

Cultural Self Project

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Whether a particular counseling theory is psychodynamic, existential-humanistic, or cognitive behavioral in orientation, a number of multicultural specialists indicate that it shares certain common components of White Western Eurocentric culture in its values and beliefs (Sue et al., 2019). Psychologists recognize that as cultural beings, they may hold attitudes and beliefs that can detrimentally influence their perceptions of and interactions with individuals who are ethnically and racially different from them (Morales & Norcross, 2010). The ADDRESSING Model enables therapists to better recognize and understand cultural influences as a multidimensional combination of age, developmental and acquired disabilities, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, indigenous heritage, national origin, and gender (Hays, 2013). Below is a personal reflection of my own life using the components of the ADDRESSING Model.

Age and Generational Influences

I was born August 1998, which gets classified in either the Millennial or Generation Z age brackets, depending on the particular data being followed. Being an only child of the late 90's, I was still able to experience some of the pop culture, TV shows/movies, musical artists, toys, and food of that decade while embracing all the advances to come in the 2000's with technology (Iphones, FaceTime, Zoom, Google, etc.) and social media (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tiktok, etc.). Between the Millennial and Generation Z groups, I identify more with the Millennial generation as I have been adapted and shaped by the social and political movements of our society and country in the last 20 years.

In comparison to my mom's generation (Baby Boomer), I have lived through events that have shaped my values and worldview such as the transformation of social media and its

influence on the changing political climate. Police brutality, immigration policies, women's equal pay, gay marriage, and LGBTQIA+ awareness are some of the events that have occurred during the early stages of my adulthood, shaping how I interact with society. My generation holds more open-minded beliefs and a willingness to take progressive action politically, but still keep a hold on the conservative family values that were present during childhood.

Developmental or other Disability

Many American Indians, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latinx Americans hold different concepts of what constitutes mental health, mental illness, and adjustment (Sue et al., 2019). Despite being part of an ethnic culture (African American) that does not easily recognize physical and mental disabilities, I have actively been aware of the possibility of growing up with undiagnosed non-visible disabilities for myself. Dyslexia and anxiety are the two disorders I believe went undiagnosed during my childhood and early adulthood. I experienced issues reading books and passages aloud during elementary school and would typically be a reading level behind my peers. Extra assignments were given during summers to bring me up to speed, but never taken to a specialist for an assessment. Growing into a young adult, my need for control and preparation worsened my anxiety throughout college and did not seek out clinical support to address it as previous discussions of mental health never occurred with my family.

Going through college and beginning the early stages of my professional life, I have experiences with friends, coworkers, and partners who have been affected with both visible and non-visible disabilities. My first encounter as an adult with an individual on the Autism spectrum was with a friend's sister in college. Being a psychology major, I had an academic understanding of the intellectual and social challenges experienced by Autistic individuals, but never

experienced the real life instances. The emotional toll and extra help needed for taking care of a family member on the Autism spectrum can be draining for some families. Ensuring that they are aware of the support and services available to them has been my role as a friend. Disability status between myself and the ones who I know are affected by it, has taken me on a path of pursuing a career in mental health and advocating for those with undiagnosed mental and physical illnesses.

Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality was a concept not discussed or enforced by my single parent household. Growing up with my mom, religion was not an emphasis during her childhood and she took that same approach with raising me. My grandfather had been a spiritual man in the last 10-15 years of his life and had taken me to a Baptist church as a little girl a handful of times, but never put pressure on me to follow his path or any particular religious/spiritual path. Presently, I do not identify or follow a religion or have a spiritual practice, but do have a belief in a higher power. My non-religious upbringing has heavily shaped my lack of pursuit for exploring a religious life as an individual and with choosing to not raise my own family with a particular religion in the future.

Ethnic and Racial Identity

My ethnic and racial identity is Black or African American, despite only knowing my maternal background. My mother identifies as Black and Native American and I do not have knowledge of my biological father's racial/ethnic identity. In public, I have been identified by other people as Mixed-race or Indian/Middle Eastern. Some of the comments received are within the Black community and have underlying meanings of questioning my identity, as I have darker set eyes than Black women typically do and more often seen with Indian women or the assumption that I am mixed-race because my hair texture is not as coarse as predominately found

in the Black community. Both of these identifications are not the same as Black/African American in culture, social, or political experiences. Despite the diversity of identification within the Black/African American experience, I have felt I have been placed in a particular set of appearances for an individual who is Black.

The racial and ethnic differences within my family vary with five of my cousins being mixed-race with three of them being Black-Hispanic and the other two are Black-White. My uncle (mom's younger brother) had three children with a Hispanic woman and was in a romantic relationship with her for almost 10 years. He later had two more children with a White woman (his current wife) who he has been with for over 20 years. The dynamic amongst the other members of my family and my uncle's children is no different than with the non-mixed-raced members. The racial differences are never an issue and we all still support one another as family usually does.

Socioeconomic Status

Social class and classism have been identified as two of the most overlooked topics in psychology and mental health practice (Sue et al., 2019). I personally was raised in a lower middle class home with my mom earning between \$35,000-\$40,000 a year. There were never issues of obtaining the basic necessities (food, shelter, clothes) as a child, but could not always afford the extravagant accessories, trips/vacations, and technological gadgets when they were first released. Living on my own for the last 5 ½ years, I consider my socioeconomic status to be near-poor as I make less than \$30,000 a year and I am not 100% financially independent. For important purchases, I save up when necessary and have a job that consistently pays most of my bills and other extracurricular events.

The statistics on class and socioeconomic status underscore the intertwined nature of race with social class in the U.S. as a result of historic events such as the transatlantic slave trade, the seizing of lands from native people, and institutional barriers to wealth creation (Sue et al., 2019). I attended a public high school in the central California town of Visalia with a population of approximately 130,000 people. There was a diverse selection of Advanced Placement (AP) classes offered and I took as many as I could with the cost of the exam at the end of the school year being paid out of pocket. Living in a one parent household and playing sports, it was not financially feasible for me to either work in high school or for my mom to buy a car for me to transport myself. When the time came to apply for college, I only applied to two universities as there was an application fee per school and had to keep the cost within a reasonable amount. Paying my way through college came from federal financial aid and the only out of pocket cost for my mom was my off-campus housing. I took the most cost effective route to lessen the burden on a single parent income.

Sexual Orientation

I identify as a heterosexual female who did not have any serious questions or concerns over my sexual orientation as a youth. There were small curiosities of having sexual encounters with another female in college, but none were ever explored and I have been satisfied with my attraction to the opposite sex. I do not have any family members who are homosexual, but have had friends who are and presently have close friends who identify as queer. Overall, my whole family would not be accepting of a gay family member. The parents and grandparents hold more conservative views on sexuality and sexual orientation. The grandkids are all part of the Millennial or Generation Z age group where the identity and lifestyle is more accepted and

understood. I have made my effort to teach and/or bring awareness to the family members who are willing to learn and be respectful to LGBTQIA+ individuals as they encounter them.

Indigenous Heritage

There is not any specific Native tribe membership known in my heritage, but I know that my maternal great-grandmother was of American Indian heritage. I am not aware of what tribe or if there was any residence near a Native community. Through an Ancestry DNA test taken about a year ago, there was not a percentage of Native tribes/nations detected to know if there is a connection to be built with a community of people.

National Origin

I am a United States citizen, born in California and speak English as my first language. My mom and grandparents' first language was English as well. Being a U.S. citizen has allowed me the privileges of legally being able to work in the country, vote, and earn a higher education degree at a cheaper cost than an international student or immigrant. I do not know from personal experience the challenges faced for first-generation residents or for those with English as a second language. Nor do I know all the details or requirements necessary to remain in the country on a visa or green card. There have been individuals I went to school with or worked with who are temporarily in the country for their education or cannot take care of themselves due to no access to health care or fear of deportation. The recent political climate and immigration laws have affected the family of my friends and given me more awareness for immigrants coming to this country for a better life.

Gender

As a female raised by a single mother and never having a male figure in the home, I was not raised with traditional gender-related roles and expectations nor do I fully embody the ones

presented by society. I have been instilled with the values of making my own money and supporting myself financially, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. Between my grandparents who were married for almost 50 years before my grandfather passed away in 2014, they embodied traditional gender roles as a married couple with my grandfather leaving the home to go work and my grandmother staying home to take care of the kids and household. It was not until my grandmother was in her 40's when all of her kids had moved out of the house, that she began working as a preschool teacher. Whenever I do begin a life with a partner, I wish to explore gender roles and not maintain the traditional roles of my grandparents generation.

In relation to my cultural identity, it is the stereotype for the fathers to be absent from their child's life and for the mothers to take on the role of both parents. This absent role is commonly due to Black men being subjected to the criminal justice system and incarcerated, removing them from the home for a significant amount of time. Other cultural identities do not have to experience this discrimination and are able to fulfill the expectations of the dual parent marriage and household. For my own relationship and family in the future, I do not want to have children until I am married and have a man to raise my children with that will be present and contribute to their lives as their father. While seeking the more traditional relationship and family for myself, I still seek financial security and an established career before bringing that together with a lifelong partner.

Discussion

These dynamics of my life have shaped and developed my beliefs, values, and traits into what they are today and continue to evolve through my various experiences. For mental health practitioners, treating clients of diverse backgrounds and identities can be challenging if there is not an open relationship established to discuss the facets that encompass one's culture. Although

it is critical for therapists to have a basic understanding of the generic characteristics of counseling and psychotherapy and the culture-specific life values of different groups, overgeneralizing and stereotyping are ever-present dangers (Sue et al., 2019). As a future practitioner, I will make a conscious effort to not generalize or stereotype my clients based on the cultural image present on the surface, just as there is more to me than my cultural identity presented with the ADDRESSING Model.

References

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