

# The culture of counselling

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Culture may be defined in both a broad and narrow context. The broad definition includes demographic variables (age, gender and sexuality), status variables (social, educational, economic) and affiliations (formal and informal), as well as ethnographic variables, such as ethnicity, nationality, language. Temporal changes can also affect culture e. g. the cultures of the Victorian era versus today are different. The narrow definition of culture is limited to the terms of ethnicity and nationality, which are important for individual and familial identity.

However, the concept of culture in counselling usually goes beyond these boundaries. It interprets culture on a larger scale, aiming to go beyond its more obvious, verifiable, and sometimes stereotypical, concepts that are associated with a particular culture, toward a more individualised, subject-centric approach to culture i. e. personal interpretations of the culture to which a person belongs. In this essay I aim show understanding of my own cultural self, from growing up till now. I am also going to explore a different culture to my own that could be brought to me by a potential client in counselling. I will attempt to connect the two cultures by comparing cultural mentalities, values, beliefs, and conditions of worth. I will touch on cultural issues that might influence the counselling process between client and counsellor.

Getting in touch with my cultural-self: I believe all cultures have a code of conduct; “ what might be acceptable to you, might not be acceptable to the client”. This is described as “ cultural” language (Dillard, John M. 1983 p. 9). To enable me to understand my own culture better, I believe I need to consider my parents’ cultures and backgrounds more thoroughly.

My mother is English and was born in 1943 into a British Catholic family in Liverpool. My grandmother became pregnant with my mother when she was already married to another man. Her husband, with whom she had two young sons, served as a soldier during the Second World War and sadly went missing during this time. This left my grandmother to fend for herself and a young family. She met my grandfather after her husband had been missing for a number of years. However, because her husband had not officially been declared dead, my grandparents' relationship was frowned upon by her staunchly Catholic community for whom sex outside of wedlock is a sin in the eyes of God: "Neither shalt thou commit adultery" (Holy Bible, Deuteronomy 5: 18).

Their relationship was short-lived as my grandfather died only a few years after my mother was born. When my mother was 4 years old, my grandmother's husband returned to Liverpool from Poland where he had been hospitalised and rehabilitated after receiving a severe injury during the war. He wanted my grandmother to give my mother up for adoption as it was not his child.

My grandmother would not give up her daughter, so her husband kicked them both out of his house. He told his sons that their mother and sister were both dead and for years they had no idea that they were both alive and living only a few miles away from them.

My father was Danish and was born into a working-class Christian family (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark) in 1934 in Copenhagen. But growing up, the beliefs he developed were more those of an atheist. He did not believe in God or the Bible. This did not create a problem within his

family as they were very open-minded and relaxed Christians. As a child my father's family had very little, due to the war and immediately post-war they had to live on daily rations to survive. My dad had to work from a very early age to help support the family so never obtained higher or further academic education.

However, he entered a welding apprenticeship at the age of 14. When he was 17 he joined the navy and worked as an engine engineer – something that was considered a good career at the time. Despite the fact that my parents came from different countries with different cultural backgrounds, my brother, Steven, and I were raised with minimal clashing of these cultures. We were encouraged to believe in what we wanted and to speak freely about anything we were thinking. I believe my parents took the best from their own cultures, and made it our individualised family culture. We were taught the value of money from an early age; having daily chores in the house and only being rewarded when they were completed aided our compliance.

Communication was also a huge part of our culture as a family. My brother and I were not smacked or physically disciplined when we had misbehaved; instead we were made to sit down and listen to why our parents were angry or disappointed with us. We would be told right from wrong and made to apologise. He would preach about respect and how lucky we were to have the life we had. At times we would be punished by being grounded; this was to allow us time to think about what we had done. My father made it very clear to us never to steal and never to lie; these were two rules he was very serious about.

Considering what Rogers refers to as conditions of worth (Sanders 2002 p. 66), I truly believe that we were raised in an environment of conditional positive regard because on the occasions we failed to abide by his rules his reaction was more severe. My mother's role was to enforce manners upon us and it was very important to her. She taught us to " never start eating before everyone was seated and had been served"; that " no-one leaves the table till everyone is finished eating"; to " never talk with your mouth full"; " to respect the elderly" and to " never to swear". On one occasion my mother once washed my mouth with soap for swearing at her and to this day I would never dream of swearing in front of her. However, I feel that the most important cultural thing my mother taught me was to be kind to others and help others in need.

My brother and I are very different individuals despite our shared upbringing and cultural background. We have developed in very different directions and if it was not because we look alike I might question that we are even related. It is possible that both the ten year age gap between us and our different sexes explains our differences and how our parents treated us. Unlike my brother I went to a private school and my parents were much stricter with me than they were with him; he was allowed to come and go as he pleased, where as I had curfews and when I was out late my father would come to pick me up afterwards to make sure I was safe.

When I was growing up, I looked up to Steven as a role model. He would take me with him everywhere, we were inseparable. But as I grew older I began to develop my own opinions, had my own cultural reference points and we grew

apart. I believe this happened naturally - a part of my becoming more independent and aware of my ambitions in life.

Growing up I conformed to the culture I was born into. The place I grew up in had a code and the people I hung out with had expectations. As long these rules were not broken I could remain as one of them: “ culture manifests itself both in patterns of language and thought and in forms of activity and behaviour” (Dillard 1983 p. 9). I never felt I fully belonged to my culture, I didn't feel it represented my true identity. I knew how I had to behave in order to feel accepted, but that to me was all learned behaviour and my congruence within told me I was different. I eventually moved away from home into a larger city where it was easy be anonymous. The city had such a diversity of cultures, it felt like sitting in a restaurant with the huge menu to choose from. I felt relieved, but also lost and also a little scared. It seemed for a while I had no identity and I spent time thinking about who I was and where I belonged.

Dealing with my homosexuality:

Shortly after moving to the city I met a girl called Tina, we quickly became very close and fell in love. Unfortunately Tina had had a complicated life, some elements of which were in common with my upbringing (Christensen “ Counselling and Personal Growth”, p. 1); she had been emotionally and sexually abused; her parents had had an unhappy relationship involving alcohol abuse and her previous relationships had been violent.

Because of this it was a part of her culture to resort to violence and emotional abuse. I stayed with her because it was a part of my culture to

help others but I also rebelled against my culture from the point of view that I made a conscious decision not to be violent in return, despite violence being something that I had been raised with (Christensen “ Counselling and Personal Growth”, p. 1). However, I eventually used my congruence (Sanders 2002 p. 69) and admitted to myself that the relationship was never going to work.

As I have grown up, moved to the UK, met new people and had experiences my personal culture has changed many times. Fundamentally I know my rights from wrongs and would consider myself to be an agnostic theist. My personal culture is to be honest with the people around me in the hope that they will return this in kind, which I think stems from my fathers rules when growing up. My parents brought me up to believe they would love me no matter what I did and who I chose to be, yet when I realised I was gay, my mother struggled to accept it given her cultural background.

As a Catholic, gay love and relationships go against everything she was brought up to believe. It took my mother eight years to accept my sexuality. It was not until she made a friend whose daughter was also gay that my mother was able to talk about it. I think that this illustrates the need for cultural identification on an individual level i. e. as soon as my mother found someone she could identify with her opinions began to change. I believe this is the reason that we feel the need to label individuals and groups around us.

These groups are often also referred to as sub-cultures which satisfy our need to identify and group individuals within society. I find it interesting that the word “ sub-culture” has come to be used in a derogatory manner by the media to describe anything they feel differs from “ mainstream culture”. I

<https://assignbuster.com/the-culture-of-counselling/>

know that my mother was torn between her love for me and her loyalty to her religion. It was a difficult dilemma for her because disowning your daughter is not culturally acceptable however, by accepting me she could no longer be fully part of Catholic culture. I believe by becoming friends with another woman who had a gay daughter she embarked upon forming a new cultural self.

According to John M. Dillard (1983 p9) a new cultural self was a necessary step in order to allow her to cope effectively with this life experience and to enable her to accept me fully. Acceptance is one of Roger's three core conditions for a healthy/therapeutic relationship to exist (McLeod, John 1993 p. 158) and, in time, she also managed to use her congruence by letting me know that that it wasn't easy for her and that she needed time to develop more empathy towards my sexuality. So my experiences support these core conditions needing to be present for two people to build any kind of relationship.

When we were given this assignment, I immediately thought of Asians, Muslims and Africans in relation to the word " culture". I had not considered my own way of living as a " culture", as my life does not involve any religion. This is an interesting realisation for me because when I read the handout we were given in class (" Transcultural Counselling" 2010) my definition of the word changed. I now agree with John M. Dillard's (1983 p9) definition of culture. He states: " Culture manifests itself both in patterns of language and thought and in forms of activity and behaviour. These patterns become models for common adaptive acts and styles of expressive behaviour which



enable people to live in a society within a given geographical environment at a given time of technical development”.

I can relate this theory to my own upbringing where I was part of a gang, and it demanded that we had to show loyalty by doing certain things to uphold respect from others around us, including the other gang members. I had to show commitment by behaving in ways that are unacceptable to me now but were not then e. g. participating in violence against others. It is not a behaviour I am proud to have shown. I contained a lot of anger then (Debbie Hughes 2010 “ Counselling and Personal Growth”, p. 4) that I could channel and express in ways that were acceptable to my friends.

Personal dilemmas that might arise during counselling:

I am an openly gay woman living in a predominantly straight society, 10% of all society is homosexual and it was only in 1974 that homosexuality ceased being classified as a psychiatric disorder (McLeod 1993 p. 365). The society around me is a mixture of many different cultures; in some of which my sexuality is not accepted or acceptable. The questions that come to mind are; do I use my congruence with my potential clients and tell them I am gay, or is that even relevant to the relationship? I think it would be difficult for me to counsel a client who could culturally be homophobic. I find that it can be hard to keep an open mind and show unconditional positive regard (Sanders 2002 p. 70) to certain other cultures when theirs actively preaches against my sexuality and incites harm towards me. Other questions I find myself asking as I embark on the journey of counselling are; how will I feel being counselled by a heterosexual counsellor?

Will he or she be able to relate to my issues of “ coming out”? Will they be able to counsel me with unconditional positive regard or will they use their congruence and express any concerns? It will be interesting to see if my counsellor is experienced with the model of coming out constructed by Coleman (1982)? Being gay is such a little part of me now as I have come to terms with who I am, and feel comfortable with my sexuality. One could state that I am in the final stages of the coming out model (Coleman 1982).

I believe everyone needs an identity of their own. When we are born we are immediately given a name. How would we identify each other if we lived without names? Similarly, each culture needs an identity that differentiates it from other cultures. This enables people to relate to the culture in front, or around them. The rituals and the ceremonies of a culture help define that particular culture. If people do not follow the customs and traditions of a culture it will be lost because the following generations will be unaware of them, an example of this would be ancient Aztec and Inca cultures or Ancient Egyptian culture.

Cultural awareness:

Because culture can lead individuals to have very different views and see the world from different perspectives it is important that counsellors are aware of this. To provide a client with counselling that will lead to a positive outcome the counsellor must learn about different cultures and behave in a culturally sensitive manner. D’Ardenne and Mahtani (1989 p. 3) states “ that people in general avoid terms like race and class when they talk about culture because they are emotive terms and can bring out deeply held

personal prejudices” I believe this to be true. Counsellors can also learn to be more culturally competent by becoming self-aware.

Self-awareness (Sanders 2002 p. 39) can move individuals towards cultural competency in many ways. Firstly, becoming more self-aware helps a counsellor become more insightful about his or her own cultural heritage and give value to/respect differences. Secondly, awareness leads counsellors to realise their own partiality and how this might affect how their own culture may impact upon their clients who are culturally different. Thirdly, becoming more self-aware also helps a counsellor become more comfortable with the differences that exist between themselves and others, both clients and non-clients, in terms of race, gender, sexuality and religion. Finally, self-awareness also helps a counsellor acknowledge their own cultural issues; issues or views that they may not previously have been consciously aware that they held.