From Cultural Competence to Third Order Change

Guidelines for Socioculturally Attuned Practice

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Problems with Cultural Competence

• Classify, categorize, and define “others”
• Therapist to bridge gap between self and “other”
• Inequities framed as differences without attending to sociopolitical contexts
• Individualistic, static
Call for more equitable, relational, fluid, and process-oriented ways to address culture and diversity
Objectives

1. Identify the elements of a relational, process-oriented approach to cultural competence that integrates cultural sensitivity with attention to societal processes of power, privilege, and equity.

2. Consider third-order change as transtheoretical lens through which to connect sociocultural intersections with clinical practice.

3. Be introduced to six clinical guidelines that promote socioculturally attuned practice.
Roots of Family Therapy

• Paradigm shift - larger context & systemic change

• Feminist critique

• Second-order thinking – inclusion and impact of therapist in system

• Critical multicultural critique
Social Constructionism

• Challenged concept of “Difference”

• Differences arise in the act of defining

• Culture is fluid and enacted
Cultural competence
Awareness of clinical power
Sociocultural attunement
Elements of Socioculturally Attuned Practice

1. Relational Focus
2. Third Order Thinking
3. Responsibility Toward Equity
4. Nuanced Attention to Context
Element 1: Relational Focus

• Seeking to know and be “with” the experience of all clients.

• An on-going relationship

• Not an end
Element 2: Third order thinking

Back to the future
Bateson’s Levels of Learning (1972)

“Learning I is change in specificity of response by correction of errors of choice within a set of alternatives. 

Learning II is change in the process of Learning I, e.g., a corrective change in the set of alternatives from which choice is made, or it is a change in how the sequence of experience is punctuated.

Learning III is change in the process of Learning II, e.g., a corrective change in the system of sets of alternatives from which choice is made. (p. 298)”
Applying Third Order Thinking

• Takes a meta view of systems of systems to map relationships between society, families and ourselves

• Connect the dots between social forces and individual/relational problems

• Is cognizant of the impact of what we notice and how we organize information

• Provides direction for integrating societal context into therapeutic goals
3rd Order Change

- Systems of systems
- Change in assumptions – sets of alternatives
- Connect power dynamics at intimate relational levels to broader societal context
Becoming an Agent of Third Order Change

Societal Context

Analysis of Power

Family Therapy Models

Third Order Change
Element 3: Responsibility Toward Equity

• Diversity is about who our practice includes
• Equity is about how they are treated

Ken Hardy (2016)
Equitable Practice is Good Practice

Promoting socially just relationships is best practice.
Symptoms of Power Imbalances

Depression, anxiety, somatic symptoms, etc.
Invalidation of personal identity
Relationship distress
Loss of flexibility
Inability to address conflict
Struggle for power
Cost of Resistance/resistance labeled as pathology
Myth of Neutrality → Ethical Positioning
Intentionality

Epistemic injustice

Social meanings invalidate subordinate voices and experience \((Fricker 2007)\)
Accountability

Being responsible for our practices may privilege dominant cultural beliefs and practices.
Element 4: Nuanced Attention to Context

Avoid stereotyping
Attend to unique niche (*Falicov, 2014*)
Both knowing and not knowing
Tensions in Socioculturally Attuned Practice

Entering into multiple, often conflicting sociopolitical worlds
May not be “either/or”
Guidelines for Socioculturally Attuned Family Therapy- “ANVIET”

- **Attune**: Understand, resonate with, and respond to experience within societal contexts.
- **Name**: Identify what is unjust or has been overlooked - amplify silenced voices.
- **Value**: Acknowledge the worth of that which has been minimized or devalued.
- **Intervene**: Support relational equity - disrupt oppressive power dynamics.
- **Envision**: Provide space to imagine just relational alternatives.
- **Transform**: Collaborate to make what is imagined real - third order change.


ATTUNE

- *Notice* how beneath-the-surface sociocultural power dynamics can easily shape what gets identified as the clinical focus.

- *Apprehend* and emotionally resonate with how socio-contextual factors connect to clients’ experience.

- *Recognize and attend* to how power dynamics are part of clients’ experiences and are reflected in session.
• In the process of “naming” we select some experiences or ways of knowing and directly or implicitly link them to possible feelings and actions.

• Guide the conversation to name unfair or unjust circumstances and amplify voices whose experiences are likely to be silenced.
Socioculturally attuned therapists develop special radar for ferreting out and highlighting strengths that dominant cultural and power processes mask.

For Example:

➢ Strengths associated with females or with cultures that place less emphasis on individuality and competition

➢ Skills and mindsets needed to survive racism, homophobia, limited economic resources, disabilities, etc.

➢ Symptoms as resistance to power and domination
• Use facilitative role to recognize and raise awareness of the impact of societal power dynamics

• Actively intervene to disrupt oppressive power dynamics and support relational equity

• Promote shared responsibility and accountability

• Collaborate with clients to create ways to transform inequitable relationships
• Third order change requires room to envision just relational alternatives

• Introduce conversations regarding alternatives to dominant culture patterns

• Be transparent and engage as a participant in the clinical conversation
TRANSFORM

Make the imagined real

Bring clients back to their equitable goals and highlight what they are doing to enact their vision

Practice responsive persistence.

Help people build networks that support their ideals and devise strategies that resist dominant societal norms.

Encourage conscious responses to familial and societal injustices and the futures with which they seek to align.
Sociocultural Attunement enhances common factors
Future Directions

Examine sources of knowledge and discourses that influence our work

Expand systemic family therapy training, research, and practice in ways that actively support equitable relationships and just societal systems
Socioculturally Attuned Family Therapy
Guidelines for Equitable Theory and Practice

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