

How I Relate to the Respectful Model

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The RESPECTFUL counseling model represents a new, comprehensive, and integrative way of thinking about the persons who are directly involved in the process of counseling (D'Andrea et al., 2001, p. 417). The RESPECTFUL model consists of ten factors. The RESPECTFUL factors influence the way people learn to view themselves and others,. Still, each frequently affects the way clients and mental health practitioners construct meaning from the different challenges and problems that individuals present in counseling and psychotherapeutic settings. (D' Andrea et al., 2001) As I continue my journey into counseling, I recognize I place myself in the role of a person directly involved in the process.

As I reflect on the factors of the RESPECTFUL model, I relate it to internet dating. You interact with so many people on a surface level. For each person, I had a conversation with, the ten factors of religious identity, economic background, sexual identity, psychological maturity, ethnic/racial identity, chronological/developmental challenges, various forms of trauma, family background and history, unique physical characteristics, and location of residence and language differences are present. I was required to take a class through work, and the prime objective taught was to treat everyone within, and that comes into the court system with respect. This model builds on this concept, adding the areas in which we should be respectful.

As I focus on myself in my religious/ spiritual identity, I am reminded of how my identity in this area has changed through the years. Raised in a catholic home, I made my sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation sacraments. First Holy Communion and Confirmation. When attending mass, I always felt internally "there has to be more." As an elementary school child, my Nana would take us to a Pentecostal church where I loved singing and jumping around. That experience stayed with me, and at the age of twenty-five, I gave my life to Jesus at a conference. My Christianity is the core of who I am. I am aware that situations and experiences stay with us throughout our lives, and I understand this to be the case, whether the experience

is positive or negative. It is vital to remember, especially in this area, not everyone views religion or spirituality as all positive or effective for their lives.

Attending public school in Queens, New York, allowed me to experience different religious backgrounds. Growing up, my mother's best friend was an orthodox Jewish believer. My ex-husband lived in a Muslim country for a while; my cousin attests to being an atheist. I have spoken with other individuals who are professed witches. This helps me to have a general idea of the beliefs of different practices. Although I am solid in Christianity, I learned, I can not force my belief on others and should accept everyone where they are at in their own beliefs. The Bible teaches us if we plant the seeds. God will water them. Love is the seed I am planting the most for anyone who crosses my path. This will help me respect where clients stand on their own beliefs and allow me the separation needed to stay focused on the individual I am counseling. Someone who has a negative view of religion or spirituality may not of had the most significant experience. I am not there to change their experience but to guide them to explore their experiences and create their own personal answers.

Economic Class Background

Until learning about the RESPECTFUL model, I would not have considered how economic class background would affect my ability to show up as my authentic self to someone in a counseling session. My financial status has changed many times throughout my life. As a child, I would have been considered middle class before my parent's divorce. When I was in third grade, my life changed. My economic class changed to what many would consider the lower class. We moved out of our house in the suburb to the city. From a three-bedroom house with a finished attic and basement to a one-bedroom apartment living with my grandmother. It was infested with mice and roaches—barely enough room for the four of us. My grandmother worked at the airport in food service, and my mom was a typesetter at a local newspaper. I wore

handmade hand-me-down clothes from a cousin that were two sizes bigger. It was not until high school that my economic background changed again back to the middle class.

I can relate well with clients that fall within the low and median economic class backgrounds. Especially people that have experienced significant financial losses and gains. The class I would struggle with counseling and find it difficult to relate to is what people consider high-class or wealthy. I do not relate well to those that are pretentious. I believe they experience the same relational difficulties as any other class, but I am unsure whether I can relate to the level it would be on.

Sexual Identity

The word female is the adjective I relate to most in exploring my sexual identity. Having had two children, I believe in heterosexual relationships defined in the Bible between males and females. Males and females were created to procreate and produce offspring. My Christian values frame how I see my sexual identity. I hold the Bible to the standard all should live according to, but I understand how confusion in a person's sexual identity is being used by the enemy.

Throughout my life, I have met people that identify differently than I believe. At a party, I spoke to people about how their sexual identity had changed. Working with others in a session, I could relate on the surface but not on a deep level. My career as a bridal consultant allowed me to meet a cross-dresser and, at Starbucks, many partners identified as homosexuals. I have been told by those that identify differently from myself I would not understand their struggles, feelings, or what they have endured through life. I could not disagree with this statement. I know I can not relate because I do not have any experience with their struggles. I know my belief is it is a sexual addiction. I have spoken with people that have been delivered from this lifestyle. I

am respectful of how they sexually identify but realize I may not be the most effective in helping a client.

Level of Psychological Maturity

The point in my life when I believed my level of psychological maturity was the highest, I look back now and realize it was the lowest. My level of development stopped at the age I was affected most by my trauma. Although I believed my behaviors replicated adult behaviors, my ability to handle situations, feelings, emotions, and situations did not reflect a very mature individual. I was naive in understanding my biases towards other cultures, ethnicities, and races. I refused to acknowledge my weaknesses. Through my years of counseling with different counselors, I have become more self-aware. I would have struggled with those with a higher economic status, as I would have displayed jealousy. Men were a struggle to relate to because I believed they were weak, uneducated, and selfish. I professed I could hold the title of man better than those I was forced to come into contact and interact. My father leaving me under the influence of my mother and nana, who carried a bitterness towards men, instilled within me the same feelings they had towards men. Faced with male clients, my bitterness and pessimistic view of men would become apparent in our sessions. I would have counseled with an angry undertone and judgmental spirit.

I have matured throughout the years in my views and understanding. Through counseling and healing, I have changed my perspective. The Bible was not written for separate cultures, ethnicities, or races. It was written for all those that hurt and seek to understand their pain. Our stories are different, but our problems with abuse, abandonment, depression, and all the other mental health classifications and diagnoses make it our job to relate or learn to relate to the person sitting across from us in a session. My psychological maturity level,

self-awareness, and ability to empathize and connect are at a level now that I would consider high.

Ethnic/Racial Identity

Until recently, I was not aware of the importance of how our ethnic/racial identity plays a role. I am a white, Italian/American female. The term white privilege was a new concept to me. I never saw myself as biased against any race or ethnic group. One day, a Black female co-worker told me I was not white privileged. I needed her to explain what she meant. I realized at that moment I needed to educate myself further. I was not in a place to honestly counsel another race or ethnic group. I was not educated enough to relate to anything others have gone through. Although I did not grow up associated with a high class, I learned quickly in a church setting, I was seen in a different light because of my skin tone. Through this awareness, I began to explore how I viewed others. I would love to write about how differently I saw things. How I could not relate to the stereotype, I fell into. I realized I had biases I did not think I could ever have. I grew up in a highly diverse area of Queens, New York. During that season of my life, I did not fear; it was my neighborhood. Once I had my two children, I moved to Long Island. I noticed myself revisiting my old neighborhood but acutely aware of my surroundings and the people. I clutched my bag tighter and felt fear inside. Realizing I, too, judged a skin tone subconsciously.

These biases would have influenced my work negatively. Having a preconceived notion of a client already creates an ineffective atmosphere for counseling. I am still determining if I could counsel certain ethnicities due to my lack of knowledge and experience with their culture. Even learning about them is different from growing up within them. This would become an area I would need to work on with a supervisor to strengthen my ability to counsel a client from a different ethnic/ racial group.

Chronological/Developmental Challenges

Chronological Developmental Challenges: Physical, cognition, and psychological skill development affects how an individual experiences challenges at different points in life(onlinecounselingprograms.com, 2022, para 10). Counseling throughout the years, I realized I matured fast in the responsibilities given to me, but I was not nurtured or educated in how to handle the responsibilities. In third grade, my life changed when my parents announced they were divorcing. Neither parent knew how to nurture their children. The roles within the household changed drastically, and I became the male figure in the household. When my mother remarried when I was a high school student, I no longer shouldered the responsibilities as prior, but I harbored bitterness, resentment, and anger. In many ways, I was stuck with an eight-year-old's emotional capacity and how I processed my emotions.

Developmentally, I was not allowed to make decisions for myself. When I would try and make decisions as an adult, I still had the mindset of a child. I would become anxious, and my mind would become scrambled. These challenges made me feel like a child next to any adult. However, my outer appearance is that of a 50-year-old woman, and my processing abilities until approximately 10 years ago, I could not relate to my peers well.

In my current frame of mind, I am now able to work with so many groups of people. My daughter was diagnosed with ADHD, so I have learned to deal with the struggles from a parental point of view, as well as the child. Learning about my own struggles, has helped me to grow and mature to handle children in a variety of ages, single parents and women. Men are still a challenge as I am still learning how to appropriately interact with them. Older adults, although I have the patience to try and help and the compassion, I do not believe I am educated enough to help with many of their problems. I do understand sickness as many immediate family members including my mother and grandmother battled cancer. Although my life has been filled with many

challenges, including date rape, abuse, sickness, and divorce, I am grateful to have walked through these areas of life so I may help others navigate through the developmental changes.

Threats to Well-Being and Trauma

Threats to well-being and trauma I believe coincides a lot with psychological development. Due to my upbringing, my trauma stemmed from emotional and mental abuse of parents. It has been throughout the generations where the woman within my family have a dislike for men. My mother made me the man of the household and shouldered me with the responsibility she did not want to be held accountable for. She then controlled me. She played out in my relationship with her what she could not in her relationship with her father and my father. This was traumatic for me and threatened my well-being. My living conditions after my parents divorce were also traumatic. The environment we are raised in contribute tremendously to the stressors of our life. Not only our home lives, but our neighborhoods, schools, work environments and social settings.

Cultural oppression, racism and ageism I have little knowledge about. I am limited to whom I can work with in these areas. I am learning and trying to educate myself in these areas to become a more effective counselor. I hold the belief that one learns more intricately when they have first hand experience.

Family Background and History

Growing up I was taught the family structure consisted of a father, mother, child/children and possibly a family pet. Television families looked the same way for the longest time. Reflecting, shows started to slowly change that structure with shows like Different Strokes, Kate and Allie and the Fresh Prince of BelAir. Different strokes showed a rich white man with a daughter that adopts two black children. Kate and Allie was a show about two divorced women

who live together helping each other. The Fresh Prince of BelAir, brought us the concept that a troubled teen goes and lives with his rich uncle, all characters of color. The show taught so many concepts including family helping family, a troubled teen coming from a broken home and his father not in his life and how success can come to anyone that invests the effort. Families no longer fit what was taught years ago. Different cultures, their family dynamics may consist of older family members living all together, the grandfather holds the family together and many other combinations. Nothing can be considered “traditional” when “traditional” has a different meaning depending upon the culture, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, traumas and hardships.

My family dynamics begin as a father, mother and children but throughout the years changed many times. When my parents divorced, it was my mother, brother and self. A few years later, my Nana, mother and children. Years after that a stepfather was added and a step mom. We are in constant change. We can not force our ways onto another. We must keep an open mind, do not presume and learn as we counsel others. Although my core belief is in the Bible of a man and a woman, even Jesus does not take away our free will to decide for ourselves what we believe family looks like.

Unique Physical Characteristics

Unique Physical Characteristics would be the area I would struggle the most in helping others. I am challenged by my own physical characteristics, my weight especially. Throughout my life the three men closest to me have all criticized my physical features. My father has found a way to justify why I am overweight. My brother has told me “no one likes the fat chick” and my ex-husband had an addiction to pornography. Wherever we went, he would stare at other women. Although I have worked diligently at healing this part of me, any issues regarding weight, obesity, eating disorders are triggering. I have learned to look for physical characteristics that, in my opinion, make a person stand out. Since I was young, I have been

challenged by what society deems as beautiful and acceptable. It is hard to counsel in an area you still struggle to gain confidence and control over yourself.

Location of Residence and Language Differences

My location of residence has changed many times throughout my lifetime. I have lived in the suburbs and city. I have lived in other states. I was married to a man from the midwest. I have lived in middle class areas, dated men in areas that are considered wealthy, worked in areas of the rich and lived in areas that were considered lower income. I have had the privilege of interacting with fellow co-workers from different countries, going to church with people from different cultures, races and ethnicities. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from those I have come in contact with and interacted. I feel that just because there is a difference in language or understanding, it may take more time to cultivate a relationship and understand a client, as opposed to someone with a similar background. I have the unfortunate disadvantage of only knowing English as my primary language. My landlord is fluent in Spanish and has a harder time understanding the English language. The communication between us is good, but the effort is substantially more compared to my other relationships where the predominate language is English. It does not change the value of the person I am communicating with, nor should it change the desired effectiveness of counseling with this individual.

There is so much value in seeing yourself through the RESPECTFUL model. Taking the time to meditate on each letter and what it represents provided me a clearer understanding of myself, triggers, biases and areas to continue to heal. Most importantly, it established a clearer understanding of the importance of each area and as it relates to the client in the counseling atmosphere. Each client should be seen, heard and feel respected as they share their lives, struggles and personal details. They have the courage to show up for themselves and seek help, we have the responsibility to be RESPECTFUL.

References

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