Session 6:
Taking Family Counseling and Couples Workshops Past the White Middle-Class Model

Working Beyond the Stereotype: The Cultural Context Model and Families of Color

Council on Contemporary Families
April 9, 2011

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Hierarchies of Power, Privilege & Oppression Create Intersectionalities of Life Experience

- Poorest Whites
- Gay Men of Color & Lesbians of Color (Who Are Out)
- Single Parent Families of Color & Youth of Color
- Upper Middle Class White Men
- White Women
- Upper Class White Gay Men & White Lesbians (Who Are Out)
- Working Class White Men
- Single Parent Families of Color & Youth of Color
- Working Class White Women
- Upper Middle Class Men of Color
- Poor Whites
- Gay Men of Color & Lesbians of Color (Who Are Out)
Hierarchies of Power, Privilege & Oppression Create Intersectionalities of Life Experience

POOR WHITES
GAY MEN OF COLOR & LESBIANS OF COLOR (WHO ARE OUT)

POOR

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES OF COLOR & YOUTH OF COLOR
Levels of consciousness (Freire, 1973)

Magical – At this level, individuals adapt themselves defenselessly and passively to the expectations of a superior force; they are not conscious of the socio-economic contradictions within society; they accept life for what it is and don't question injustices done in their lives. They are silent and docile.

*Keep your head down, be invisible and be content.*

*(voice of fear and lack of safety, i.e., slave or immigrant)*
Raising Critical Consciousness

Levels of consciousness (Freire, 1973)

Naïve - This level involves gaining insight into and becoming aware of one's own problems, but without making connections with the world outside- in other words individualizing problems. Problems are more or less seen as coincidences, “accidents.”

Pull yourself up by your bootstraps - poor. The losses of poor, lower and lower middle class in recent financial crisis were accidents. (voice of those who internalized “-isms”)

Raising Critical Consciousness

Levels of consciousness (Freire, 1973)

Critical – At this level, individuals and groups stop looking at problem as mostly individual accidents but see them more as structural problems. Critical consciousness involves making connections with the socio-economic contradictions in society. It means looking at reality and recognizing such contradictions as a fact.

There are multiple, invisible ceilings based on the social structure rather than any individual or group. Malcolm X
Working Beyond the Stereotype

• What if...we begin to empower families of color to think differently about dealing with their mental health concerns?

• What if...we interrogated cultural competence/multiculturalism about its ineffectiveness to meaningfully address the notable disparities in mental health care?
Cultural Competence or Structural Violence

• Muddled discourse around culture (Park, 2005).
  o Multiple “assumed” meanings with rare consensus
  o Term used at varied levels of abstraction
  o Is it an attribute of wanting (i.e., lacking), or presence of a particular uniqueness?

- No analysis of power, privilege and oppression, and its broad and nuanced interconnectedness.

- No focus on perpetrators (systemic and interpersonal) of oppression.
Working Beyond the Stereotype
Using a Social Justice Lens in Therapy

• Addresses the multiplicity of personal, social, and institutional locations
  (*intersectionality*, Crenshaw, 1991)

• Frames identities in therapeutic practice by locating these complexities within a societal matrix that shapes relationships: power, privilege, and oppression

• Bridges cultural borders
Working Beyond the Stereotype
Using a Social Justice Lens in Therapy

Three Legs of Cultural Context Model*

- Accountability
  - Power
  - Privilege
  - Oppression

- Critical Consciousness
- Empowerment

*(Almeida, Dolan-Del Vecchio, & Parker, 2007)
Building Community

Culture Circles & Sponsors

1. Bridging cultures
2. Interrupting white supremacy
3. Families partnering with progressive communities
4. Building social capital
5. Creating therapeutic transparency through breaking down therapeutic assumptions
Washing one's hands of the opportunity to empower those who are marginalized means ignoring privilege and endorsing one's ability to oppress in the social structure, not an ability to be neutral. (paraphrase of Paulo Freire, 1973)
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Returning to Critical Consciousness

Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.

(Paulo Freire, 1973)
Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people.

If we only view the margin as sign, marking the conditions of our pain and deprivation, then a certain hopelessness and despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being.

It is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for is lost. (hooks, 1990, p. 343)
MULTICULTURAL DISCOURSE AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Is attending to cultural difference a helpful way to decrease mental health disparities?
If the ideas have changed in the “right” direction, why haven’t the promises of cultural competency reduced disparities?
Implications

Focus on within-in group victimization based on anti-oppression theories; ethnicity and culture are interiorized as the object of study.

Use of a-political language to describe different groups with no language to describe the hierarchical identities that occupy the space of multicultural discourse.

The scholarship of “Otherizing” colludes with the larger landscape of segregation.
Social Justice

• Addresses the multiplicity of personal, social, and institutional locations

• Frames identities in therapeutic practice by locating these complexities within a societal matrix that shapes relationships: power, privilege, and oppression

• Bridges cultural borders
• The Cultural Context Model is a psychotherapy model informed by critical theory and social justice ideologies.

• Even with this theoretical grounding, does this model continue to perpetuate stereotyped ways of working with families of color or does it offer clinicians and families a therapeutic experience that is qualitatively different?
Critical Theory

• Way of being critical or analytical about a theory of perspective from a specific position or lens.
• Most critical theory analysis has been from the position or lens of the marginalized or those whose ideas or viewpoints are muted or rendered invisible or unimportant, i.e., people of color, or those marginalized because of class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or nationality.
Social Justice
(Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2007)

• Incorporates beliefs about justice from the viewpoint of the majority versus elites
• Focuses on what is just for the social whole rather than just the individual
• Focuses on distributive versus retributive justice (core to criminal justice); focuses on giving/sharing equally
  – Distributive: fair dispensation of resources and burdens
  – Retributive: fair dispensation of punishment (sometimes rewards)
Cultural Context Theory

Stereotypes

• Entry to mental health is primarily mandated
• Live by/fail to challenge dysfunctional values; live outside the cultural norm (substance abuse and domestic violence)
• Cultural competence provides tools to deal with families of color
Cultural Competence or Structural Violence

Cultural competence as the source guide to knowledge about the “Other” masks the policies and procedures of structural violence.

System of “otherizing” was intended to help the privileged understand those in “need of help”.
White Privilege – The Silence Surrounding Multiculturalism

• Understanding whiteness in its relational sphere (Kivel, 2010; Park, 2005; Wise, 2001)

• Giving voice and analysis to historic majority cultures that use concepts of “culture” to signify minority populations.
Culture Circles

• Raising critical consciousness through redefining differences and similarities

• Building connections by building community
Working Beyond the Stereotype
Using a Social Justice Lens in Therapy

Cultural Context Model*

- Critical Consciousness
- Empowerment
- Accountability

*(Almeida, Dolan-Del Vecchio, & Parker, 2007)
Culture Circles/Families as Subsystems

• CC’s describes a heterogeneous helping community that emphasizes language and structure of social activism and denotes a break with traditional mental health.

• The circles organized by gender, meet bi-weekly and come together in community on the alternate weeks.
Sponsors – WHO ARE THEY?

• Sponsors partner with the therapists to break the isolation of families, enhance connection and support, and build critical consciousness

• Sponsors are a community of mentors/role models who demonstrate versions of manhood and womanhood in which equity for all is the guiding value
Therapeutic Team

- Group of diverse trained therapists intended to reflect client pool in terms of gender, class, race, and sexual orientation.
- Not defined by a funding source
- Assignments not by case
- Entire team has the case
- Power sharing occurs between clients and therapists
Empowerment

• Creating a context for listening and witnessing

• Connecting both genders of all races, GLBT’s, as well as under-privileged classes, to strategies of resistance, truth telling and social action.

• Creating a narrative of LIBERATION
Accountability

Accountability begins with the acceptance of responsibility for one’s actions and the impact of those actions upon others.
Levels of consciousness (Freire)

Magical – At this level, individuals adapt themselves defenselessly and passively to the expectations of a superior force; they are not conscious of the socio-economic contradictions within society; they accept life for what it is and don't question injustices done in their lives. They are silent and docile.

Keep your head down, be invisible and be content. (voice of fear and lack of safety whether slave or immigrant)

(“People like us do not get education.”)
Raising Critical Consciousness

Levels of consciousness (Freire)

Naïve - This level involves gaining insight into and becoming aware of one's own problems, but without making connections with the world outside - in other words individualizing problems. Problems are more or less seen as coincidences, “accidents.”

Pull yourself up by your bootstraps - poor. The losses of poor, lower and lower middle class in recent financial crisis were accidents. (voice of those who internalized “-isms”)

(“We do not work hard enough for education/did not score high enough to get a better education.”)
Raising Critical Consciousness

Levels of consciousness (Freire)

Critical – At this level, individuals and groups stop looking at problems as mostly individual accidents but see them more as structural problems. Critical consciousness involves making connections with the socio-economic contradictions in society. It means looking at reality and recognizing such contradictions as a fact.

There are multiple, invisible ceilings based on the social structure rather than any individual or group. 

Malcolm X

(“Equitable access can only occur once the social structure is challenged.”)