Chapter 2: Culture

LEARNING GOALS:

Upon completion of Chapter 2, students should understand the following concepts:

- The definition of culture on both individual and societal levels
- The impact of culture on the individual, society, and the counseling relationship
- The psychological implications of various cultural frameworks in the context of cultural worldviews, immigration, acculturation, and language
- The impact of culture-specific illnesses on making diagnoses and implementing successful interventions

CHAPTER OVERVIEW:

A. Defining Culture: There are multiple ways in which culture has been defined, including definitions pertaining to manners, etiquette, and breadth of knowledge about arts and literature.
   a. Culture as Defined in Multicultural Counseling: a total way of life held in common by a group of people who share similarities in speech, behavior, ideology, livelihood, technology, values, and social customs.
   b. Biological Versus Cultural Behavior:
      - It may seem difficult to distinguish culture-based behavior from biologically based behavior.
      - Cultural behavior is made up of rules of conduct, which were not invented and whose function is generally not understood by the people who obey them.
   c. Levels of Culture
      1. Species culture: the level that all human beings share
      2. Societal culture: based on an interacting collective people who see themselves as a social unit
      3. Familial culture: the impact of the family of origin, due to the fact that every family raises children in a slightly different manner
      4. Associational cultures: organizations that are not kinship based, but are enduring associations that have cultural aspects that impose expectations and make demands for consent and performance on their members (e.g. churches or Boy Scouts)
      5. Individual cultures: the characteristic assemblage of habits and one’s own unique integration of values, beliefs, expectations, and life experiences, as well as biological limits.
   d. Everyday Impact of Culture:
      - Culture is an all-encompassing concept that affects every area of every person’s life.
      - We have to be aware of the core components of culture and how they differ from person to person, group to group, and society to society.
B. Cultural Worldview: a common system of beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and values
   a. The acceptance of counseling and its credibility to members of a culture is directly related to the cultural beliefs that those members hold and the degree to which the counselor can provide services that are sensitive to and congruent with those beliefs.

C. Cultural Identity: association with our culture of origin and all of the meanings, perceptions, and expectations associated with every dimension of a person’s life within that culture.
   a. Enculturation and Acculturation: enculturation is the process by which a person is socialized into his or her primary culture, whereas acculturation occurs as a person responds to the influence of the dominant second culture.
      • Levels of Acculturation:
        1. Superficial- consists of learning the facts and history of the dominant culture and forgetting facts about one’s culture of origin
        2. Intermediate- changes take place in the more central behaviors in a person’s life such as language preferences and use
        3. Significance- changes that take place in the individual’s beliefs, values, and norms that describe the person’s worldview and interaction patterns
      • Modes of Acculturation:
        1. Assimilation- denotes a shift toward the dominant culture together with a rejection of one’s culture of origin, with a goal of complete absorption and acceptance by the dominant culture
        2. Separation- describes those who retain their cultural values and identity while rejecting those of the dominant culture
        3. Marginalization- involves a rejection of both the culture of origin and the dominant culture
        4. Integration- also known as biculturalism; involves a flexible balancing of some dominant-culture attitudes and practices with retention of culture-of-origin practices and identity

b. Immigration:
   • Immigration is the influx of people into the nation, whereas emigration refers to the departure of a nation’s people.
   • Sojourners, refugees, and immigrants experience unique stresses, and counselors should be aware of the additional impact of their experiences in multicultural counseling.

c. Language:
   • Culture is the medium through which language emerges in its particular shape and form.
   • Talk therapy relies on the assumptions that both counselor and client share not only a common language within which they can communicate but also a common understanding of the constructs within that language.
D. The Role of Culture in a Multicultural Society:
   a. The meaning of a belief or behavior can be understood only relative to its own cultural context.
   b. Although one must acknowledge that a behavior has function and meaning in the culture of origin, it must be assessed to see if it is appropriate and functional in the new culture.

E. Culture and Effective Counseling
   a. Culture-Bound Syndromes:
      - The Western model has dominance in the two major texts of psychological disorders, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-TR) and *The International Classification of Disorders* (ICD-10).
      - Illnesses that take place outside European and European American culture, are placed in the category of “culture-bound syndromes” in the DSM-IV-TR appendix and “culture-specific disorders” in the annex of the ICD-10.
      - There is a need to assess what is considered pathological behavior versus what is considered normal in the environment, decoding what kinds of behavioral labels and terminology are used in the culture to describe behavior.
   b. Culturally Based Treatment:
      - Counselors may consider pairing traditional counseling practices with culturally relevant practices such as herbal remedies or acupuncture that the client may find helpful.

F. Tools for Culturally Competent Counseling:
   a. Interventions should be based on a solid understanding of the client’s view of the world and his or her subsequent needs in the therapeutic context.

**KEY TERMS:**

1. **Acculturation**: The process by which a person responds to the influence of the dominant culture or a second culture.

2. **Assimilation** A shift toward the dominant culture together with a rejection of one’s culture of origin, with a goal of complete absorption and acceptance by the dominant culture.

3. **Bicultural competence** An individual’s ability to effectively utilize “dual modes of social behavior that are appropriately employed in different situations” (LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983, p. 592).

4. **Biculturalism** A flexible balancing of some dominant-culture attitudes and practices with retention of culture-of-origin practices and identity.
5. **Cultural identity**: The embodiment of the cultural norms, beliefs, values, and worldview and one’s sense of affiliation and belonging to a group identity.

6. **Cultural worldview**: The commonly shared system of beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and values in a culture.

7. **Culture**: A total way of life held in common by a group of people who share similarities in speech, behavior, ideology, livelihood, technology, values, and social customs.

8. **Culture-bound syndrome**: A combination of psychiatric and somatic symptoms that are considered to be a recognizable disorder only within a specific society or culture.

9. **Enculturation**: The process by which a person is socialized into his or her primary culture, receiving primary cultural knowledge, awareness, and values.

10. **Ethnicity**: A common sociocultural heritage that includes similarities of religion, history, and common ancestry.

11. **Immigrant**: A person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another.

12. **Marginalization**: A rejection of both the culture of origin and the dominant culture; such individuals have difficulty with social functioning and acceptance, and may lack a sense of cultural identity and self-efficacy.

13. **Race**: A construct that classifies persons by shared genetic history and/or physical characteristics such as skin color.

14. **Refugee**: One who comes to a new country unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country due to war, famine, political instability, or persecution due to race, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

15. **Separation**: A mode that describes those who retain their cultural values and identity while rejecting those of the dominant culture.

16. **Sojourner**: A temporary resident who holds on to one’s culture of origin and may make only surface adaptations to the host culture.

**PRACTICE TEST QUESTIONS:**

1. It is possible to share the same racial grouping with a person, but have different cultural beliefs and values and belong to a different ethnic group, because __________ is a construct that classifies persons by shared genetic history and/or physical characteristics such as skin color, whereas __________ is a common sociocultural heritage that includes similarities of religion, history, and common ancestry.
   
   a. culture; ethnicity
b. race; ethnicity

c. ethnicity; race

d. race; culture

2. __________ is defined as a total way of life held in common by a group of people who share similarities in speech, behavior, ideology, livelihood, technology, values, and social customs.

a. ethnicity

b. race

c. culture

d. society

3. All of the following are examples of levels of culture except:

a. Species culture

b. Societal culture

c. Associational culture

d. Relational culture

4. _______ culture is the level that all human beings share, such as learning to speak; whereas, _______ culture includes one’s own unique assemblage of habits, values, beliefs, expectations, and life experiences.

a. species; individual

b. societal; individual

c. associational; familial

d. familial; species

5. _______ binds together people in the same culture, based on a common system of beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes.

a. cultural worldview

b. multiculturalism

c. family of origin

d. societal expectations

6. A client’s cultural worldview may affect the way he or she:

a. perceives the counseling relationship

b. seeks/accepts help

c. views health and illness

d. makes meaning of the presenting problem

e. all of the above

7. A person develops a __________ based on the meanings, perceptions, and expectations he or she associates with each dimension of his or her life within a culture.

a. individuality

b. cultural identity

c. cultural worldview

d. cultural perspective
8. ________ denotes the process by which a person is socialized into his or her primary culture, whereas ________ occurs as a person responds to the influence of the dominant second culture.
   a. acculturation; enculturation
   b. cultural identity; cultural worldview
   c. enculturation; acculturation
   d. cultural acceptance; cultural rejection

9. A person who is immersed in learning about the dominant culture, and in turn forgets about his or her own culture is in the __________ level of acculturation changes.
   a. significance
   b. superficial
   c. intermediate
   d. individual

10. A person making changes at the __________ level of acculturation begins making changes involving his or her individual beliefs, values, and norms that reflect his or her worldview and interaction patterns.
    a. significance
    b. superficial
    c. intermediate
    d. individual

ANSWERS:
1) b 2) c 3) d 4) a 5) a 6) e 7) b 8) c 9) b 10) a

Short Questions:
1. Give an example of a culture-bound syndrome with a description of the behaviors and the culture of origin.
2. Differentiate between species culture and societal culture through the use of an example.
3. Describe the acculturation process that an international student from Taiwan might go through with examples.
4. If a person was to identify themselves as Jamaican rather than American even if they were a citizen of the United States, what might this say about his mode of acculturation?
5. Define the concept of sociolinguistics.

PRACTICE ESSAY QUESTIONS:
1. How might the client’s and/or counselor’s worldviews affect the counseling relationship?
2. Discuss ways in which a client’s level of cultural identity development might present itself in counseling. How might a client with a strong cultural identity compare to a client with a less developed cultural identity?
3. Sojourners, refugees, and immigrants experience unique stresses. Discuss the differences between each and how the unique experiences might be addressed in counseling.

4. Discuss the difficulties surrounding diagnosing a client from a culture other than European or European American. How might these difficulties be addressed therapeutically?

5. Discuss the acronym ETHNIC and apply the framework to counseling a hypothetical client who is from a culture different than your own.
Instructional Strategies and Exercises

Frequently, dominant group students and even students who are not dominant group but have never been outside the United States, often ascribe culture to those other than themselves. The first step in understanding culture as a dynamic and core concept is therefore identifying cultural assumptions, beliefs, values, and ideas within oneself. Towards this view there are a number of simulations and activities that help students to “journey” cross culturally. These include *Bafa Bafa* (available from [http://www.simulationtrainingsystems.com](http://www.simulationtrainingsystems.com)) and Barnga (available from the Intercultural Press at [http://www.nicholasbrealey.com/boston/barnga.html](http://www.nicholasbrealey.com/boston/barnga.html)).


**Purpose:**
This activity is designed to engage students in a process of defining "culture" and examining its complexity. Often, especially in a class about multiculturalism or diversity, "culture" becomes synonymous with "race" or "ethnicity." This activity reveals the limitations of such a conceptualization and challenges the assumptions that are often made by educators about what students identify as the important strands of the "cultural" in "multicultural."

**Preparation:**
Preparation for this activity is very simple. You need only a chalkboard or large sheet of paper. At top, center, write "MULTICULTURAL." Make sure your students or workshop participants are positioned such that they can all see the chalkboard or paper.

**Instructions:**
1. **Defining "multicultural."** Start by underlining the prefix "multi" and asking your students what this prefix means. Responses will include "many," "varied or various," "different," etc. Affirm all answers, then sum them up. This portion should only take a couple minutes. Next, move on to "-cultural." What does this term mean? Encourage students to define "cultural" both in terms of what they believe a dictionary-type definition to be and what it means to them individually.
2. **Tell the students you would like them to explore the understanding of "cultural" more deeply.** Ask them to suggest all dimensions of culture they can think of, encouraging them to reflect on their own culture and the dimensions of that culture with which they identify. There are several effective ways of accomplishing this task. You can either have students call out these aspects of culture when they think of them. You might also decide to simply go around the room, person by person, asking for suggestions. There are literally endless dimensions to culture, and this will be reflected in the answers. It is likely that an influx of answers will come right away, then the rate of response will slow down considerably. This often happens after some of the more surface-level cultural aspects are suggested: music, food, etc. Prod the students to think a little more deeply about how they define their culture. Allow for some short silences, or suggest some deeper dimensions, including faith, religion, values, language, family structure, and others. It will be important to get as many suggestions for this list as possible. Be sure to note that this part of the activity could go on indefinitely, highlighting the complexity of
"culture." Also, point out how intertwined some of the dimensions are, illustrating how simplistic it is to make a judgment about somebody based on one cultural dimension of the person. This step should take 10-15 minutes.

3. What's not there? Often several interesting cultural dimensions are not mentioned by participants. Ironically, these are the very dimensions that are most often associated with multicultural issues: race, gender, sexual orientation, social class. Do NOT suggest these additions to the list, because if nobody suggests them, it leads to a wonderful conversation. If your class does not suggest one or more of these items, point this out and ask why the participants believe they didn't think of these dimensions. This will be an interesting introduction to the following steps, as you will see. It's often the case that when participants are suggesting items for the list from their own experience, and thus through how they define themselves, race, gender, etc., don't come directly to their minds. But, if they're suggesting items for the list based on how OTHERS define them, or how they define OTHERS, these items immediately come to mind.

4. Categorizing list items. The next step is to divide the items into categories, which will make the final step of the exercise much easier. Indicate this intention to the group, and mention that you will be using Nitza Hidalgo's "three levels of culture."


- The Concrete: This is the most visible and tangible level of culture, and includes the most surface-level dimensions such as clothes, music, food, games, etc. These aspects of culture are often those which provide the focus for multicultural "festivals" or "celebrations."

- The Behavioral: This level of culture clarifies how we define our social roles, the language we speak, and our approaches to nonverbal communication. The Behavioral level REFLECTS our values. Aspects to be listed in this category include language, gender roles, family structure, political affiliation, and other items that situation us organizationally in society.

- The Symbolic: This level of culture includes our values and beliefs. It can be abstract, but it is most often the key to how individuals define themselves. It includes values systems, customs, spirituality, religion, worldview, beliefs, mores, etc.

Write short definitions for these levels on the board or sheet of paper you used to record the dimensions of culture. Review each of the categories for a couple of minutes. Give the participants an opportunity to consider further how they define themselves within these categories. Ask them to look over the categories and the items on the board for a few seconds. As a group, categorize all items into these categories. There may be some disagreement about where a certain item falls, so allow the same item to be listed under two categories.

5. Consistency in Conceptualization. After you have categorized the links, the next step is to facilitate a discussion about relatedness, importance, and the consistency of how individuals define themselves and others. Starting with "the Concrete," proceed down the list of Hidalgo's categories, asking participants to raise their hands if they consider the items listed under that category to be the most important dimensions in how they define their own culture. Count the responses to each, and list them next to the category name on
the board or paper. Be very clear that they are indicating what they consider important items for defining themselves, not the ways in which other people define them. Sometimes, one or two students will choose "the Concrete" or "the Behavioral," but in virtually every case, a vast majority of the participants will choose "the Symbolic." As you discuss each category, ask those who chose it to describe why they did so, and encourage those who did not choose it to explain why. Because most people will choose "the Symbolic," be sure to challenge them on why that is more important than the other levels.

After encouraging the participants to convince you that "the Symbolic" is the most important category, refer them back to the lists. Several questions will lead to interesting conversation:

- When you meet somebody, which of those items (under any of the categories) do you use to understand them culturally?
- Is your attempt to understand others culturally consistent with how you want to be viewed and understood?
- What forces in our society might contribute to our simplification of the culture of others, even though we don't want to be defined simplistically ourselves?

6. Wrapping up. To wrap up this exercise, you can lead to a discussion on how the participants might try to make the consistency of their conceptualizations more...consistent. Point out that this exercise is not meant to indict anyone, but instead to highlight how forces ranging from the media to our own education can sometimes move us backwards when we think we are experiencing progress in self and social development. The conversations that happen as a result of this activity can last 10 minutes or over an hour, depending on what questions you ask and what direction you take.

II.
A provocative additional reading that students can complete and then discuss includes: Pedersen, P. (1987). Ten frequent assumptions of cultural bias in counseling. Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 15(1), 16-24. This article identifies 10 of the most frequently encountered examples of cultural bias that consistently emerge in the literature about multicultural counseling and development. Assumptions are described in the areas of normal behavior, individualism, the limits of academic disciplines, dependence on abstract words, independence, client support systems, linear thinking, change, history, and the danger of cultural encapsulation.

III.
Cover the cultural theories of Trompenaars and Hofstede with particular reference to the dimensions that have implications for the counseling relationship:

Hofstede’s (1991) dimensions include:
- Power Distance Index
- Individualism and Collectivism
- Masculinity and Femininity
- Uncertainty Avoidance
- Long-term Orientation

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2005)
• Universalism vs Particularism
• Individualism vs Communitarianism
• Achievement vs Ascription
• Neutral vs Affective
• Specific vs Diffuse
• Human – nature relationship
  o External and internal control
  o Past, present and future orientation

IV.
Bring in a panel of international students to describe their everyday activities in their cultures of origin to highlight for students the cultural construction around what they consider normal.

V.
Have students complete a cultural interview with a person who is culturally different from themselves. Caution: minority group students should not interview majority group members as there is too much familiarity. The instructions for such an interview are set out below:

Inquiring About Culture – How to conduct the cultural interview

1. In setting up interviews, prepare yourself beforehand (you may wish to audiotape, so as to be able to listen well) with some reading, overviews of the ethnic group, issues, etc.
2. Have questions to get started, and to keep a sense of the issues you want to know, but also be flexible about where the person will lead you. Do NOT use a questionnaire—this is a conversation, not a survey.
3. Use the counseling skills you have learned to create safety, trust, respect, and to listen accurately.
4. Have the courage to ask hard questions, but also be respectful about your interviewee’s level of comfort.
5. Pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings, and immediately after the interview, make informal notes to capture your experience.
6. Since it is not useful to ask about culture directly, especially if we are interested in the symbolic level rather than the concrete, the following questions provide some guidelines and hints to get started. Pick and choose from them so as not to overwhelm the interview.

How an individual reflects on culturally appropriate and meaningful expressions of personality

• What are enjoyable activities you find rewarding?
• What types of experiences are painful?
• What kinds of things get you angry and how do you express it?

How an individual meets needs for survival and beyond

• What is a normal day like for you?
• What type of normal day do you strive for?
• What do you need to feel safe? What types of things make you feel safe?
• What do you need to feel you are living happily?
How is power distributed and what is the cohesiveness of the family?

Draw me a psychological map in which you are the center: who are the people closest and farthest from you?

On a ladder of 100 rungs, put the most important people in your life, in order on the rungs.

How does an individual make sense of their existence and their place in the world.

Who are the people closest and farthest from you?

On a ladder of 100 rungs, put the most important people in your life, in order on the rungs.

What makes life meaningful for you?

What are your feelings about death?

What responsibilities do you have as a human being?

VI.

VII.
Have students complete the Cultural Compass Inventory that helps them determine their take on four dimensions of Time (past, present, or future); Activity (doing, being, becoming); Relationships (ranked, mutual, individual); and Nature (controlling, harmonious and yielding). Follow this with a small group discussion where students can share their results with each other and discuss their findings. This is available from HumaNext at [http://www.communicationideas.com/opinion-surveys.html](http://www.communicationideas.com/opinion-surveys.html)