TOWARD A CULTURALLY RESPECTFUL, RESPONSIVE, AND EQUITABLE MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICE:

Moving Away from the Myth of Cultural Competence

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Today's Agenda

1. Overview-General Background and Remarks
2. Exploring Culture: Terms, Definitions, Understanding
3. A look at Cultural Competency as a Construct/Method
4. Practice Issues as a result

BREAK

5. Conceiving and Understanding Culture in Practice
6. Attitudes, Approaches, and Methods to become more Culturally Respectful
7. Questions, discussion, considerations

Definition of Culture (Cultural Competency Framework)

Current teaching considers culture as the sum total of:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion

Power of Culture

Culture often seen as Deterministic/All Powerful

- Who we are and what we believe is Determined by our Culture (Cultural Determinism)
- Culture shapes people
- Culture is not shaped by people
- People primarily abide by a (one) culture

Culture is Quickly Discoverable and Easy to Understand

With the Correct Training and Skills, and by understanding one's own biases, A person can:

- Rapidly understand a client's culture
- Quickly communicate in culturally consistent manner
- Temporarily join another's culture to help
- Develop interventions and approaches that fit
- Become competent in someone else's culture

Why is Cultural Competency a Myth?

- Based on premise that one can become fluent/competent in another's culture in short period of time.

- Based on a Narrow Definition of Culture (Race, Gender, Ethnicity, etc.)

- Ignores the Interactive nature of practice

- Ignores multiple, interacting cultures of clients and practitioner

- Promotes Ecological Fallacy & Stereotyping

And Finally...

- We only see and know clients in our environment
- We largely only know our clients history through previous written records
- We never/rarely see them in their own environments
- We rarely/never meet the cultural influencers in their lives
- We rarely/never understand the lifelong learning, stories, messages, myths, and facts taught through family and community that shape our clients cultural systems, beliefs about the world and BELIEFS ABOUT US!

Lets be Real...most of us are not Competent in our own Cultures

...let alone someone else's

Cultural Competency: Problems in Practice

- Approach/Knowledge-Base Narrow

- Promotes Ecological Fallacy

- Ignores the Interactive nature of Practice

- Ignores the role of Practice Privilege

- Delivered from an "expert" position of power

- Practiced in our cultural context

- Assumes a trained professional can assess and join another's culture from the "outside"

Specific Practice Issues

- Resistance to help
- Misdiagnosis (Upwards of 50% Black & Latino)
- Treatment Refusal
- Culture Clash/Misunderstanding
- Disaffection with Helping Systems in future
- Poor Treatment Participation
- Problems left untreated become chronic, severe, life threatening
- Excess community Stigma leading to Social Isolation/Disconnection

The Dangers of Practice Privilege

- Rarely Discussed, Widely Practiced
- The Power and Privilege, regardless of demographics, that comes with our role, degrees, connections, expert status, responsibilities (legal and professional) and class status.
- Misused Practice Privilege is just as damaging to culturally respectful practice and White, male privilege is in a diverse world. It accomplishes the same stratification and delegitimizing effects on clients as general White privilege does in daily life.
- Learn to neutralize and use your privilege against itself with you clients.
- They need to know that you know the imbalance that is present.

A Working Definition of Culture

Culture is the sum total of the behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, values, norms, stories, myths, history and symbols that help shape the way people assign meaning and value to their world.

These factors are self-evidently true and real and are passed along by communication, imitation, and social encouragement/approval from one generation to the next.

Cultural Respect & Humility as a Basis for Practice

Cultural Respect & Humility, as a basis for practice, posits:
- Different cultural groups think, feel, and act differently, and that's OK.
- People within cultures selectively and uniquely ascribe to cultural practices.
- No single culture is intrinsically superior or inferior to another. Curiosity about differences in culture in groups and/or between people is foundational.
- Our culture is only normal for us. No such thing as "Common Sense"
- Information learned by interaction about the nature of cultural differences between people, people and institutions, their roots, and meanings must precede judgment and action.
- Interaction and/or negotiation is more likely to succeed when people understand the reasons for the differences in viewpoints, meaning, and/or behavior.
- Every culture has its own "Common Sense"

Cultural Respect & Humility in Practice

Understand the interactive nature of treatment.

- At least four Cultures colliding: Client, practitioner, agency, system
- Two people from different cultures begin creating a new culture between them
- The relationship one develops with a client is unique to the particular client and practitioner.
- Setting Matters!

Stereotyping & Implicit Bias All Around

- Practitioners must assess their own Implicit Biases about a range of issues
- Practitioners must avoid seeing clients as stereotypes, particularly based on former clients.

Practitioners must also be aware and deal with:

- Clients Implicit Biases about us, therapy, mental illness, and the system
- Clients stereotyping us!

First Principle

Healthy Outcomes are directly related to people's long term connections to helpful, supportive systems over a lifetime

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Developing a Culturally Respectful Environment

- Cultural Competency akin to Diversity
- Culturally Respectful Practice akin to Inclusion

- Much of the Work toward Cultural Respect occurs during Early Phases of Treatment
  - Focus on Relationship building, not problem solving
  - Be Friendly, social, conversational
  - Be respectful, complimentary, and Inquisitive
  - Be transparent. Allow your client a "seat at the table" with the ability to have a say in their care
  - Always act in ways that are Trustworthy
  - Have Patience. Don't Rush to Problems and Problem-Solving

Toward a Culturally Respectful Practice: Areas of Focus

- Why are you here?
- What do you want?
- Previous Treatment Experiences (self and family)
- Family, friends, and social support

- Always focus on learning what clients believe about issues, what they value, cherish, like, and do not care about.
- Try to discover your client (and by definition his people's) version of "Common Sense"

Words Matter

- No Assumptions on Meaning
- Ask a lot of clarifying questions
- Don't understand---Ask
- Whenever you must make a statement from your position---Ask for a reaction
- Never Assume you know what somebody means....

What to Avoid

- Hip, Slick, and Cool (Be yourself)
- Inappropriate or ill-timed Confrontation
- Assumption of sameness (between us and our clients)
- Any comment, reaction, or value judgement about the clients beliefs, actions, thoughts, or values.
- Too Much Practice Lingo
- Assumption your relationship is better than it is without testing it

Apply the Stages of Change to your developing professional relationship.