Culture, Diversity and Relationships

Cultural understanding that supports and nourishes your relationship.

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Definition

- Culture is the way of life of a group of people—the behaviors, beliefs, values, traditions and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.

Expectations in a Couple’s Relationship

- Egalitarian relationship with significant individual space vs. Hierarchical relationship with limited individual space.
- Post marital residence – with his or her family, or forming a new nuclear family?
- Relationship with extended family.
- Holiday Celebrations.

Culture

- When two people enter a relationship, they bring with them their different dances; aspects of the culture they were raised in.
- It could be culture based on nationality, race, religion, geography or family.

Think About Culture as an Iceberg

- Language
- Behavior
- Nonverbal Communication
- Symbolic Meanings
- Cultural Norms
- Cultural Values
- Cultural Beliefs
- Cultural Traditions

Universal Human Need

Our Culture Often Protects Us

- Helps us to build self-confidence and a strong positive identity. Self-Affirmation.
- Provides a foundation of values, beliefs and traditions that can be shared as the partnership/family is built.
- Fulfills a basic need to belong. Builds our sense of family and sense of community.
How Can Culture Support Healthy Relationships?

- Connection and Influence
- Successful Handling of Differences
- Shared Values and Goals

Even coming from the same culture, people bring into the relationship differences.

Combining different cultures of origin creates further adjustment issues for each partner.

Our Cultural Framework is also Influenced by Our Heritage & Ancestors

- Each partner in a couple brings with them the influence of their family background and significant members of that family from past generations.
- From that legacy we often derive our understanding of:
  - What family is (or is not).
  - Family roles.
  - Our personal comfort with closeness and where we set our boundaries.
- If that legacy includes a story of immigration, we often have several sets and blends of culture, traditions and values within one person, one family and between generations.

(Our culture + our heritage + our personality)

ADDED TO
(culture, heritage and personality)
BLEND, MIXED & STIRRED in RELATIONSHIPS

FORMS THE ROOTS FROM WHICH COUPLES ANCHOR THEIR RELATIONSHIP, FAMILY, AND SUPPORT NETWORK.

Let’s Grow a Couple’s Garden

TRUNK of the Tree

The Center Of the Family
Individual or Couple
**Roots**
- Culture
- Heritage
- Family of Origin
- Ancestors
- Individuality

**APPLES**
- Those extended family members who support and sustain a couple or who they nurture. Family as the couple defines it.

**FLOWERS**
- The children (young or grown) in the couple’s life who are special to them.

**LEAVES**
- Those people not in the couple’s family but support and sustain them. For example:
  - Friend
  - Mentor
  - Neighbor

**Earth**
- What are the organizations, groups, institutions that support and strengthen the couple’s relationship and family.
  - Could be the local community center for example.
- The grass and flowers that grow in the earth represent the people (staff or volunteers or members of the group) in the organizations that help the couple.
Just as we plant and fertilize our relationship, we must also grow our framework of support and sustenance. Sometimes this comes easily but often we have to deliberately pursue it.

The famous poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once pointed to an apple tree in bloom and said, "That tree is very old, but I never saw prettier blossoms on it than it now bears. That tree grows new wood each year. Like that apple tree, I try to grow a little new wood each year."

Practicing and Educating with A Multicultural Perspective


What is MCP?

A foundational stance that significantly informs how one sees the world.

It promotes understanding of self, others and self in relation to others.

Basic Assumptions: (Hardy and Laszloffy, 2002)

- **Culture is a Broad-Based, Multidimensional Concept.**
  - Culture is complex, fluid and dialectical. It pertains to everyone.
  - It is comprised of a host of interrelated dimensions. (Race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender or sexual orientation)
  - It is the intricate interaction between these dimensions that shapes how an individual defines his/her self and has a profound impact on relationships.

- **Culture is a powerful organizing principle in human lives.**
  - Because it is multidimensional in nature, a person can occupy both a privileged (ex. male) and a subjugated (ex. black male) position.

Segregated Thinking Limits our View.

- Western culture promotes segregated thinking; a rigid, either-or approach that obscures connections.
- This results in artificial divisions with respect to individuals, families and culture.
- Sameness and difference.
- Past, present and future.
- Oppressor and oppressed.
- Embracing both-and thinking is critical in appreciating how all matters are potentially connected.
  - Requires a paradigm shift in your basic orientation to the world.
  - Invites us to think about the interconnections and place them at the forefront of what we do.
- MCP challenges segregated thinking by recognizing and simultaneously balancing diverse perspectives.

(Hardy and Laszloffy, 2002)
Context is Significant and Reality is Relative.

- Context refers to the sense of embeddedness we all have that helps define the nature of our existence.
- Each of us has multiple selves that are based in and defined by multiple contexts.
- Assumes that 2 integral aspects of context must be attended to: historical and contemporary.
- Context has profound impact on one’s perceptions of reality. Reality is subjective.

All Relational Interactions are Cross-Cultural.

- Cultural differences exist between clients and practitioners/educators.
- In all relationships, each of us is working across and through boundaries that make it impossible for any of us to fully know and understand another’s context and experiences.
- It should also be recognized that ethnic and racial differences have unique potency and volatility in our society and therefore warrant special consideration.

Works Cited