

Grief, Culture and Spirituality
A Framework for Dealing With Diversity

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Goals

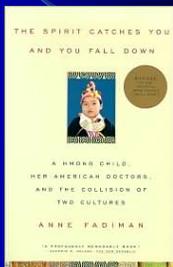
- Explore the nature of culture
- Discuss the ways that culture influences grief and end-of-life decisions
- Develop culturally sensitive interventions

The Growth of Cultural Diversity in the United States

- Sources of New Immigration
- Differential Birth Rates
- Increasing Racial and Ethnic Diversity
- The Growth of Non-Western Religions

Culture and End of Life Care

- *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*
- Fadiman's book offers a powerful story of mutual cultural misunderstandings and their impact on care



Cultural Awareness

Less a body of knowledge than a spirit of inquiry

Cultural Do's and Don't's

Don't Do!

Social Constructivism (Rosenblatt)

- There are no universals in grief
- The only similarity is that “death may be difficult for everyone”
- Each society constructs its own way to understand grief and mourning



Counseling the culturally diverse is simply good counseling

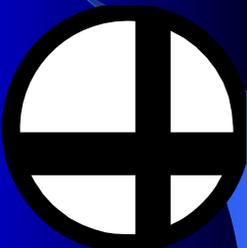
Culture is a way of life

Culture Can Be Defined by Many Ways

- Race and Ethnicity
- Social Class
- Spirituality

Illustration: Ethnicity and Social Class

- Milton Gordon's concept of *ethclass*



Social Class – The Hidden Distinction



- The Myth of the Middle Class
- Class in America
- Implications for School and Programs (Photos)

Culture Can Also be Defined by:

- Geography
- Shared Lifestyle

Illustration: Shared Life Style
Gay and Lesbian Subcultures

- Homophobia, trust and healthcare
- Intimate networks and support
- Disenfranchised grief



Spirituality as a Source of Diversity

A Transcendental Belief System

Spirituality and Medicine

- Hippocrates
- *"Prayer indeed is good but while calling on the gods, a man should lend himself a hand"*
- *"It is more important to know what sort of a person has a disease than to know what sort of disease a person has."*



"Spirituality" (Miller, 1994)

*Spirituality relates to our souls
It involves the deep inner essence of who we are
It is an openness to the possibility that the soul
within each of us is related to the Soul of all that is
Spirituality is what happens to us that is so
memorable we cannot forget it, and yet we find it
difficult to talk about because words fail to
describe it
Spirituality is the act of looking for meaning in the
deepest sense, and looking for it in a way that is
authentically ours*

"Religion" (Miller, 1994)

*Now religion, on the other hand works in a different way
In fact, if you take the word back to its origins, "religion" means "that
which binds together" "that which ties things into a package".
Religion has to do with collecting, solidifying, and consolidating
Religion says, "Here are special words meant to be passed on. Take them
to heart."
Religion says, "Here are a set of coherent beliefs. Take them as your
own."
Religion says, "Here are people to revere and historical events for you to
recall. Remember them"
Religion says, "Here are ways to act when you come together as a group,
and here are ways to behave when you are apart."*

Spirituality is



- Eclectic

Spirituality is



- Influenced by Culture

Spirituality is



- Affected by Development

Spirituality can both facilitate and complicate adapting to illness and loss

Role of Spirituality and Religion

- Providing Meaning
- Allowing Connection
- Reinforcing Self-Esteem
- Reinforcing Positive Health Habits
- Offering Social Support
- Enhancing the Immune System
- Renewing a Sense of Control

Renewing a Sense of Control

- Interpretive Control
- Predictive Control
- Vicarious Control



Spiritual Issues Can Be Manifest in:

- *Reactions to the illness*
- *End-of-life and other ethical decisions* – Prigerson *et al* (2009) found religious people more likely to take aggressive actions at end-of-life perhaps through belief in miracles, might see DNR as thwarting the gift of life, or see value in suffering
- *Spiritual tasks at each phase of illness*

The Critical Importance of Spiritual Assessment

Spiritual Interventions

- **Meaning Making Strategies**
 - Reminiscence
 - Dignity Enhancement Therapy
- **Utilizing Spiritual Strengths**
 - Beliefs
 - Spiritual Practices
 - Faith Communities (the A List)
 - Ritual



Spiritual Coping



- Hymns were often a coping strategy for older African-Americans – assisting them in dealing with stressful life events
- Counselors should consider using them in interventions

Hamilton, *et al*, 2013

Spiritual Counter-Transference



- Spiritual transference can occur when you impose your spiritual issues or practices on others (example – forgiveness)
- Attempt to proselytize
- The client's spiritual struggles raise spiritual issues for you as well

We can assist persons

When we become comfortable with our own spirituality and respectful of other's spirituality

Faith as Destructive

- Sometimes spiritual beliefs can be a source of tension or conflict --perhaps creating family divisions
- People who believe the disease is a divine punishment may not adhere to treatment regimens
- In other cases beliefs may cause distress (e.g. suicide, homosexuality etc.)



The Challenge of Multiple Cultural Identities



- Race
- Ethnicity
- Class
- Gender
- Sexual Identity

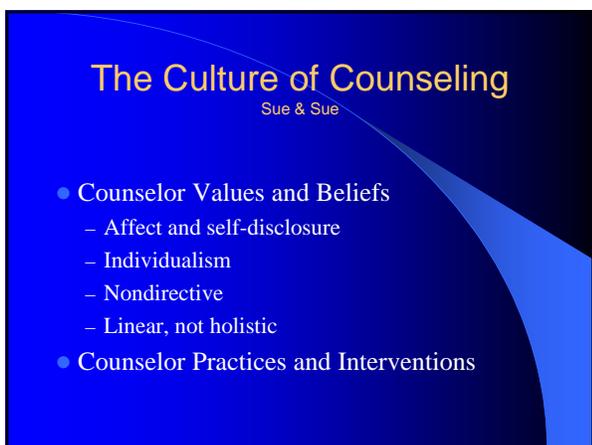
The Role of Cultural Assessment

- *Simply put, No case should ever be presented without an identification and analysis of cultural factors*









Counseling the Culturally Diverse Affects

- Relationships
- Assessments
- Interventions

Cultural Differences Can Create Barriers to Mutual Understanding

- Class differences
- Language differences
- Counseling culture as poor match
- Worldview differences
- Spirituality



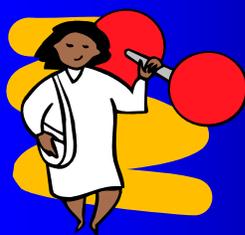
Health Professionals need to ...

- Gain knowledge about patient's culture
- Understand that their own cultural views are just "one" way to look at reality
- Develop communication skills that allow for nonjudgmental exchange of values in problem solving



Culture affects the ways we look at dying, death, loss and grief

Each culture views death differently and has its own strengths and weaknesses



- A paradigm
- Culture as facilitating and complicating responses to dying, death, grief, and loss

Every culture approaches dying differently

- Trust
- Open communication vs. protectiveness
- Access to care
- Treatment preferences – including hospice
- Advance care planning

Disclosure and Communication

- The dilemma between policy and ethical mandates vs. patient wishes, family concerns and culture
- Truth-telling vs. Truth-offering “the Right of Refusal”



The Influence of Culture

African-American Responses to Life-Threatening Illness

Values born in the struggle with adversity and racism

- Independence
- Survival
- Spirituality

Assist adaptation to life-threatening illness

(Becker & Newsom, 2005)



Langston Hughes' *Mother to Son*



Well son, I'll tell you
 Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
 It's had tacks in it,
 and splinters,
 And boards torn up
 And places with no carpet on the floor
 Bare,
 But all the time
 I'se been a-climbin' on,
 And reachin' landin's
 And sometimes goin' in the dark
 Where there ain't been no light.
 So boy, don't you turn back.
 Don't you set down on the steps
 'Cause you find it kinda hard.
 Don't you fall now -
 For I'se still goin', honey,
 I'se still climbin'
 And life for me ain't been no crystal stair

The Influence of Culture

African-American Responses to Life-Threatening Illness



Yet, these same values can discourage utilization of hospice; discourage advanced directives, and impair adaptation in the terminal phase.

African-Americans

Factors in Lower Hospice Utilization

- Cultural Mistrust, the cessation of curative medical care, and hospice
- Suffering as spiritually meaningful
- Spirituality and hope
- Survival as value
- Need for information

A Reminder: Cultural Caveats

- The *Sociological Fallacy* in interpreting research
- **Cultural Competence + Cultural Humility = Cultural Curiosity**
- Ask, do not assume
- *What do I need to know about you (or your culture, your background) to serve you best?*
- Opening a dialogue



Cultural Competency

- Cultural Awareness – appreciating diversity
- Cultural Knowledge
- Cultural Skill
- Cultural Encounters – seeking experience based on mutual learning
- Cultural Curiosity – open to ongoing learning



Areas of Cultural Conflict



- *Historical Mistrust*
- *Interpretation of Disability* – some cultures may interpret disabilities as spiritual punishments or rewards
- *Locus of Decision-Making*
- *Communication Styles* (including nonverbal)
- *Cultural Incompatibility of Explanatory Models of Disease or Treatment* (be open to incorporating folk treatments as possible complements)
- *Disease without Illness* – some symptom less disease such as hypertension may not be recognized

Cultural Sensitivity Guidelines

LEARN

- **L**isten to the patient's perception of the problem
- **E**xplain your perceptions and treatment strategy
- **A**cknowledge differences between perceptions
- **R**ecommend treatment while remembering patient's parameters
- **N**egotiate agreement

Cultural Sensitivity



- Do not make assumptions
- Question patients about their beliefs
- Do not discount patient beliefs
- Use indirect strategies
Many patients have told me the do _____ or visit _____. Do you?
- Incorporate folk beliefs
- Be sensitive to cultural taboos on information or on decision-making

Culture and Grief

Grief and Culture

- Attachment
 - Blauner, Freud, Kastenbaum on death rates, social structure, and attachment
- Expression
- Adaptation
- Styles of Grief
 - Instrumental vs. Intuitive



Culture and Funerals

- Customs and rituals
- Expressions of support
- Access and availability of formal support

Cultural Perspective

Cultural Strengths vs. Limitations

Illustration: Death in the Arctic

Death in the Arctic *Strengths*

- Strong Community Ties
- Flexible Family Structures
- Powerful Rituals
- Strong Spirituality



Death in the Arctic: *Limitations*



- High rates of chemical coping
- High incidence of traumatic death
- Disenfranchisement of certain losses (I.e. – missing)

The Key – A Spirit

Mutual Respect and Learning

How to Begin?

- Begin with – ourselves
- Assessing our own culture, our beliefs, attitudes, values and experiences



Guidelines for Sensitive Practice

- Do not assume
- Identity more crucial for non-dominant groups
- Maintain an open, nonjudgmental attitude
- Use open-ended questions
- Use gender neutral language
- Use sensitivity in language
- Listen and ask, rather than assume self-identification
- Remember cohort differences
- Be eclectic yet experimental and evidenced-based

Levels of Inter-Cultural Communication

- Verbal
- Non-verbal
- Paraverbal



What are the characteristics of an effective counselor?

- Skilled and knowledgeable
- Enlightened ignorance – openness
- What do I need to know about your culture to be effective?
- Reflective Self-awareness

What are the characteristics of an effective counselor (2)?

- Learning about the cultures you deal with regularly
- Observations and cultural informants
- Research and reading
- The value of ethnic newspapers, magazines and other media



Counseling the Culturally Diverse

The Value of Eclectic Approaches

Practice

Handling challenges and recovery skills

Interventions

- Utilize Beliefs
- Utilize and Cultivate Community Resources (including faith community)
- Utilize Culturally Appropriate Interventions

Illustration: Using Cultural Practices

A Native-American Men's Support Group in a Sweat Lodge

- In a trip to Alaska, the Inupiaq – a Native-American Group held a men's grief support group in a sweat-lodge
- Linking the activity with a traditional way that men found healing and support



The Value of Expressive Approaches

- Bridge to culture
- Natural
- Reflective
- Cathartic
- Projective



The Power of Ritual

- Liminal
- Bridge to spirituality and culture
- Meaning to moment

A Multicultural Perspective Will Teach Us

- What is grief?
- What does loss mean?
- What can we learn?
 - Klass – Continuing Bonds
