

RESPECTFUL Model of Counseling & Development Self-Assessment

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The RESPECTFUL Model is a comprehensive framework for therapy that integrates and considers many aspects of the therapist to consider when treating their clients. This model calls on the therapist to evaluate and process how their own characteristics and experiences affect the therapy they provide. The following sections address each aspect of the RESPECTFUL Model within myself and as a clinician.

Religious/Spiritual Identity

My mother was raised as Southern Baptist in a small rural southern town. She was brought up very religiously, however, rejected her religion in her 20s and became agnostic and then atheist. My father was raised Jewish in New York City. However, he was not raised religiously Jewish; he was raised more culturally Jewish. Because neither of my parents were religious by the time they started our family, I was not raised religiously. I was raised around religion, as I occasionally attended Church or temple with extended family members and friends. This led me to become more spiritual than religious; I am open to the possibility or likelihood of a higher power, but do not utilize religion as a support or comfort and do not seek guidance from a higher power.

I would estimate that over three-quarters of the clients I have worked with identify as religious. Regardless of our differences, I always encourage clients to utilize healthy support systems that they have in their lives. If my clients find their religion to be a support system, I explore that with them as I would with any other support, and encourage them to utilize their religion in any healthy way possible. However, I have experienced skepticism about my judgment or ability to provide helpful therapy due to my limited belief in a higher power. In these instances, I work towards creating a space of support and understanding

rather than judgment due to differences. I encourage clients to talk about, explore, and utilize their religion in positive manners, and validate any healthy support systems they may utilize, religion included.

Economic Class Background

My worldview of economic classes and how history has directly affected entire cultures and races has a huge influence on my therapeutic practice. From the beginning of my career, it has been my passion to provide quality mental health services to families from low socio-economic status (SES). It is obvious that families from low SES have unequal and limited access to health care, among many other things. As a therapist, I have made it a professional goal to assist families in receiving quality mental health services regardless of their SES.

Being from the middle-upper class has affected the way I experience the world around me as well as the way people treat me. I never experienced poverty firsthand. My mother came from a family of low socio-economic status and created her career. Because we are middle-upper class, my parents were able to pay for my undergraduate degree; I was able to attend a public out-of-state college. My family is well-educated and values education. We understand that although education is a right, our higher education is a luxury that many people do not have, simply because of the class they were born into.

Being from a middle-upper SES has sometimes created a barrier in providing therapy services to families from lower SES, as sometimes families may think I am unrelatable. To overcome this barrier, I am transparent and vocal about our differences and also my belief in their right to quality mental health services. This assists in building trust with my clients.

Sexual Identity

My sexual identity is comprised of my gender identity and my sexual orientation. I identify as a woman who is romantically attracted to all genders. Because I present and identify as a woman, I am often treated differently than a man in our society. As a woman, I have less legal autonomy over my body; there are US laws dictating what type of medical care I can receive within my own body. As a woman, I financially make less money than my male counterparts. As a woman, I am more likely to experience intimate partner violence than men. As a bisexual woman, I have become more aware of the discrimination the LGBTQ+ community experiences. Because my bisexuality cannot be seen like many other identifying characteristics such as race and age, I often do not receive this discrimination directly.

In therapy, my identification as a woman and awareness of the challenges and discrimination women face has assisted in empathizing with my clients that identify as women. Women from low SES often face significantly more violence and discrimination than women from higher SES. Openly recognizing this has helped my clients feel seen and understood. My identification as bisexual has also assisted in my therapy practice. I am more empathetic towards and understanding of my clients who are questioning their sexual orientation, as is more common with the younger generation. While my clients may resist speaking about their sexual orientation with friends or family, I make sure to create a safe space where this can be explored without judgment.

Psychological Maturity

As a woman in my 30s, I have made an intentional decision to consistently work on my psychological and emotional maturity. Improving and increasing my psychological maturity

often looks like attending my own therapy sessions weekly, engaging in self-care rituals such as meditation and exercise, and maintaining respectful communication with all people. I make an effort to prioritize the development and improvement of my psychological maturity because I believe that it leads to long-term happiness and acceptance. Psychological maturity also includes having an accurate view of myself, including my strengths, weaknesses, privilege, and bias.

This has been important in both my personal and my professional life. Personally, it has been important for me to have an accurate view of myself. Attending therapy has helped me to see and value my strengths regardless of how others have treated me, and has also helped me to identify areas in which I can improve and grow. Professionally, my ability to help my clients depends on my psychological maturity. My empathy towards others often comes from my experiences and my ability to show empathy towards myself. My work towards the development of my self-love, which includes acceptance of my strengths and challenges, helps me to support my clients along their journey and create an environment to accept them for who they are and meet them where they are at.

Specifically when working with resistant clients, a high level of psychological maturity is needed. Often, a client's resistance has less to do with the therapist and more to do with where the client is currently at mentally. Psychological maturity helps me to focus on what my client is going through rather than what I am going through; I can help them from a viewpoint that focuses on them and the challenges that they may be facing rather than focusing on myself. Additionally, if they do identify something that I have done that they do not like, psychological maturity will allow me to explore that with them without taking personal offense.

Ethnic and Racial Identity

Traditionally speaking, my culture of origin is French, Russian, and Polish. My mother is mostly French. Because my mother's family has lived in America for so long, our French heritage is not an aspect of our culture that we identify strongly with. My mother grew up in the rural south, in an isolated, small, and relatively poor town called Manteo, with very modest means. Although Manteo had some black residents, institutionalized racism was and still is a normal part of life. Some of my relatives today have closed their doors to me when I was accompanied by a black friend or significant other. This may have pushed my mother and my family further in distance from my relatives and from Manteo.

My father is half Polish and half Russian and is culturally Jewish. He is the third generation of his family to live in the United States. Because of that, his parents identify with their Polish and Russian heritage. However, they identify most with their Jewish culture. My father was not brought up religiously Jewish, but he was brought up culturally Jewish.

What I consider more important than being French and Jewish, although related, is the fact that my family is white. While I acknowledge that my cultural heritage is important and has affected my way of life, I think my skin color far overshadows this (However, my skin color is due to my heritage, so the two are not exclusive). As a white family in the middle-upper class, we value education, family bonding, and acceptance of others. My family emphasized waiting until marriage to have children and, also because we live in the north, not getting married until mid-to late-20s. Because I am white, and also because I grew up in a predominantly black city that was also very segregated, my brothers and I knew that we were lucky to have been born into a white middle-class family. We also recognize that, simply because we are white, we are treated differently and receive certain

benefits. People see my skin color and make certain assumptions that often lead to more respectful treatment. I feel lucky that I was born into a white family, and it is this mix of pride, guilt, family morals, and history that has given my family members the desire to work for equality.

Chronological and Developmental Challenges

As a person in her early 30s, my age often plays a role in my professional life, both with coworkers and with clients. In my mid-20s, I had discomfort with my age, as I was often younger than most of the parents of my youth clients. Because this sometimes led to the parents questioning my abilities, I let that lead to me questioning my own ability. Being in the field for almost a decade now, I do not let my age or how others may perceive my skills due to my age affect my own opinion of the work I do. I have developed more confidence, which has also led to my clients having more confidence in me and the therapy they receive. Coworkers have also needed some time to adjust to the fact that I am considered young for my role as clinic director.

My stage of life also has an impact on my work with my clients and their parents. As a woman in my 30s, I am often asked if I have any children and my intentions in having them. As this is not a question asked of my 30-year-old male colleagues, I find that it sometimes alters the way people view or treat me. Separately, I do not have or identify with having any developmental challenges. Some clients may think that I am not relatable. However, I have not encountered this thus far regarding developmental challenges.

Threats to Well-being and Trauma

The trauma that has heavily impacted the last 6 years of my life has been the unexpected death of my fiance in April 2017 to a random act of gun violence. This sudden trauma not only

affected my ability to utilize healthy coping skills in my personal life, but it also initially affected my ability to provide quality therapeutic care. Due to my own grief, I found it difficult to make space to help others. With years of therapy and consistent work on myself, I was finally able to arrive at a space where my trauma has made me more empathetic and relatable to others. My trauma has taught me to be gentle with myself and others, and it has taught me the power of consistent effort, for both myself and my clients. While I do not share this trauma with my clients, it makes me more patient, caring, and empathetic.

In contrast, the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic is a trauma that I share with my clients. While everyone experienced the pandemic differently, it is a shared life event that, during its height, created a stronger bond between me and my clients.

Family Background and History

With my parents' unique background, my brothers and I were raised to encompass many ideals. Both of my parents fought for equal rights, mainly for different historically oppressed groups: African Americans and women. I was raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a predominantly black city that now claims the title, "Most Segregated City in the United States," (WUWM). My brothers and I attended Milwaukee Public Schools where, as whites, we were the racial minority. From an early age, without blatancy, my parents instilled in us the idea and right of equality. Because of our geographical location, in the north and in a city, it was also taught, generally by experience, that people were often not given equal opportunities. Today, each person in my immediate family, in their unique way, is working towards achieving some type of equality for minorities. This could be for many different reasons. First, my parents chose to be socially and politically conscious and raised us to be the same. Second, my father is Jewish, and Jews have a history of oppression. Thus, it is

possible that my father and his children are able to have empathy for the oppressed peoples in the United States. Third, my brothers and I grew up witnessing institutionalized inequalities occur daily based largely on skin color.

Unique Physical Characteristics

Regarding physical characteristics, I meet many societal standards of beauty, as I am a white and slender woman. While I try not to uphold these standards of beauty in my personal and professional life, I acknowledge that I am a part of a larger society that does view me this way. One way I combat that both in my personal and professional life, is viewing beauty through the lens of health rather than weight. This is done through the language I use, such as commenting on someone's feelings, and also through topics, such as discussing healthy food choices to improve self-esteem. Because I look different from most of the families that I work with, my physical characteristics are often pointed out and addressed. I have learned to discuss these things, such as my whiteness or my weight, in an open and non-defensive manner with my clients.

Location of Residence and Language Difference

I grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in a two-story house. In Milwaukee, most families live in houses or duplexes with small yards. I grew up in an English-speaking-only household. In middle and high school, I studied Spanish language and, in college, studied abroad in a Spanish-speaking country. I am fluent in English and near-fluent in Spanish. I am generally good at understanding Spanish speakers and speakers with heavy accents. I have built upon this skill through my years of work in non-profit organizations. Working in New York City, I have learned that most people grew up in and live in apartment buildings. Many of my clients and coworkers currently live or have lived in subsidized housing. I do not pass judgment on anyone who has

lived in subsidized housing versus living in a large house, especially living in a city with high rates of housing insecurity and the most expensive rental rates in the country.

References

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