

Culturally Competent Counseling Case Study

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Cultural identities strongly shape one's perspective of self, and thus, one's well being. In this case, Esperanza Mesa was born in Durango, Mexico, and experienced discrimination after her family relocated to the United States when she was four, and she entered the public education system. Her ethnic identity began to form in the context of "otherness" as she was treated adversely for her accent and appearance. Thus, she assumed the name Hope, the English translation of her name, in an effort of acculturation. Hope's sexual orientation began to be questioned, but because of her religious affiliation with Catholicism, and her family's traditional views, she suppressed these feelings. The intersectionality of gender, sexual-orientation, ethnicity, and creed have prompted suppression. She conformed herself to her familial expectations, got married and had a child. Thus, she experienced subjugation, which is excessively conceding to the influence of others, including suppression of needs and emotions, trying to accommodate other expectations. This results in a sense of feeling trapped, which produces feelings of pent-up anger, and can influence other adverse behaviors such as withdrawing affection and "acting out." Based on this initial assessment, Hope is seeking treatment for feelings of loneliness, anxiety, insomnia, and rage. Given the cultural influences in her identity formation, and in the coping mechanisms related to subjugation, socialized and cultural factors need to be incorporated in communications and analyses with Hope.

Cultural competency regards an inquisitive, empathetic, and informed approach to cultural considerations in communicating and delivering healthcare services. It involves attention to lingual, dietary, genetic, and spiritual implications on health, as well as values, customs, rituals, and communication styles. In this case, the religious influence of Catholicism, and the

values and customs within her traditional family, have strongly influenced Hope's resistance to sexual orientation. However, the cultural influences run much deeper, as her identity was shaped in the prism of being regarded as an "immigrant", and particularly, as a "greasy, lazy, Wetback Mexican who should just go home." Despite living in the U.S. with her family, having a home neighborhood, she adapted in the context of feeling like an "outsider" in everyday life, particularly in the public education system and in employment, both of which strongly impact one's personal development and conception of self.

To provide culturally competent care, it is vital to assess one's own self-awareness, and to avoid projecting stereotypes or bias onto the client. As a daughter of immigrants, this is a narrative that is personally relatable. While immigrants carry different stories and vary on individual bases, including whether they relocate to an ethnic enclave, whether the parents are able to earn respectable wages, how many siblings are in the family, and other variables, being able to relate to this narrative can help improve trust-building between the counselor and client (Linesch, et al., 2014). The overarching experience of transition and feelings of "otherness" is a theme that connects diverse immigrant experiences (Linesch, et al., 2014). At the same time, it is vital not to project one's own cultural experiences onto the client, and to try to approach each individual with a culturally sensitive assessment. Failing to recognize cultural differences can result in unethical and unfair assessments of the client (Hays & Erford, 2018).

In this case, a primary goal would be to provide a culturally competent assessment, and an individualized assessment. For example, I would prefer to speak with Hope in the language, and refer to her in the name, that she most identifies with personally. This will help to get to the root of how she identifies herself, and to question her own identity and to differentiate between

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how she wishes to identify herself, contrary to how cultural and social pressures influence her to identify herself. For example, Lyons, et al. (2010) address how many psychologists often lack the experience and competence needed to treat LGBTQ+ clients. An Ethical Acculturation Model is recommended as an approach to assess clients who cultures oppose or have little or no tolerance for LGBTQ+ behaviors and identities (Lyons, et al., 2010). Thus, there is the acculturation to a dominant culture, in this case mainstream American culture, as well as acculturation to ethical norms as promoted by one's religion and family tradition.

As addressed, there are numerous ways to utilize technology to apply culturally competent support to Hope. In another example, rather than just generalizing "Hispanic" I would seek to educate myself more on other studies of cultural constructs in Mexican Americans specifically, and to explore what constructs she relates to most. Cuellar, et al. (1995) discuss that common cultural constructs relevant to Mexican American acculturation and identity formation are: Familism, Fatalism, Machismo, Folk Beliefs, and Personalismo. Based on the Acculturation Theory, which argues that there are behavioral and cognitive dimensions to the process of adapting in another culture, four of these constructs are strongly correlated with the process of acculturation and generational status. Accordingly: Familism, Machismo, Folk Beliefs, and Fatalism negatively correlated with acculturation, whereas Personalismo showed no correlation (Cuellar, et al., 1995). In Hope's case, familism seems to have had a major impact on her sense of identity, as she adhered to familial expectations of marrying and bearing a child at a young age. However, she also demonstrated acculturation by changing her name, which essentially internalizes the discrimination experienced.

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her help-seeking behavior in counseling. Diaz and Bui (2016) explore, “Latinas experience multiple oppressions and poorer health due to their often triple minority status as poor, female, women of color,” which in Hope’s place is extended further to the additional dimension of unconventional sexual orientation (p. 607). In their assessment of the implications of these multiple discriminations on Latina women, higher perceived family support and greater ethnic identity were positively correlated with overall subjective well being. In this case, Hope exhibits limited familial social support with regards to her individuality, and lower ethnic level given her behaviors of acculturation, such as changing her name to Hope to fit in more with mainstream American culture. Basically, Hope is positioned between feeling rejected by the mainstream culture with ongoing discrimination, as well as feeling a lack of family support as she has been suppressing her own needs based on low perceived familial social support (Diaz & Bui, 2018).

To support Hope in her mission to overcome feelings of loneliness, anxiety, rage, and insomnia, technological and community tools can be utilized. Foremost, technology can be used personally, to screen databases on research relating to the client’s individual and cultural considerations. Cultural competence is not something that is achieved but is something that is maintained with continual learning and expansion of awareness. This includes also looking into community-based participatory research that looks specifically at what local resources are available, and what variables go into the usage of these resources (Shattell, et al., 2008). Immigration status and acculturation strongly impact help-seeking behaviors, including behaviors to maintain ongoing self-care and mental wellness. In Hope’s case, she would likely Beyond experiences related to ethnic discrimination, gender, family expectations, and sexual orientation all relate to Hope’s experiences leading up to her help-seeking behavior in

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with others who have similar experiences, albeit perhaps with different details, helps in the construction of one's chosen identity, rather than melding into a conformed identity that correlates with subjugation.

To work with Hope in forming a strategy for improving her own mental wellbeing, and in achieving her personal goals, it is vital to build trust and connect her to further resources. According to Valencia-Garcia, et al. (2012) perceived access to services and community trust play substantial roles in Mexican American women seeking ongoing treatment for symptoms including for anxiety and depression symptoms. Thus, trust-building is important to effectively motivate Hope to utilize technological and community resources as recommended. This may include economic support to facilitate her divorce and the custody she is seeking of her daughter. Social capital is positively correlated with acculturation, and negatively correlated with anxiety and other symptoms that Hope is experiencing, so directing her to resources to enhance social capital can facilitate ongoing improvements (Valencia-Garcia, et al., 2012).

Overall, Hope has experienced multiple levels of oppression related to ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, and experiences low levels of perceived familial support. However, Hope is also seeking healthcare, demonstrating a desire to take greater command over her life. Given the complexities of her circumstances, it is important to utilize a range of resources via technology and in the community. This can include local resources to support social capital, as well as social media resources to connect her to others with similar experiences, and community resources available to support self-care and subjective well-being. This will be a process that requires benefit from community-based and online-based support groups that incorporate the intersectionality of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and immigration status. Associating

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goals. For the most part, Hope has been forming an identity in reaction to social and familial practices, and this subjugation has led to feelings of isolation, anxiety, sleeplessness, and anger. However, by exploring Hope's desired identity, and developing a framework for actualizing this identity, can help set her on a path toward confidence, self-awareness, and belongingness.

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