

# Cultural heritage

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Having come from a close-knit family both my maternal and paternal grandparents taught me about our African American culture. They all were born and raised in the United States and have become accustomed to African American traditions, Christianity as a religion, and episodes of discrimination. From the earliest days of slavery, slave owners sought to exercise control over their slaves by attempting to strip them of their African culture.

The physical isolation and societal marginalization of African slaves and, later, of their free progeny, however, actually facilitated the retention of significant elements of traditional culture among Africans in the New World generally, and in the U. S. in particular (Brown, 1998). Traditions My African American traditions are wide spread. They range from music, dance, and holidays. The African Americans use of music has come from ethnic groups of Africa, specifically those in the Western, Sahelian, and Sub-Saharan regions.

In times of slavery, music was used to pass on history, teach lessons, ease suffering, and relay messages. My culture has too used this as therapeutic expression. Music was turned into an emotional outlet. It was one thing that kept the slaves bonded. My family quite often gathers in song. It is something that cannot be explained but is very peaceful. It reminds us that we are family and have so many things to be thankful for despite the unfavored incidents that take place. Through song we manage to preserve some of our culture and express love for one another as our ancestors did.

Music in the African American culture is closely associated with dance. African American dance, like other aspects of African American culture, was

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brought to North and South American as slave labor (a form of entertainment) in the 1500s by Africans. Africans danced for special occasions, such as a birth or a marriage, or as a part of their daily activities (African American Registry, 1999). Dance often gave African American slaves a view of a better future. The act of dancing has become a major tradition for my family. At family gatherings there is always an imaginary dance floor which turns into our reality.

Family members of all ages gather together and communicate their happiness through dance. Having a background in professional dance, often times my family members would ask for me to perform. Most of all performances held great substance in spirituality and our African American culture. Out of the many traditions, I cannot say that I am ashamed of any but the one that I am most proud of is the Christmas holiday. Christmas is both a sacred religious holiday and a worldwide cultural and commercial phenomenon. My family, of Christian belief, celebrate this day as the birth of Jesus.

Often times we do decorate the Christmas tree, exchange gifts, attend church, and share meals with family and friends. Amongst all the gathering we do not forget about the sole purpose of this day. It is the time that God showed his love for us. Jesus was born to pay for all of our sins. We see this time as a time of healing and renewed strength. This holiday is also a reminder that we are God's children, his sons and daughters in Christ. Religion From a very young age it was instilled in me that God is the foundation of my family.

He is the “ go to guy,” the main personal therapist we turn to in our time of need. I have been taught in order to spiritually mature and live a life that is pleasing to God we must increasingly understand and obey God’s will. This we are taught through God’s word, the Bible. It is understood that God is spirit and operates in a spiritual realm even though we live our lives in a material realm. Knowing and building that personal relationship with God is a spiritual choice that I have inherited from my ancestors. It is great motivation for me to live positively and spiritually. Discrimination and Oppression

I have not personally been discriminated against but my grandparents have witnessed it first hand. My grandfather would always tell the story about the time his mom sent him to the grocery store. Several racial slurs were used such as, “ boy,” “ that colored one,” and “ nigga. ” He would elaborate on the shame and anger he felt but also stated that there was nothing he could do to defend himself. As for me, I have only witnessed discrimination in the black community. Black Americans frequently experience racial discrimination that negatively impacts their lives (Brown, 1998).

They also face minority status stress, a unique source of stress that comes from psychosocial difficulties related to racial and ethnic background (Greer and Brown 2011). Experiencing racial discrimination can be stressful and reduce a person’s sense of control and meaning while evoking feelings of loss, ambiguity, strain, frustration, and injustice (Brown et al. , 1999). Purpose, Role and Approach to Counseling Although I am of African American culture I am still aware of my purpose as a counselor. My purpose in

counseling is to become as knowledgeable in as many multicultural groups as possible.

According to Draguns (1976), we have to be prepared to adapt our techniques (e. g. , general activity level, mode of verbal intervention, content of remarks, tone of voice) to the cultural background of the client; communicate acceptance of and respect for the client in terms that are intelligible and meaningful within his or her cultural frame of reference; and be open to the possibility of more direct intervention in the life of the client than the traditional ethos of the counseling profession would dictate or permit. (p. 4)

In multicultural counseling and therapy (MCT), the professional defines both a helping role and a process that uses modalities to define goals consistent with life experiences and cultural values of clients. The therapist learns to advocate the use of universal and culture-specific strategies and roles in the healing process; and balances the importance of individualism and collectivism in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of client and client systems (Sue & Sue, 2013). Sue & Sue dissect significant implications for healthy clinical practices that every counselor should follow:

1. Helping role and process: MCT involves broadening the roles of counselors and expand the repertoire of therapy skills considered helpful and appropriate in counseling. Some methods of helping can be taking the passive and/or objective stance in therapy, teaching, consulting, and advocating for the client.

2. Consistent with life experiences and cultural values: MCT means using specific procedures to define goals for culturally diverse clients. These goals should be consistent with their racial, cultural, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation backgrounds.

3. Individual, group, and universal dimensions of existence: MCT acknowledges that the client's existence and identity are composed of individual, group, and universal dimensions. Any form of helping that fails to recognize the totality of these dimensions negates important aspects of a person's identity.

4. Universal and cultural specific strategies: MCT believes that different racial/ethnic minority groups might respond best to culture-specific strategies of helping. For example, African Americans appreciate therapists who are authentic in their self-disclosures.

5. Individualism and collectivism: MCT broadens the perspective of the therapist by balancing the individualistic approach with a collectivistic reality that acknowledges our foundations in families, significant others, communities, and cultures. A client should be perceived as an individual who is a product of his or her social and cultural context.

6. Client and client systems: It is important to focus on the individual client and to encourage them achieve insights and learn new behaviors. However, when presented with prejudice, discrimination, racism of employer or organizational policies, the focus must shift from the individual client to altering the client systems. There are several other components that can be added to assuring that The definition for effective therapy includes verbal

(content of what is said) and nonverbal (how something is said) elements. As therapists we cannot be more concerned with the accuracy of communication than with whether the communication is appropriate.

According to each cultural background the therapist has to consider proxemics when attempting to connect with the client. E. T. Hall (1969) identified four interpersonal distance zone characteristics of the U. S culture: intimate, personal, social, and public. However, different cultures dictate different distances in personal space. For example, Latin Americans conversing with a person dictates a much closer stance than is normally comfortable for Euro-Americans (Nydell, 1996). Potential Barriers

While taking the MCT approach I want to recognize potential barriers that may be present in counseling a client of a different multicultural group. It is very likely for the counseling professional to experience culture, class, and language barriers. The individual's culture defines their totality of ideals, beliefs, skills, tools, customs, and institutions into which they are born. I may be liable to experience several cultural barriers different from my own. Having come from a middle- to upper-class background, it is often difficult to relate to the circumstances and hardships affecting the client who lives in poverty.

The counseling professional must be conscious of their perception of the lower-social-class client and be sure not to see them as more unfavorable (as having less education, being dysfunctional, and making poor progress in therapy) than upper-social-class clients. (Sue & Sue, 2013). Lastly, the language barrier may be the most important. Communication that is disconnected automatically leaves a gap between the client and counselor.

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Clients who are limited in English tend to feel like they are speaking as a child and choosing simple words to explain complex thoughts and feelings (Sue & Sue, 2013).

Although we are unique biologically, each of us is born into a cultural matrix of beliefs, values, rules, and social practices. Acknowledging shared experiences and characteristics makes the therapist more relatable to the culturally diverse client. The mental health professional must set aside their personal worldviews and understand cultural values and life circumstances of their culturally diverse clients. We must free ourselves from the cultural conditioning of what we believe is correct therapeutic practice and play new roles in the helping process.