Cultural Competence for 21st Century Practice: Thinking Beyond Boxes

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Thinking and Feeling Together About Cultural Competence

- A focus will be on epistemologies of difference rather than on prescriptions rule-sets regarding specific groups
- Mindful relationships with one's own affects, cognitions, and behaviors
- Development of attitudinal norms for culturally competent practice
  - If you can't get close enough to step on someone's toes you're not close enough to move in the direction of cultural competence
  - Cultural competence- a journey, not a destination
- Terminology I'll be using-"Target" and "Dominant" or "Agent" groups rather than "Majority" and "Minority"
  - Why the language we use and our mindfulness about language is important for culturally competent practice
  - Why Star Trek ethnic groups?

Some Working Assumptions and a Ritual for Difficult Dialogues

- Assume the goodwill of everyone in the room
- Assume that you will be offended, and you will offend someone. Mindfully notice these experiences, and assume that they are not intended (close enough to step on toes)
- Ritual for being offended: Soothe yourself. Assume the other person's best intentions and willingness to change. Create private one-on-one space, approach the person, say, "You had no way of knowing this, and what you said/did (fill in blank with behaviorally specific description) was painful/offensive to me because (fill in blank).
- Ritual for being offensive: Soothe yourself. Use your best active listening skills to clarify what you're hearing. Then simply say, "Thanks for taking the risk to tell me about this. I'm grateful for the chance to learn about how my actions might have this effect on someone."
- Continuing ritual for being offended: Thank the person for listening and let it go.

Mindfulness Break

- For the next few minutes, take the time to attend to your breathing. If you do not have a personal mindfulness practice, simply notice breath in and out. When thoughts or sensations arise, notice them without judgment or reaction by naming and describing, then return to your in and out breath.

An exercise in knowing who we are in the room together

- This exercise is designed to enhance our awareness of our collective multiple and intersecting identities, and our memberships in
  - Dominant/Agent groups
  - Target groups
  - Both of the above
- As you do this exercise, notice what you think and feel about the groups in which you find yourselves
- You are free to be visible as a member of a group that I describe or not.
- If you choose to be visible, notice what that choice means. Notice what it means to *have* a choice to be visible or not
- If you choose not to be visible, notice what that choice means. Notice what it means to *have* a choice to be visible or not
- If you cannot choose to be invisible, notice how that feels. Notice how you feel about people's abilities to choose invisibility/passing

After the exercise...

- How did you feel having people you like across the room from you?
- How did you feel having people to whom you don't feel connected standing with you, sharing part of your identity?
- How did you feel having differences within the group that are usual invisible made visible?
- Notice how these affects inform your strategies in relationship to difference

How Do I Define Moving Toward Cultural Competence?

The individual's capacity to be self-aware in regards to her or his own identities and cultural norms, to be sensitive to the realities of human difference, and to possess an epistemology of difference that allows for creative responses to the ways in which the strengths and resiliencies inherent in identities inform, transform, and are also distorted by distress and dysfunction.

The individual knows self and identities, and is attuned to the diversity and complexity of humanity, not pretending to not see or notice differences. The individual understands difference as a multi-dimensional phenomenon not limited by visible characteristics such as phenotype, body morphology, or apparent sex. Identities and social realities are perceived as stemming from intersectionalities of identities.

The individual takes a mindful, self-compassionate stance in relationship to one's ignorance, biases and privilege.

Defining Cultural Competence, 20th Century Version

- Etic epistemologies drove prior definitions of cultural competence
  - Competence = acquisition of specific body of knowledge about a specific group
  - Parameters of knowledge imposed by external, allegedly "objective" knower (usually researcher from outside the system)
  - Knowledge of the "other" seen as fulfilling requirements of becoming culturally competent
  - Not about the person of the insider (who is defined as above it all)
  - Not about the subjective experiences of the "Other" (who is defined as biased because her/his experiences are not the dominant norm)

Rules and Algorithms

- A consequence of 20th Century models
  - "The handbook of psychotherapy with Alien Others"
    - Rules about how to interact with members of specific groups
    - Groups defined so as to enhance apparent homogeneity and downplay within-group differences
    - Identity as singular- one box checked
    - Competence defined as acquiring and using the correct set of rules for the group

Positive Effects of 20th Century Models in Psychotherapy Field

- Opened the discourse re: culture and human distress
- Legitimized the discourse about difference in psychotherapy practice
- Created awareness of lacunae in mental health services delivery to marginalized populations
- Supported development of basic skills and awareness re: work with official Alien Others

Problematic Effects of 20th Century Models

- Created false sense of competence in clinicians ("I know the rules because I read the book, so I am competent to work with Bajorans")
- Downplayed relational, contextual, and political meanings of mental health interventions by constructing phenomena as interesting cultural artifacts of the Other
- Imposed dominant cultural categories (mental illness vs physical illness) on Other groups, creating an implicit norm for both health and illness for them

Further Challenges Inherent in 20th Century Models

- Defined difference as primarily or only about phenotype (aka "race") and other biological factors (sex), taking an essentialist, deterministic stance that treated these variables as fixed in their meaning for people
- Limitations on knowledge- only one set of Alien Others at a time, no epistemic framework for extrapolating
- Graduate training often induced problematic affects of guilt, shame, avoidance, distancing, victim-blame - or rage, in members of target groups sitting in trainings
- The "problem" of human diversity and difference was defined as belonging to the Alien Others

Inherent Assumptions of 21st Century Models

- Intersectionalities of identities - Crenshaw
  - There's more to identity than can be known from direct observation, and the intersections are unique – see under our exercise this morning
- Knowing a person requires consideration of multiple social locations, each with its own meanings for the particular individual
- Culturally competent practice requires a high degree of emotional competence on the part of the practitioner or researcher, because cultural competence is much more about the practitioner's own attitudes and self-awareness than the acquisition of formal data-
- Understanding what we symbolize to one another – a new way to think about transference and countertransference (or whatever you prefer to call that weird thing that goes on in the therapy room) is central
- The reality (not problem) of human diversity and difference is everyone's interest and responsibility
- Thus...

Intellectual **and Emotional** Competence- the 21st Century Paradigm

- Old-style cultural competence = intellectual competence
- 21st Century cultural competence = emotional competence + intellectual competence
  - Capacity in professional to hold ambiguity of a person's intersections of identities, understand how they inform one another, **and also**
  - Know and own one's own biases and prejudices-self-awareness
  - Awareness of *own* cultural identities and their meanings
  - Embrace of one's *own* ignorance, human capacities for bias, privilege
  - Commitment to this stance with *all people* not just Alien Others (a carryover mindset from 20th Century cultural competence paradigms
  - Redefining cultural competence a a mindful relationship with these factors of identity and difference rather than as acquisition of "correct" behaviors

Ignorance and Humility as Steps Toward Cultural Competence

- A radical proposition
  - Culturally competent practice is practice emerging from a stance of ignorance and humility – I don't know, and I have lots to learn (and that's wonderful)
  - Genly Ai and the Foreteller

The Myth of the Unbiased Professional

- People of good will, which includes most human services professionals, prefer to see ourselves as unbiased, or at least reasonably fair
- This denies
  - The presence of our limbic system (the chip with the sub-routine for emotion). We are not Lt. Cmdr Data.
  - Actual lived experiences and encounters with difference which classically condition our responses to various cues regarding difference
  - Ways in which culture and context lend excess meaning to those encounters, creating appraisals of our over-learned responses
    - How have our clinical encounters been affected by the past year's worth of news of judicial murders and hate crimes?
  - Think back to "across-the-room" exercise. What was activated for you in relationship to some of the groups called out?

What Else the Myth Misses

- Insider/outsider statuses of clinicians themselves
- Individuals' own standpoints and intersectionalities of identities
- Role of power in relationships- who has it, how do they have it (e.g., how conferred, how upheld)
- The power of the non-conscious dynamics of difference in the room
- The effects of aversive bias

Aversive or Modern Bias

- Work of Dovidio, Greenwald, Gaertner, Banaji, and others exploring non-conscious bias (which is called aversive or modern, as it reflects biases to which the person is consciously averse, and emerged from modern discourses on difference)
- Why aversive? Because it's incongruent with consciously held beliefs, and thus ego-dystonic and often unavailable to scrutiny
- Disowned material for self-described good people in the modern world, particularly the world inhabited by psychologists
- Aversive bias is not simply a private affair
  - Substantial empirical data documenting negative effects of aversive bias on interactions with target group members (largely in context of race relations)?

Embracing the Reality of Aversive Bias in Ourselves

- Aversive bias supports and is supported by denial and undoing
  - "I'm not biased, but…"
  - Creates crazy-making emotional data for member of target group, leading to distance, disconnection, and distrust
    - Ironically, overtly biased individuals were rated as more trustworthy than those disavowing bias but holding implicit aversive bias

Assessing Your Own Aversive Bias

- Take the Implicit Association Test
  - http://www.understandingprejudice.org/iat/
  - Empirically demonstrate the presence of non-conscious biases, including race, gender
  - Challenging, eye-opening activity to engage in as it's difficult to game the test
  - Cultural competence includes a willingness to uncover and confront non-conscious bias in ourselves
  - The goal is NOT to have a low score; the goal is to have an accurate mirror of unconscious bias
  - Then to be mindful and compassionate; we are who we are, we are simply responsible for knowing who we are and the choices we make with that awareness

Aversive Bias as a Form of Unexamined Countertransference and Transference

- When aversive bias is unacknowledged, how might it affect relationships in and outside of work contexts?
  - The effects are most similar to dynamics associated with shame
  - It is shameful to many people to acknowledge our bias
    - Shame is defended against in ways problematic to genuine relating
    - When shame over bias touches other aspects of shame about self, then its power to distort human encounter grows
    - How is an individual at risk for shame around aspects of self?
      - Disowned identities
      - Stigmatized identities

How Shame Affects Us Interpersonally

- Donald Nathanson has proposed four common reactions
  - Distancing
  - Blaming
  - Fusion
  - Self-hate
- How might these reactions in affect a relationship if their source (bias) is unacknowledged and/or unexamined?
- How would an individual's unexamined or unmetabolized shame over aspects of identity interact with shame about bias- particularly if the person is her/himself also target of bias due to intersectionalities of identities?

Cultural Competence = Metabolizing Shame

- Radical acceptance of the reality of our biased, limbically-driven selves
- Forgiveness of ourselves for stepping on toes
- Letting go of perfection (which requires dishonesty on the part of the targets of our bias in the "Oh no, that didn't hurt my feelings" category of response) in exchange for open-heartedness and genuineness, allowing for repair of ruptures

Understanding Privilege-The Next Step for Cultural Competence

- The "invisible backpack" (McIntosh, 1990) of privilege carried by members of dominant groups
  - Unearned, cannot be taken off or gotten rid of
  - Confers dominance and potential for oppression
  - Denial of privilege frequently accompanies aversive bias, as both involve assumptions that playing fields are level (experience of dominant group made equivalent to human experience)
- Privilege or disadvantage have specific effects on mental and physical health and well-being
  - Because trauma is a particular form of disadvantage it can and does interact with other experiences of privilege or its absence
- Privilege adds power to bias
  - Thus, bias of target group members against agent/dominant group members will sting- but it will not carry the structural power of bias held by members of the dominant group due to structural effects of privilege

What is privilege?

- Some examples…
  - You can drive any car you want without worrying that you will be stopped and killed by law enforcement
  - You can walk into any store wearing anything you want pretty well assured that you will not be followed or harassed
  - Your culture's holidays don't require you to take PTO
  - You can be imperfect and few people will generalize from your imperfections to those of everyone in your group
  - If your day, week, or year is going badly, you need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has overtones of bias or whether you're being paranoid
  - You are unlikely to experience continuous insidious trauma/microaggressions, and can deny your part as the source of these painful experiences for others
  - You can make the issue of diversity someone else's problem

Notice…

- Privilege creates
  - Ease—your group is the norm and defines what is real and important and valuable
  - Safety—your group is not targeted because of its characteristics
  - Clarity—no need to decipher and unpack potentially ambiguous situations (and thus no awareness that such multiplicity of meanings chronically resides in target group members' interpersonal milieus)
  - All of which contribute to resilience in the face of psychosocial stressors—but can also become vulnerability when this very just world is challenged by events
- Privilege unscrutinized can impair empathic relating
  - "S/he's just over-reacting" (aka demonstrating Axis II characteristics), "making a big deal about nothing," "focusing too much on peripheral topics" (privilege defines a center around you)

Privilege and Cultural Competence

- Acknowledging privilege with compassion towards self is one step toward cultural competence
- Necessary—managing affects of shame and guilt associated with awareness of privilege—component of emotional competence
- Acknowledging privilege creates the possibility of alliance across difference

Guilty Awareness as a Problematic Affect

- Guilt over privilege frequently arises for dominant group people of good will, which is interpersonally problematic
  - Resentment
  - Boundary violations
- Denial of realities of privilege can lead to disconnects relationally
- Guilty awareness of privilege – equally problematic
- Failures of accurate empathy and interpersonal encounters can arise *both* from denial of privilege and guilt/shame over its existence
- Particularly a challenge when the ideal is cultural competence- how might this affect a person's functioning?

From Awareness of Privilege to Alliance: Anti-Domination

- Having an anti-domination perspective on our work means acknowledging
  - There are no bystanders to oppressive dynamics in the social and cultural realities in which we all live
  - One either cooperates with oppression and domination, actively or passively

    Or
  - Works against oppression and domination though models of behavior that are liberatory
  - Has a compassionate relationship to her/his own participation in oppressive dynamics
  - This doesn't require perfection- simply telling the truth about the power of a bystander to worsen oppressive realities by doing nothing

Changes in Attitude

- Cultural competence ultimately requires learning about our own dynamics of internalized oppression and domination
  - Within our multiple and intersecting identities we experience each of these – and defend against them in various ways
- We must be willing to make mistakes that we can learn from-be close enough to step on toes
- Make human diversity core to our analysis of everything we do, rather than an add-on
- This creates a stance of alliance around the larger social context in which oppression and domination occurs, and may be ubiquitous, and in which we have options to empower ourselves to change the structural realities to be more fair.

Cultural Competence Deepens Empathic Relating

- Embracing and examining our bias and privilege in a mindful, compassionate manner deepens the capacity for genuine empathy with others across differences
- Research findings- target group clients perceived self-aware dominant group therapists as equal in empathy to therapists from own group
- Beyond the therapeutic alliance to alliances with meaning in the social/cultural/political contexts outside the treatment room, all of which inform (or distort) the nature of the therapy relationship
- Examples of how we might manifest this
  - Talking about elephants in the room and taking the elephants seriously rather than being annoyed by the fact that someone has reminded us of elephants
  - Attending to "when and where I enter" in a mindful, self-compassionate manner

When and where we enter…

- When we enter an encounter with another human being we bring
  - Our personal history with this person's various groups
  - Our client's personal history with our various groups
  - Our groups' collective histories with one another
  - Being aware of what we represent allows us to be allied more effectively and more culturally competent
  - So what do we represent? What do we wish we did not represent? (and how does that lead us to denial about what we represent, or minimization of other people's experiences of representation?)
  - How do we accept the reality that we do represent?
    - Target group members are often hyper-aware of representing due to absence of privilege; persons with primarily dominant group memberships frequently minimize or deny this reality due to presence of privilege

What We Represent to Each Other

- Our individual and cultural experiences lend symbolic meaning to encounters across lines
- Social context can and often does change what we represent to one another in a particular moment
  - For example, when ethnic strife is in the foreground of public consciousness, our ethnicities will become more powerful factors in our interactions

Challenges of Representation

- When people are ambiguous to us (because of mixed heritage, or apparently non-congruent combinations of attributes, for example), this may affect how we perceive, and thus assess, diagnose, and treat
- People whose problems appear to conform to our stereotypes of their group may be either missed or over-pathologized

Everyone's Diverse Here

- There is a broad range of factors affecting diverse human experiences; cultural competence must apply to *all* of our work, not be saved up for the psychotherapy encounter.
- All of us have all of the dimensions of human diversity, whether we notice them or not (a privilege issue about whether to notice)
  - If our core identity is in an agent or dominant group, we may be unaware of how we are affected by these dimensions-privilege at work
  - If our core identity is in a target/oppressed group, we may be only aware of how we are affected by these dimensions-the impact of the absence of privilege.
  - Each of these denies the complexity of multiple and intersecting identities

ADDRESSING- An Epistemology of Difference

- An epistemology of difference developed by Pamela Hays (2015) that
- Moves your thinking away from the "how to treat Bajorans" model
- Attends to the complexities of each person's identities, including yours
- Works well with 21st Century models of identity development that move away from invariant stage theories to multiple trajectories of identity expression

What It Stands For

- A-Age related factors. Actual age and age cohort (generation)
- DD-Disability- visible and invisible disabilities, developmental (born with) and acquired
- R-Religion and spirituality
- E-Ethnic identity- "race", phenotype, culture

ADDRESSING

- S-Socioeconomic status- current and former (and family's current and former)
- S-Sexual orientation-gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual
- I-Indigenous heritage/colonization history
- N-National identity- immigrants, refugees, temporary residents, undocumented persons, "1.5 gen" and adult children of same
- Gender- biological sex, transgender, intersex, gender role conformity and non-conformity

Assumptions of the ADDRESSING model

- People do not have one identity, but rather live in intersectional identities
  - There are multiple identities and social locations for each person
  - Aspects of identity have different salience in different social contexts
    - For instance- if we define a person in a context in terms of their Alien Other status, it will over-determine the meaning of that aspect of identity for that person in that context
  - Observers will construct a person's identity differently than persons construct it themselves
  - Cultural competence includes attending mindfully to the realities of visible identities and simultaneously not assuming that these are primary, or what they mean for the individual

Implications of 21st Century Model of Cultural Competence

- Our responsibilities—awareness of implicit bias and privilege, capacity to own our biases and contain our shame and guilt
- Increasing our acceptance of our ignorance as a stance for deepening our wisdom
- Functioning as allies
  - Being part of the solution, not only part of the problem. Owning both problem and solution
  - Being aware of how our personal and cultural heritages of domination and oppression, and the effects of these on our intersectionalities of identities, affect how we are in our relationships with others

Ultimately

- Cultural competence is a way of being that draws deeply on what we know makes difficult relationships (aka psychotherapy) work well
- Alliance, empathy, respect, positive regard, genuineness, and both the willingness and capacity to repair ruptures translate into behaving in more culturally competent ways.
- As psychotherapists we have deep experience of the affect skills and forms of emotional competence that underlie culturally competent relating
- Our challenge; to translate that knowledge and experience from the therapy room to our work with one another, and our lives in this increasingly diverse world.

Additional Reading

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