



Autobiographical Sketch

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We all have culture in our lives. Although we are born into cultures we are not born with a culture. Culture is dynamic, it is something we learn and can adapt to changing circumstances. Culture can be used to describe our identity as well as our way of life and the values, beliefs, and attitudes we have.

I am a 22 year old female who appreciates the art of shopping, pretty pink nail polish and everything girly; all while being smart, strong and independent. I believe that as a female in today's world we are redefining what it means to be a woman. I will always embrace the fact that I am able to blend feeling beautiful and feeling accomplished at the same time. I have developed confidence in myself, and my gender, from the positive female role models around me. My first female role model growing up would have to be my mother. Representing herself as an intelligent, compassionate, and positive woman, my mom has always influenced me to not set limits on my goals. This has been a vital influence on my own development growing up. My mother was the one who implemented a caring mindset to me at a young age. This makes great sense looking at my mom's career in the medical field, caring for individuals in renal failure, and my own career goals of working in the mental health field.

Growing up in a Polish American household, culture is of great importance. Religion is deeply intertwined with the Polish culture. I am currently a practicing Roman Catholic. Catholicism is one of the most widely practiced religions in the Polish society. I as well as my family members have always attended Catholic schools. I'm grateful to have gone through Catholic school. Apart from the educational aspects, I appreciated the environment in which my spiritual development could be nurtured. As a family we knew that Sunday was always a special ritualized day, filled with going mass and sitting down together for

→ hmmm... is shopping reflective of gender? SES?

ethnicity?

to

supper. As I have grown older and move^d out of my parents' house, the religious aspects of my life ^{have} has not remained as prominent. However I do contribute my religion to helping me formulate^s who I am today. Being exposed to the Catholic faith throughout my childhood has ingrained a value system that will forever be a part of my life. ^{I wonder which elements are most salient to you?}

Besides religious beliefs, growing up in a family which was deeply intertwined with the Polish Culture has provided me with certain personality traits. If you know any Polish family with roots to the "old country" you will also know the overwhelming important that manners [✓] play. Besides old fashioned courtesy, as a Polish American I hold a high standard of etiquette. [✓] This standard was placed on me growing up and I hope to encourage it with my own family down the road. Some aspects of etiquette that I strongly identify with are. Timing, being on time is very important, arriving late is considered unacceptable. Since family and friends are held at such high standards it was also very common for my family to hosts certain events. From this I have establish a very welcoming personality, going out of my way to make some feel comfortable is something I don't even have to think twice about doing. I hope to portray these personal qualities to my clients always making them feel comfortable, listened to, and welcomed. [✓]

One of the biggest rituals of my culture would have to be weddings. [✓] This is especially important to my parents, being that their first born (me) is a female. In a traditional Polish wedding the bride's parent ^s play a large role. Beginning with a pre-wedding blessing, this is when the wedding parties will gather at the home of the bride to send the couple off the church with a blessing and symbolic farewell. Typically this is done right before the ceremony, for me I will have it done the night before. I love my culture, but I also enjoy the American tradition. Specifically the one on not see your soon ^{of to? ing} to be spouse

until you walk down the aisle. My parents also appreciate different cultural traditions and will not pressure me to marry within the culture or to stick solely to our traditions. Older members in my family such as my grandparents would disagree with their decision since they lay such a large important on traditions. Other major marriage traditions specific to my family's background are instead of rice being thrown at the newly married couple, loose change is thrown at them. Even though this sounds somewhat painful, it is believed to bestow luck upon the couple. One other tradition that I hope to continue happens when most wedding receptions are nearing the end. However midnight marks a special moment for the bride on the day of her wedding. This ceremony is called "oczepiny" which mean removal of the bridal veil. It's a symbolic moment as the female moves from her single youth, toward her married future with the midnight hour signifying the time of transition.

A little over a year ago I had begun working as a nanny for a family who was very much different from me pertaining to culture. The Morgan family is Egyptian, the father is 100% Egyptian and the mother is Italian and German. However for them to become married the mother had to convert from her religion and become Coptic Christian. Their home, in which I reside in while caring for their two year old and newborn, is your typical American house. However, I have had the fantastic opportunity to be enmeshed into their culture. Partaking in cultural events such as traveling to Egypt, partaking in Orthodox Christmas, and even learning some words and phrases in Arabic. I have been very fortunate to be welcomed and accepted as an additional member of this family. I can thank them for enhancing my multicultural competencies as a future counselor. By experiencing another culture separate from the one I was brought up in, has opened my eyes to how interesting and enriching it is to learn about cultural differences.

My cultural background is Polish but my racial background ^{is} white. I grew up in northern Connecticut, in a small, financially established, predominantly white area. It only occurred to me recently that I did not have racially diverse schools, dance classes, or friends growing up. There were occasions where specs of diversity ^{word choice?} could be spotted. I do remember as a child having an elementary school friend who was half black and that there was a boy down the street who was of Jewish faith, but the lack of diversity was never brought to my attention. It was just normal. ^{How do you feel about this?}

One memory I have surrounding the topic of racial and economic diversity is from when I was younger (age 6-10), I always accompanied my mom to this area where they had a "little Poland." There were a few good food markets there that my mom would visit once a month. This area was poverty stricken, and was also associated with a higher level of crime. Growing up I remember labeling this area as a "bad" area and associating some feelings of fear towards the town. As an adult I still feel that it is easy to make these kinds of bias assumptions towards specific areas. This past year I relocated to New Jersey and I can remember my employers giving me the layout of what areas are dangerous or "bad areas". Locations such as Newark, Irvington, and Trenton are ones that I remember. Even though I have yet to visit any of these locations I already have a pre conceived fear towards them. Most of time when we are talking about where we live or where we are from, a notion about our geographical location gets pulled into how we may be viewed by others. Such as, if you are from Mendham or Harding you must be more financially stable than individuals who are living in Camden or Paterson. ^{these} This pre conceived biases that we form can be troublesome when it comes to counseling. I think it is important to remember that all areas have their good parts and bad parts. [✓] Just because one specific area is more likely to be

associated with gang violence doesn't mean that all individuals living there have dealt with that situation.

Associations tied between low SES, crime, and gang violence. Where do we learn this from?

Becoming educated and aware of different situations is so important in counseling. Prior to this assignment I was not in tuned to how much our health and wellness status is a part of our identity. Luckily I have live a healthy life thus far, nothing majorly challenging has occurred. I do however have an auto immune disease which has effect small aspects of my life. This is when the body's immune system attacks healthy cells. In my case the cells that are affected the most are located in my thyroid. This causes my thyroid to be overwhelmed with white blood cells and therefore cannot make enough thyroid hormone. This is somewhat like hypothyroidism except for the added immune system dysfunction.

The most important thing is that this disorder is treatable. Right now there are medications to correct the thyroid imbalance, but not to stop the cells which are attacking the gland. This is why most individual will take the approach of removing the thyroid gland altogether. Thinking of having my thyroid completely taken out is a scary thought. For right now I am not at that stage where surgery needs to be considered. Currently, the way this autoimmune disease affects me on a daily basis is in what I can and cannot eat. I have to maintain a gluten free diet. Which means I must refrain from any foods contains wheat, rye, spelt, and barley. This is because the molecular structure of gluten and its protein called gliadin are a trigger for autoimmune attacks.

As much as I would love to dig in to some yummy bake goods, I know that sacrifices must be made to keep our bodies healthy. This can even be viewed as a form of self-care. As counselors, if we neglect our mental, physical and spiritual self-care we will not be able to effectively help our clients. I identify as a very independent person, usually when problems

arise I assume that I can handle it on my own. Dealing with the issues connected to my thyroid helped me in learning how to become attuned to my body and seek out services when needed. There is a balance that counselors need to find in recognizing warning signs of empathy fatigue and not feeling ashamed of them. Wellness as a whole is hugely important. As counselors we are one of the primary instruments of our own working practice. Just like the flight attendant instructs us on an airplane, in the event that the oxygen masks are needed: put your own mask on first before trying to help someone else. Helping yourself first and creating your own wellness is a principle that I identify with and directly apply it to counseling.

It's easy to see how culture and society put forth remarkable influences on each of our lives, structuring our values, forming our views and patterning our responses. While each of us has our own individual cultural identity, to truly be successful in multicultural counseling we must learn to be fluid. By being fluid I mean that we are open to change and variation, accepting that every individual that you meet will have a different cultural identity which is an aspect of their personality. During this self-analysis process I was able to conceptualize where the basis of my cultural identity is not just the color of my skin but a psychocultural pattern of identity. I can see where certain aspects of my culture have been embodied in my personality; this has prepared to work as a promoter or facilitator between cultures unlike my own.

96/100 or 4.8%