

Ideals of Counseling Practice: Therapeutic Insights from an Indigenous First Nations-Controlled Treatment Program

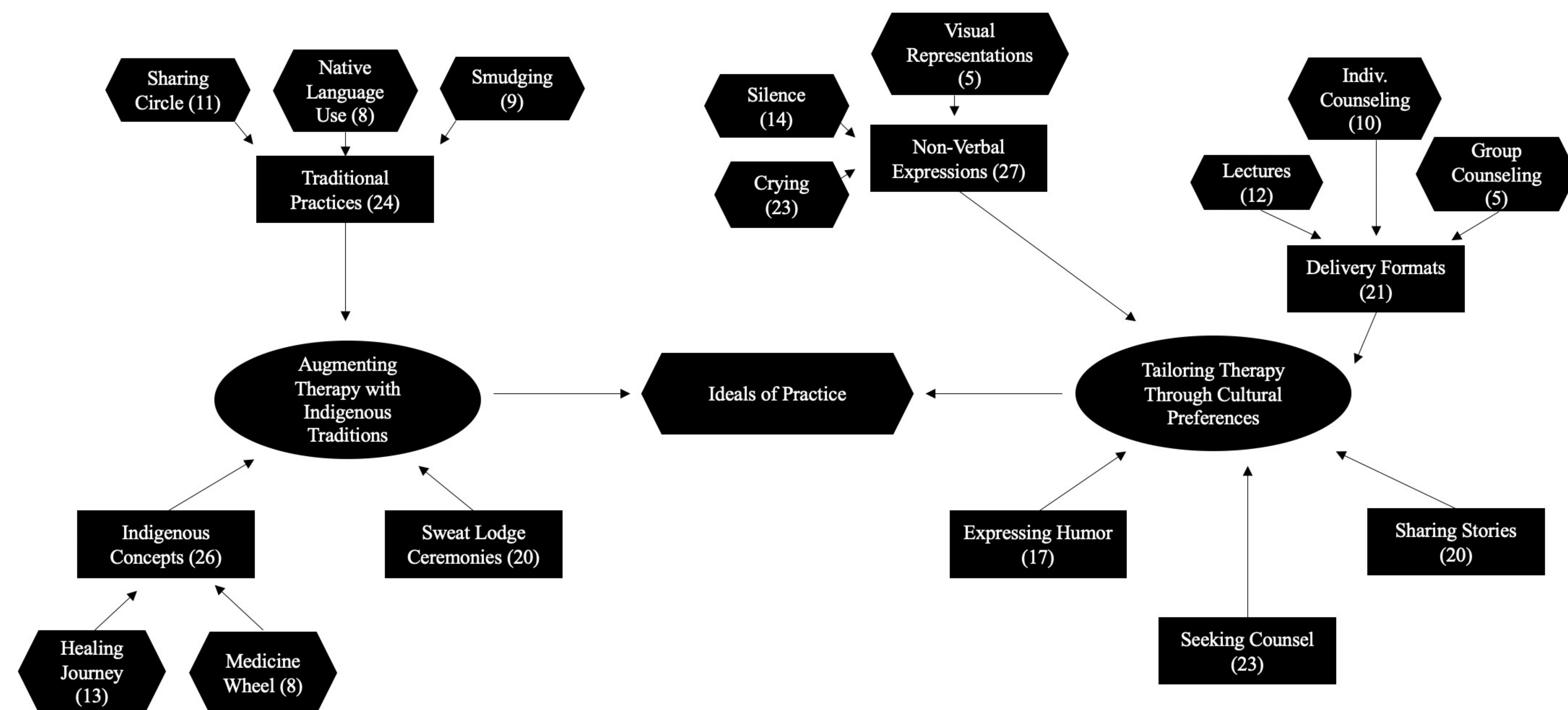
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Background: Indigenous Canadians suffer disproportionately from mental health concerns tied to histories of colonization, including exposure to Indian Residential Schools. Previous research has indicated that preferred therapies for Indigenous populations fuse traditional cultural practices with mainstream treatment.

Method: In this study, we address the following research question: What community-driven practical solutions do Indigenous administrators and staff integrate with modern therapeutic practices to address the legacy of coercive assimilation through the IRS system for community members on a Canadian First Nations reserve? We study conducted thematic analysis on 32 interviews conducted with administrators, staff, and clients at a reserve-based addiction treatment center to identify community-driven and practical therapeutic solutions for remedying histories of coercive colonial assimilation.

Results: We found that counselors tailored therapy through cultural preferences, including the use of non-verbal expression, culturally appropriate guidance, and alternative delivery formats. Additionally, they augmented mainstream therapeutic practices with Indigenous traditions, including the integration of Indigenous concepts, traditional practices, and ceremonial activities.



Conclusions: Collectively, this integration of familiar counseling approaches and Indigenous cultural practices in response to community priorities resulted in an innovative instance of therapeutic fusion that may be instructive for cultural adaptation efforts in mental health treatment for Indigenous populations and beyond.