

Cultural Self Project

Kathryn M. Carlson

Department of Graduate Studies, The University of Western States

COUN 6150: Multicultural Counseling & Advocacy

Dr. Patience Lee

February 22, 2025

Cultural Self Project

Introduction

The ADDRESSING model examines a person across nine cultural factors and aims to raise awareness of bias and to consider how each factor influences clients (Hays, 2024). The nine factors (age, disability, religion, ethnicity, social status, sexual orientation, indigenous heritage, national origin, and gender) help counselors understand themselves and others through a more comprehensive lens of cultural identity. They can see how their friends, partners, and intimate relationships mirror their own identity. This model helps counselors better understand a person of color's experiences with racism, ethnocentrism, and other forms of oppression.

Examining my cultural identity with this model is crucial for my career and development. As a mixed-race child, I grew up in a home where one parent ignored her cultural background (Hispanic), and the other felt mildly ashamed of his (Japanese and Hawaiian) when he was away from his family. It was confusing, and I had a hard time learning about my ethnicity. Consequently, my interactions with people of similar ethnicity can sometimes be awkward. Taking the time to revisit each factor will help me identify biases, strengths, and areas for growth.

Age

As a 41-year-old millennial, I have noticed that people will treat me differently depending on whether they are older or younger than me. When I was in college, my father criticized me for asking help for groceries. Although I had worked hard to qualify for scholarships and worked a part time job, I was unable to afford food without assistance. My father refused to help me and his reasoning was due to his experience when he was my age. He

did not recognize how I could struggle to afford the same basic needs while attending college full-time.

Socially, I must consider my appearance. People treat me differently because I look younger than my age. This was the case for each of my parents as well. They both look young. Consequently, many people treat me younger. While I was growing up, I disliked being treated like this. I felt that people would talk down to me or dismiss my opinions. As an adult, this quality has become a privilege because people treat me better than others who are my same age.

Disability

I have not been diagnosed with any disabilities (physical or intellectual). In my family of origin, many of my family members have been diagnosed with ADHD, Autism, and other mental health disorders. Personally, I do not consider these as disorders, but I do believe that they impact the way that a person interprets the world around them. My family members with ADHD react to situations in different ways than I do. My brother has ADHD and struggles with school, work, and relationships. This has changed the way that he looks at his family, community, and country. He is often hyperaware and suspicious of new people and experiences.

Because I live an able-bodied neurotypical life, I feel comfortable with interactions within my community. I recognize that I can navigate through the world without considering factors such as transportation, communication, and accessibility.

Religion

I am a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Colloquially, this church is called the Mormon or LDS church. In many ways, this has introduced privilege and marginalization into my life. While going to school in Utah, church activity and membership was dominant in these communities. People showed more comfort around me when they saw me as

part of their religious community. On the other hand, I have been judged for being a part of this church because of its history of discrimination towards ethnic minorities and the LGBTQ+ community. I grew up in California during a time when they were voting to define marriage as being between a man and a woman. Friends who disagreed with the proposition would confront me with questions and accusations because they knew which church I attended. Personally, I still struggle with these issues. I have a strong love for my LGBTQ+ friends and deeply identify with my ethnic minority background. So being a part of this community can be difficult for me. I also find deep connection and meaning in practicing my religion. This moral foundation has helped me treat others with respect, kindness, and care.

Ethnicity/Race

I have a diverse ethnic background that has shaped my cultural identity. My father is mostly Native Hawaiian and part Japanese. My mother is Mexican and white. My parents separated when I was a young child. My mother was very critical and biased against my father and his family. She expressed many racist views and discouraged me from participating in Hawaiian activities. I adjusted to this situation by compartmentalizing my cultural identity around my mother. When I was with my father, I could be Hawaiian. When I was with my mother, I had to act white. My cultural identity developed amid confusion, and I leaned toward acting “white” to appease my mother. This identity helped me assimilate into much of Western American culture, but I struggled to connect with many parts of the Native Hawaiian community, including my relatives. As an adult, I have tried to reconnect and rediscover this part of my cultural identity.

Social Status

Growing up, my family lacked reliable access to healthcare, money, and sometimes resources for life. Neither of my parents had completed college, so they did not have jobs that would provide for quality healthcare. When I was in second grade, I broke my arm at school, and I remember my parents being so angry because it would cause so much trouble for our health insurance. Although this situation sounds like a disadvantage, the culture of this demographic taught me so much.

As adults, my husband and I have reliable access to resources to meet our needs and wants. I recognize that this is a privileged place because many people have not had the same opportunities we have. One example of this is when my husband was diagnosed with cancer. My father-in-law, a physician in Georgia, called his contacts to find us the best neurosurgeon and oncologist within driving distance. We recognized that my husband's incredible treatment and recovery were largely due to our ability to be connected with these two doctors.

Sexual Orientation

I am a heterosexual cisgender woman. I feel that this is a significant area of privilege for me. Most representations of love, weddings, and relationships showcase people with similar sexual orientations. I have never had to wonder about my identity in this way. I have never needed to hide this part of myself from my family, friends, and colleagues. I have not had to modify my behavior to feel safe, authentic, or accepted.

Indigenous Heritage

As a Native Hawaiian, I recognize that this is an Indigenous heritage factor for me. But being Hawaiian can bring much bitterness and pain. As tourism grew in Hawai'i, Hawaiian locals were oversexualized and our traditions mocked. The colonization and overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom is especially difficult because most Americans do not understand. This has

sparked anger towards tourists in Hawai'i. I wish there were more respect for our culture. Many members of my Hawaiian family have chosen to assimilate into American culture. They feel that this route provides a better promise of privilege.

National Origin

I was born and raised in the United States. Until recently, I saw this as a major advantage and privilege. We have access to resources like healthcare and education, and we enjoy overall happiness. I love celebrations that spark patriotism, liberty, and democracy. But sometimes our patriotism overflows into fanaticism when we support parties over principles. I believe this nation is interesting and wonderful because of its diverse backgrounds, accents, and values. Recently, Bad Bunny performed at the Super Bowl Halftime Show. Some football fans were upset that a singer would perform only in Spanish and that it would not represent our country well. But I remember feeling that Bad Bunny represented many parts of the United States. To me, this country is enhanced by diversity and inclusion.

Gender

As a woman in the United States, I have mixed experiences and feelings regarding my gender. I feel that my gender creates bias against me. When I am coaching at senior-level swim meets, I see fewer female coaches in these spaces. The male coaches can be somewhat misogynistic. There have been several times when male coaches have spoken over me or ignored me when I ask them direct questions. I know that many people would think I am more “professional” if I had been a man. So, I have recognized that I must work harder to get *some* recognition.

Reflection

This exercise was very interesting for me. I have looked at many of these factors individually. But having them in one space helps me feel understood and can also highlight holes in my cultural competency. I mentioned how I needed to “act white” around my mother. I wonder if this can help me be curious about the way that people change their behavior to feel accepted for their gender, race, or sexual orientation.

References

- Hays, P. A. (2024). Four Steps Toward Intersectionality in Psychotherapy Using the ADDRESSING Framework. *Professional Psychology: Research & Practice*, 55(5), 454–462. <https://doi-org.uws.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/pro0000577>