaningful information that can be useful for using the GAIN in culturally sensitive landscapes.

Keywords:

Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN), diversity, culture, assessment, validity, qualitative methods.

Introduction

Indigenous peoples all over the world tell the story of a monkey, from Australia and New Zealand to Africa. As the story goes, a monkey was swimming across a wide river. The current was strong, and the monkey had a hard time reaching the other side. While crossing, the monkey went under the water several times and nearly drowned. When she finally reached the shore, the monkey passed out from exhaustion. When she awoke, the

monkey noticed a number of fish jumping out of the water, so she gathered all of her energy and ran downstream as fast as she could. One by one, the monkey snatched the fish from the water; then, she grabbed a vine from a nearby tree and tied each fish to a vine. Eventually all of the fish died. Why did she do this? The monkey had perceived the fish as trying to escape the river and so she tried to "rescue" them. The fish, however, were not trying to escape at all. Instead, they were feeding on insects just above the water's surface.

This story teaches an important lesson about diversity that can be applied to assessment practices. What we perceive to be correct in assessment practices with one population may be meaningless or even harmful to another population, despite our best intentions. Differences in styles of thinking and cross-cultural communication give rise to potential concerns regarding the use of conventional assessment techniques that are normed on other communities, societies and peoples. Assessment research with ethnic minorities and various cultures has a challenging history (Deardorff, Tschaan, & Flores, 2008; Okazaki & Sue, 1995; Whately, Allen, & Dana, 2003). Instruments used in human services settings are often either normed for the population most familiar to the developers or are ethnically “glossed” (Trimble, 1991) to provide a sense of working with specific cultures rather than being flexibly designed to accurately assess a multitude of cultures within a larger culture. It is also noted that most psychological instruments do not adequately address the influence of culture on functioning (Hitchcock et al., 2006).

The validity of the data collected with existing biased measures can be enhanced by assessing their degree of cultural appropriateness, interpreting client responses with cultural and environmental norms in mind, recommending changes to administration processes and the instruments themselves, and then implementing those changes. This enhances the fairness of these instruments by allowing people to be assessed in a culturally familiar manner (e.g. language); it also reduces costs and saves development time for new tests (Hambleton & Kanjee, 1995). In addition, many diverse cultures’ realities are more meaningfully represented by qualitative techniques of data collection rather than quantitative.

Exclusive reliance on quantitative techniques may be too reductionistic to adequately portray realities in a manner meaningful to a diverse range of cultural contexts (Godlaski, Johnson, & Haring, 2006). Hence, increasing the evidence-based support of assessment tools in unique populations is essential for relevant evaluation, successful treatment, and, ultimately, individual and societal wellness.

The purpose of this study is to discover the commonalities, themes, processes, experiences, and perceptions represented by multiple diverse workgroups sharing their “in the field” or “practice based” knowledge of the Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN) assessment (Dennis, Titus, White, Hodgkins, & Webber, 2003)—a widely-used substance abuse assessment—from a cultural utilization standpoint. This paper gives voice to the experiences of multiple participants, from diverse settings and societies, who are affiliated with the GAIN Coordinating Center (GCC), its ambassadors and administrators. The results of this study will assist GAIN users in effectively implementing the GAIN in a variety of cultural settings. Ultimately, this article aims to inform and provide multi-cultural settings with meaningful information that can be useful for using the GAIN instrument in culturally sensitive landscapes.

The GAIN Assessment

Data collected using the GAIN was not the focus of this project; rather, the focus was on documentation of the experiences described by clinicians, researchers, and other subject-matter experts who use the GAIN as they serve individuals from culturally distinct populations. The GAIN is a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment used with both

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adolescents and adults who are referred for substance abuse treatment in outpatient, intensive outpatient, partial hospitalization, methadone, short-term residential, long-term residential, therapeutic community, and correctional program settings. A copy of the instrument may be found at <http://chestnut.org/LI/GAIN/>.

The GAIN has been thoroughly validated psychometrically (Dennis, Scott, Godley & Funk, 1999) and is used in thousands of agencies and systems of care in communities ranging from large urban areas to moderate-sized and small urban communities, rural areas, and reservations. The data gathered for this project focused on increasing the knowledge base of those who use the GAIN in culturally diverse settings, but the findings are likely to be applicable to other instruments also.

The GAIN Cultural Sensitivity Summit

Because of the widespread utilization of the GAIN and the desire to build a culturally sensitive workforce, Chestnut Health Systems partnered with the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), a division of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), to host the GAIN Cultural Sensitivity Summit in San Antonio, Texas in January 2010. The purpose of the summit was to begin a discussion on how to use evidence-based assessments like the GAIN in culturally sensitive ways.

A culturally diverse group of treatment professionals, subject matter experts and certified GAIN trainers from across the country came together to explore ways to encourage cultural sensitivity and adaptability of the GAIN assessments in clinical practice. Seven

groups were represented at the summit, including four ethnic groups (African American, Indigenous peoples (American Indian/Alaska Native), Asian American, and Latino/Hispanic) and three non-ethnic groups (Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender/Questioning (GLBTQ), and Rural/Small Communities).

The 3-day summit included presentations on topics that defined and clarified the meaning of “cultural sensitivity” in clinical assessment and clinical interpretation along with discussions on the implications of those definitions in practice. One of the key objectives of the summit was to develop a consensus and guidelines on reasonable adaptations and accommodations to be used in semi-structured interviewing with instruments like the GAIN in an effort to optimize respect, validity, reliability and efficiency with clients of any cultural background. All summit participants were familiar with the GAIN and many of them used it with clients.

During the course of the summit, each of the seven culturally specific groups worked independently to generate discussion notes in response to specific questions on using the GAIN. These notes included workgroup summary notes, narratives, and comments from summit participant end-of-day surveys.

This article, as a follow-up to the summit, utilizes qualitative analytic methods to distill the workgroups’ discussion notes and thus identify the central themes that address the question of how one can use an assessment like the GAIN with cultural sensitivity. This analytically generated advice from the workgroups provides a framework for increasing the knowledge base on how to utilize the GAIN in diverse settings.

METHODS

Foundational research models

Community-Based Participatory Research. The project model was based on the guiding principles set forth in a community-based research protocol, the *Model Tribal Research Code* (American Indian Law Center, 1999) as well as direction from community-based participatory research literature (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). The Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) model is a collaborative approach whereby research is conducted as an equal partnership between academically trained researchers and members of a community. CBPR has emerged as an

alternative paradigm that integrates education and social action to improve health and reduce health disparities. CBPR is more than a set of research methods; it is an orientation to research that focuses on relationships between academic and community partners—with principles of co-learning, mutual benefit, and long-term commitment—and incorporates community theories, participation, and practices into research efforts (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). In this project, each of the seven communities represented in the GAIN Cultural Sensitivity Summit was integrated into some component of the research methodology, as described throughout subsequent text. By doing so, the project incorporated multiple cultures and supported community collaborations.

Grounded Theory. The analytic model used in this project was grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is unique in that data are used to generate theory, rather than the conventional scientific method in which theory drives the interpretation of

data. Through the application of grounded theory, qualitative data were used to construct a model comprised of categorical processes that explained the phenomena under study. In this case, the application of grounded theory to qualitative data were used to construct a model that explained how culturally diverse groups organized and interpreted their experiences with GAIN utilization. This study also drew upon grounded theory to develop action-based recommendations for the GCC on using the GAIN in culturally diverse settings. Qualitative methods such as grounded theory have been used in minority populations to develop and test culturally based value measures (Deardorff, Tschann, & Flores, 2008).

Confidentiality and cultural safety

There were no types of deception associated with this project and the Principal Investigator (PI) was an independent consultant and an Indigenous researcher (Seneca Nation of Indians). Furthermore, the GAIN Cultural Advisory Council, an external committee, was part of the analysis review and evaluation process and, because the results are being presented to the community at large, no individual responses were identified. Participants attending the Cultural Sensitivity Summit—including their individual notes, responses, comments, and related verbatim materials—are not identified on an individual level. It is also noted that all GAIN-using sites, including specific minority groups attending and contributing at the summit, had the opportunity to receive a copy of the report upon request. The project did not identify any discomforts related to the physical and psychological well-being of the communities involved; lastly, it did not cause any negative impact on the cultural, social, economic, or political well-being of the cultural communities that were represented.

Data

The raw data documents consisted of written and verbatim data from the workgroups' summary notes, narratives, and comments from the end-of-day surveys. Data were submitted in rough draft form to the Principal Investigator. Two Native American women transcribed the raw data into Microsoft Word documents suitable for upload into the ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software (<http://www.atlasti.com>). A male member of the GLBTQ community was recruited to review the materials as a secondary examination to ensure that the initial transcription was completed without error. This was done to improve the rigor of transcription. The total collection of materials included 25 documents, with 16 of the documents transcribed and transformed into RTF files for use with the ATLAS.ti software (nine documents were already in Word format). Data from these documents composed the secondary data set.

Analytic procedures

An independent minority researcher conducted the data analysis using ATLAS.ti software to facilitate the organization of the qualitative data.

Transcript analysis and categorizing.

Secondary data were subjected to transcript analysis, a rigorous and labor-intensive process that involved the assignment of codes to text. The substantive codes identify and label participants' main experiences and perceptions of increasing the knowledge base for using the GAIN in culturally diverse settings. Each transcript was open coded (reviewed at a macro level by the PI) several times to identify and label codes, and like-codes were grouped

into categories. A *category* is a "theme" or variable which makes sense of what is being communicated in the text. Categories represent concepts that stand for various phenomena, for instance, any problem, issue, event, or happening defined as being significant to respondents (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this project, categories were "in the field experiences" or "practice base knowledge" from multiple individuals and agencies that utilized the GAIN in an array of cultural environments. The experiences of these GAIN users represented the processes associated with improved use of the GAIN. They were based on stories of GAIN Summit participants and further represented the building blocks of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A category that is represented often and appears central to the study and emerging story is called a *core category*.

As coding continued, categories were further delineated through properties, which are characteristics of ascribed categories. They provide definition and meaning and serve as attributes to the categories. An additional sub-level of coding identifies dimensions, which further explain properties. Dimensions provide a range within which the property varies and also provides a location map of the properties along continuums (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Throughout the analysis, the properties and dimensions of categories were developed. Some categories were eventually absorbed within other categories.

The study also used sub-categorization. Sub-categorization is a method of breaking down higher-level categories. Subcategories were definitive and unique concepts that pertain to the ascribed category and include information about where and how a phenomenon is likely to occur (Strauss & Corbin,

1998). Finally, this study also utilized axial coding. This coding process relates categories to subcategories and codes around the axis of a category.

Memoing. Memoing is an important activity in a grounded theory-driven analysis. As the categories and properties emerge from the coded data, the relationships that link them together also emerge. Memoing refers to the creation of written memos that document the coder's thoughts and ideas about the relationships between emerging categories and the explanatory model. These memos form the framework for explaining the data and also leave an audit trail leading back to the data. The audit trail provides the coder with a means to understand how the data were analyzed and how theoretical models were developed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

GAIN Cultural Advisory Council. The GAIN Cultural Advisory Council, a diverse external group of treatment providers and content experts, assisted in the evaluation by providing results verification, input, and insight into the theory building process. This extra step was taken to ensure that results were coded, analyzed, and arranged to show the correct process and final result determination. Lastly, the involvement of the GAIN Cultural Advisory Council strengthened the research design by providing a powerful collaborative effort. Those attending the initial focus group received a raffle ticket for a chance to win an honorarium that was purchased from a remote, rural Ethiopian community in Africa. At the completion of the advisory input-sharing conference call, the raffle was held and the honorarium was awarded.

During the second call, advisory council

members assisted with the final review of the results. This process improved qualitative rigor and combated possible investigator, ethnic, or gender bias. Advisory council members attending the second teleconference meeting received a raffle ticket for a chance to win an honorarium, which was purchased from a Native American rural reservation community. At the completion of the second meeting, the raffle was held and the honorarium was awarded.

Research Limitations

One limitation of the study was the lack of full audio- or video-recorded data for observational review or word-by-word line qualitative analysis. To improve validity and rigor, the project used multiple transcribers to validate transcription of hand-written notes, making sure all data were transcribed correctly and all content was used. In addition, the GAIN Cultural Advisory Council held two follow-up sessions with the P.I. in order to discuss and verify the process and outcomes. A second limitation of this study is the generalizability of its findings. Due to the diverse nature of cultural and community environments and assessments, these findings are not to be over-generalized to every culture or assessment.

RESULTS

The results of the qualitative analysis are outlined in Figure 1. Five categories and one sub-category emerged from the data and represented the main topics of the “in the field experience” or “practice based knowledge” for successful use of the GAIN in culturally diverse landscapes: Adapting the Administration Environment of the GAIN, Understanding and Improving Terminology, Communication Styles, Trainings, Emphasiz-

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ing Community Process (core category) and Historical Trauma: Trust and Mistrust (sub-category of emphasizing community process). Most categories had several properties and/or dimensions associated with them.

Adapting the administration environment of the GAIN

Environment can be defined in a number of ways. In relation to this project, environment is primarily described as the overall setting in which the person is situated within the community context. This premise is well described in the social work literature as Person-In-Environment or PIE (Kirt-Ashman & Hull 1999). In a GAIN-using site, the GAIN interviewer (person) who conducts assessments in culturally distinct community settings (environment) is the focal point. Thus, PIE sees people—in this case, the GAIN interview-

er—as constantly interacting with the client's various systems, which include family, work, religion, and educational settings. The goal is to adapt the GAIN interview in a way that improves interactions between the person and the various systems or environmental situations in which the GAIN interview is conducted and in which its clinical findings are interpreted.

Flexibility during assessment. Adapting the assessment or adding flexibility to the administration of the GAIN was a topic that many attendees discussed. Attendees stated that GAIN training should reflect ways that individuals administering the assessment could adapt the GAIN for use in their unique setting. The assessment should also continue to be administered in a semi-structured way to maintain validity and fidelity. However, when needed, interviewers should explain items in greater detail so as to fit the client's experi-

Figure 1.

Using the GAIN in Culturally Diverse Landscapes: Recommendations from the Field

1. Adapting the Administration Environment of the GAIN (Category)
 - Flexibility During Assessment (Property)
2. Understanding and Improving Terminology (Category)
 - Identity Questions (Dimension)
 - Taboo Questions (Dimension)
 - Resiliency Questions (Dimension)
3. Communication Styles (Category)
 - Storytelling (Property)
4. Trainings (Category)
5. Emphasizing Community Process (Core Category)
- 5b. Historical Traumas (Subcategory of Community): Trust & Mistrust
 - Spirituality (Property)
 - Multi-Cultural Advisory Council (Property)
 - "Listening to the Children" (Dimension)
 - Involving Families & Collaterals (Property)
 - Confidentiality (Property): "There Is a Strong Grapevine"

ences within the client's community environmental contexts. This flexibility will increase the client's understanding of the questions being asked and improve the likelihood of an accurate response. A summit participant who stated that it was useful to "hear that I can be flexible" exemplified this. Other summit attendees indicated that it was important to "make it known that the GAIN is meant to be modified/added to, etc." in order to make it more appropriate for each individual. Other responses included: "prep agencies and individuals!" and "accountability to the instrument is important, but emphasize the flexibility during the training." A final recommendation by the advisory council was to "encourage trainees to make notes on the adaptations as they make them" so as to share their adaptations with others who are in need of making similar adaptations.

Understanding and improving terminology

Participants of the summit indicated that terminology of items used in the GAIN is often misinterpreted or misunderstood in differing cultural contexts. An example of this was the meaning of the word "treatment." Its meaning may be unclear in cultures where there are potentially different interpretations, perceptions, or experiences related to treatment. In addition, some summit participants stated that the language in the GAIN is sometimes too technical for clients to understand. Ultimately, how can the GAIN items be adjusted for better community understanding so as to address potential differences in cultural meaning? Summit participants suggested the items should be adapted into layman's terms, meaning that items should be explained more in the contextual language of the area when necessary. Another important recommenda-

tion was to reframe items back to clients, or in the words of an advisory council member, "to make the language more general or to re-engage in another way."

Identity questions. A dimension of the greater category, Terminology, is reflected in the diverse nature of cultures. Administration of identity items on the GAIN can be complex. As with many assessment tools, general identifying questions include cultural selections (boxes from which to choose, e.g. race/ethnicity items) that are not diversified enough to successfully include multiple cultures or peoples. For example, within the Asian population there are multiple communities that comprise "Asian." It was suggested that more selections be included on the GAIN to identify cultural community. New efforts cited by the GAIN Coordinating Center address this issue and attempt to balance self-identification in order to support clinical work with individuals, meet reporting requirements, and support a wide range of research on how to improve care (retrieved from http://www.chestnut.org/LI/gain/GCC_Insider/GCC_Insider_issue9.pdf)

Taboo questions. The use of questions that may be taboo within certain cultures is another dimension that emerged in relation to the property of Terminology. For instance, questions regarding school or sexual abuse in some cultures may trigger recollections of past historical traumas, community traumas, or unknown histories that are taboo to speak of. A recent, brief GAIN Q & A (Asking About Menstruation on the GAIN; retrieved from http://www.chestnut.org/LI/gain/GCC_Insider/GCC_Insider_issue9.pdf) is a starting point of discussion for addressing the administration of taboo questions. However, ongoing education about using these items with clients

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from different cultures requires ongoing attention. It may also be important to understand differences in interpretation of taboo questions in varying cultural contexts. This can be done by having a dialogue within the community about the reason for and content of these items and how best to administer them in a culturally sensitive manner.

Resiliency questions. Resiliency can be defined as “both an individual’s capacity to navigate to health resources and a condition of the individual’s family, community, and culture to provide these resources in culturally meaningful ways” (Unger, as cited in McCubbin et al., 2010, p. 262). If differences in cultural adaptation and coping are understood, decision-makers will be better able to design public policies and mental health interventions to meet the needs of different cultural groups (McCubbin et al., 2010). This also applies to assessments within varying cultural environments and communities. With regard to the GAIN instrument, summit participants asked the basic question “How can the GAIN incorporate items to tap resiliency?” Throughout the discussion, the term *resiliency factors* for varying cultural societies became important. This included how to formulate a strength-based relationship with a client within the community context and was best stated by an advisory council member who said, “This is an important issue in community process.” Furthermore, having a comprehensive set of resiliency questions in an assessment and administering them in a culturally sensitive manner may address mistrust, build trust, and mitigate historical trauma. Although not specifically a representative of a GAIN issue, participants indicated that resiliency questions are a means of adding a culturally appropriate style for improving acceptance in diverse com-

munities.

Communication styles. Differences in styles of thinking and communication give rise to concerns regarding the use of conventional assessment techniques within diverse cultures (Godlaski et al., 2006). Specifically, the adoption of more flexible communication styles which are consistent with the cultural communication styles of the community that the GAIN is being with used with. Therefore, understanding communication styles, rapport building, and respectful turn-taking-style conversations may be beneficial skills for GAIN-using sites when entering into a community to administer the GAIN. As noted by the cultural advisory council, “Storytelling is important.” Storytelling, by nature, allows clients to tell their stories at their own pace to answer questions posed. It allows for more time to explain and does not rush answers from clients. Furthermore, storytelling “allows (the interviewer) the ability to pick out information relevant to the assessment, use reflexive listening, and reframe back to client” (advisory council member). “Storytelling is also a cultural value—it recreates the story rather than telling it in the past tense” (summit participant).

Ultimately, storytelling is the foundation of many cultures. Patience, listening, and observing are a part of cultural oral tradition and are essential skills for understanding the metaphors and relationships inherent during the assessment process (Godlaski, Johnson, & Haring, 2006). A statement shared by an advisory council member best sums up this process: “Storytelling shares more relevant information. Although it takes more time, it shows respect and gives explanation which helps build trust.” When interviewers let clients explain and tell their stories when relevant for them it can help

them to fully describe their thoughts and feelings in response to the questions.

Trainings

Another category that resonated throughout the project was the need for supplemental or additional or ongoing trainings focused on concerns discussed at the summit. This included the need for a more detailed set of diversity-related trainings to engender an increased level of cultural awareness about the multiple communities involved. Topics for consideration included training on communication-style differences, incorporation of culturally relevant vignettes for best practices in assessment administration, retraining modules for past GAIN trainees focusing on cultural sensitivity, using story-telling with a semi-structured assessment, building rapport and community trust, and community information meetings prior to introducing the GAIN assessments at provider sites.

Emphasizing community process (Core Category)

As the data were analyzed, a definition of community collaboration emerged. The core category, Emphasizing Community Process, assumed an overarching role that encompassed the results. This category primarily included discussion of building a cultural advisory board, involving children, family inclusion, and trust versus mistrust issues embedded in historical traumas. These were identified as properties and a sub-category of this core category. In the overall picture, community process involved assessing how to adapt when administering the GAIN to fit the unique community landscape, determining how this adaptation was useful in community engagement,

and evaluating the ways in which the use of specialized trainings contributed to community capacity building and GAIN acceptance.

Cultural advisory council. The recommendation and development of a cultural advisory council provided a means through which communities could work with the GAIN Coordinating Center to assist GAIN-using sites in successfully implementing the GAIN within various cultural contexts. One attendee best stated the role of the advisory council: "Let the cultural advisory council serve as implementation mentors."

Woven throughout the discussion of developing a cultural advisory council was the inclusion of the voices of youth (listening to the children). Recommendations included incorporating diverse youth into the cultural advisory council or having some means by which youth could have an opportunity to share their experiences as people who have been assessed with the GAIN. Their input would provide valuable information for the assessment's ongoing development and use in their communities.

Involving families & collaterals. This property of the core category included the potential need to incorporate families into the assessment process. One cultural advisory council member indicated, "Collaterals were key." This approach is similar to collective society thinking (Triandis, 1995). Collectivism is defined as a social pattern consisting of strongly linked individuals who see themselves as parts of a larger system. A second view may be seen in the emphasis placed on family ties and the discouragement of children to achieve psychological separation and independence from their parents (Choi, 2002). Summit attendees

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incorporated the ideology of collectivism by emphasizing the need for family involvement during the GAIN assessment.

Confidentiality: “There was a strong grapevine”. Confidentiality is crucial during the GAIN assessment process as noted by summit attendees. This is paramount in small communities, and especially true for work within specific cultural contexts. One attendee who noted that there was a “strong grapevine” of which GAIN interviewers must be aware exemplifies the need for confidentiality. Many people in these communities are related, whether by blood, by marriage, or through social networks (e.g., sports teams). Many shop at the same stores, visit the same health clinics, and pet the same dogs walking down the road.

Historical traumas: trust & mistrust. This topic emerged as a sub-category of the core category. Historical trauma is a traumatic or stressful era in history that alters the perceptions or behaviors of a population, culture, or society. The most widely recognized historical trauma in the United States specific to Native Americans comes from the era of the boarding school. In the early 20th century, these schools were established to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream culture. Native American children were removed from their homes, communities, and families and sent to institutions far away. The goal of the boarding schools was to “remove the Indian.” Children were not permitted to speak Native languages or practice traditional ways. They were forced to speak English, cut their hair, and wear the clothing of dominating societies. Choosing not to follow the rules often resulted in severe abuse or death (Godlaski et al., 2006).

Because of this and similar historical

traumas in diverse communities (e.g., African-American, Deaf) across the United States, communities may be hesitant to accept the GAIN assessment or the GAIN interviewers as they can be seen as part of the dominant society. This hesitation may not be due to the GAIN instrument or to the individual conducting the assessment per se. Rather, the reluctance to participate in the assessment may be due to influences, experiences, and perceptions passed down through generations that emerge in the form of trust versus mistrust. In contemporary assessment practices, the residual effects of boarding schools and related historical traumas in diverse settings may form a barrier that prevents trust between a GAIN interviewer and the individuals or communities with which they aim to work.

Communities may view the GAIN Coordinating Center or the GAIN-using site and staff as extensions of a government that they do not trust. For a number of cultural communities, suspicions have run high that the information gathered might be used against them. The GAIN interviewer might be perceived as a person sent to gather secrets, community history or other information for some unknown purpose. Summit participants indicated that in order for the GAIN data collection process to be trusted, to be seen as responsibly used, and given community acceptance, more education related to its intent would be beneficial. The GAIN Coordinating Center and GAIN-using site must be aware of these possible concerns, assess for them, and take them into consideration when conducting assessments within a broad range of cultural settings. One summit attendee emphasized this feeling by stating that communities wonder, “What are they after?” or “Are outsiders trying to get a view of our culture?” which can ultimately lead to a contemplation of trust versus mistrust. It is crucial

for GAIN interviewers to have an understanding of trust versus mistrust issues especially when the interviewer is from a majority culture with majority norms working within minority culture settings.

Spirituality. This property of Historical Trauma was mentioned by a number of attendees and was the topic of a summit presentation. However, it was unclear how the GAIN measured or fully incorporated the assessment of spirituality across diverse cultural contexts. This property was very open and could certainly benefit from ongoing discussion by the GAIN Coordinating Center's Cultural Advisory Council. In fact, during the advisory council's focus group meetings to review results and offer input, it was recommended that the property of spirituality be incorporated as a subcategory of Historical Trauma. This fits well within the trauma context because spirituality often plays a major role in past community historical traumas and in today's diverse societies. For example, spirituality was changed, lost, or abused for generations of Native Americans who were part of the boarding school era.

DISCUSSION

To appreciate the unique contributions of assessment instruments (such as the GAIN), as well as their limitations, one needs a clear schematic map of the multiple layers of a conceptual structure, the functions served at each layer, and how the different layers are interrelated (McFall, 2005). Therefore, the development of a theory for GAIN adoption and culturally sensitivity use is but one part of a complex, multilayered process that the GAIN Coordinating Center can develop, test, refine, and apply.

As part of this project, a theory was built that documented a complex set of interrelated concepts and processes: one that was more than just a listing of themes. The process for developing this theory was dynamic in nature and included action and interaction. The summit participants came together to discuss the application and usefulness of the GAIN in diverse cultures. The data utilized were not collected to answer the question of "How does this naturally work in their specific environment." Rather it assisted to answer the question of "How do we improve the use of the GAIN based on experiences." Thus, the theory that developed drew upon the voices of the summit participants and helped build concrete "next steps" in order to make the GAIN process culturally relevant to the diverse communities it is utilized. Specifically, having the flexibility to adapt the GAIN for implementation in culturally diverse communities, understanding the varying meanings of terminology during the assessment process, utilizing a storytelling process to improve communication styles, promoting trainings focused on culturally diverse circumstances, and collaborating with communities in a respectful and meaningful way are all important elements in moving toward using the GAIN in a culturally responsible manner.

The theory, as grounded in the experiences of GAIN Cultural Sensitivity Summit attendees, can be labeled *Culturally Sensitive Implementation of the GAIN in Community Systems* and is described as "Individuals administering the GAIN instrument in varying cultural climates stressed the importance of assessment flexibility." This essentially reflects a phrase noted during the advisory council discussion - that the goal is "cultural enhancement for a more inclusive assessment." Adapting the GAIN to

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fit various cultural communities will support a more appropriate and successful implementation. By doing so in a storytelling fashion, and by reframing questions to improve understanding, communication style is improved. Furthermore, these techniques need to be incorporated through ongoing diversity trainings. These techniques also need to be incorporated into the overall collaborative efforts when promoting the GAIN to communities in order to engender community acceptance, utilization, and benefits to societies that may have past historical traumas that influence trust. Therefore, the community has the ability to shape the meaning, acceptance, and successful implementation of the GAIN assessment.

This developing theory showcases action-orientated outcomes that expands the knowledge base on how the process of implementing the GAIN in culturally diverse environments. Results specify the commonalities, themes, processes, experiences, and perceptions represented by the multiple diverse workgroups sharing their “in the field” or “practice-based” knowledge of the GAIN users’ process from a cultural utilization standpoint. The qualitative results can be used to develop a guideline for action and process. Furthermore, the results of the study provide a framework for the GAIN’s utility in an array of organizational climates. In response to Antony and Rowa’s (2005) question of how to improve assessment tools, the GAIN Coordinating Center is already taking action by involving communities represented at the summit for ongoing discussion. Furthermore, the GAIN Coordinating Center has begun to address sensitive (taboo) questions, ask and identify classifiers (retrieved from http://www.chestnut.org/LI/gain/GCC_Insider/GCC_Insider_issue9.pdf), adapt training materials to

reflect various cultures, refine identity items as well as develop a GAIN Coordinating Center Cultural Advisory Council.

Ongoing attention needs to focus on acceptability and dissemination of the GAIN within varying community contexts. Results of this study indicated that this process needs to consider historical traumas and how these influence community trust (versus mistrust) concerns. Furthermore, the GCC should consider how to increase the visibility of benefits to communities by educating and continually developing ways to incorporate best practice examples for working in culturally diverse settings. Ultimately, the GAIN Coordinating Center should work with GAIN-using agencies to continue to focus on a community-based participatory implementation process and stress implementation of the GAIN in a culturally sensitive, respectful, and meaningful manner.

The findings of this study parallel some of the previously written recommendations with regard to diverse communities (Godlaski et al., 2006). These include drawing on qualitative approaches of assessment (storytelling) as well as promoting flexibility in the assessment process. Assessment, and its meaning in diverse cultures, is a never-ending cycle of learning, sharing, and staying open-minded. To be successful in assessment, one must refrain from being like the “uninformed rescuer” swimming in turbulent waters and instead, strive to understand, appreciate, and value the perspective of the fish.

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