

IT IS ARGUED THAT AT THE HEART OF ALL  
RELATIONSHIPS THERE IS AN UNEQUAL POWER BASE.  
CRITICALLY EVALUATE THIS STATEMENT AND ITS  
RELEVANCE WITHIN THE COUNSELLING RELATIONSHIP.

ABLE TO DEFINE THE MAIN CULTURAL DIVISIONS AND  
INDICATE AWARENESS OF THE MAIN DIFFERENCES.

### RACE

As a counsellor, I will encounter people from many different races. I could unconsciously discriminate against someone of different race or go the other way and make more of an effort in a bid not to be a racist.

### RELIGION

Not understanding another's religion will lead to misunderstanding. Some religions place significance on when or where you are born, and this could affect the counselling relationship.

### CLASS

People are judged by their class, if I have an upper class client, I would expect them to be well educated. So will this client expect me to be a certain way and will it affect the relationship? Yes.

### DISABILITY

It is all too easy to treat those with disabilities differently as though their disability affects their mental state. I have found it hard not to treat those with disabilities better than those without, too much sympathy, even when it is not wanted.

### AGE

Old, infirm, smelly, slow or young, brash, loud, drugs, these things affect how the client sees me and how I view the client. Young client may see me as old and wise or old and useless and so this will affect the relationship accordingly.

### GENDER

Will a female counsellor find it easier talking to a man or woman? It should not matter but it does. Men place more significance on different events and words; women are softer?

### SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Do gays have different issues to straights? Would a straight male counsellor feel that every gay client fancied him? It would be hard for me not to assume what a gay client would be like prior to the first session.

### PROVIDE SUFFICIENT BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION TO

### INDICATE AN AWARENESS OF THEIR OWN CULTURAL

### HERITAGE AND HOW THAT MAY IMPACT ON THE

### RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPED WITH CLIENTS

Lago (2003: p28) writes that it has been estimated that, by the early 1960's, there were in excess of 160 different definitions of culture in the social science literature. With this in

mind I have tried to right, what I think was most relevant for my own 'culture'.

I come from a middle class background, both my parents are still married and I have one sister. I went to public school, and although I had a few Asian and black, friends there were not many ethnic minorities at my school at that time. I am white but have mixed race uncles, aunts and cousins. I am engaged and have one 6-year-old boy. I would say that I used to have a typical English culture, that being quite patriotic and xenophobic especially towards the French. In addition, I am not very religious and find those who believe very strongly in religion quite sad.

All these things could have an impact on the counselling relationship. If I had a very religious client, I think that I may struggle to keep my own views from interfering with the relationship. Small things, as well, make a difference to the relationship. I would shake hands with a client in greeting; however, many cultures will bow or kiss the cheeks.

### TO CONSIDER THE ABOVE IN INTERACTION WITH A SPECIFIC CLIENT.

I have never had a client that was culturally different from myself and so will have to extrapolate a scenario.

Eastern cultures and particularly the Chinese believe strongly in hierarchy and order and have a sense of self that is different from that of western cultures. McLeod writes that concepts such as self-actualisation or authenticity (being true to ones individual self) do not make a lot of sense in the context of a collectivist culture.

However, my own culture promotes doing things for oneself and quite often by oneself

and so is almost the complete opposite. It is important for me to realise that although I would be seeking to empower the client to be an individual I could be trying to push for something to which the client does not even aspire.

A client from a Chinese culture would be more inclined to do the best for their community or family than I would because they would see themselves as more an integral part of that community than I would. Therefore, as a counsellor I must be aware that any decisions made by a Chinese client would be more about their community than themselves

There is also the difference between the way that the Chinese revere their ancestors and ask their advice. I would not even think that my ancestors are watching over me let alone ready to help me deal with difficult issues. How would I deal with a client that told me that their ancestor had told them to seek out a western counsellor?

TO DISCUSS THE INHERENT POWER DIFFERENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF POWER AND DEMONSTRATE THE STEPS THAT MAY NEED TO BE TAKEN TO LIMIT THE INEQUALITY.

“However often we tend to conceal the fact that no other profession involves a greater inequality of power than the psychotherapists in which one of the two poles is always, by definition, psychologically weaker than the other. For reasons intrinsic and structural to the psychological field, when a person is overwhelmed by suffering or convinced that his/her rational dimension, which up to that moment had qualified them as a human being, has failed, asks someone stronger than them to save them, then he/she places that

person in a position of power and superiority. This could also be why we undertake this profession; it is the only one that allows us to deal always with weaker individuals, in partial identification with the omnipotent figure of saviour offering a hand to the suffering“. Carotenuto (1992: p51).

Therefore, no matter what we as counsellors profess about being equal with the client, it is likely that the client will place us in a position of power themselves. I think that this is not as serious in the humanistic approach because the counsellor is in a more approachable position. So how to address the power imbalance?

I believe that by putting Rogers's core conditions in place and being myself, rather than a counsellor the balance will be equal. Also admitting to the client when a mistake has been made will also improve the balance in the relationship.

I believe that making sure the client knows from the initial session that I am not there to supply solutions to their issues; only to help the client help themselves, will help equal the balance of power from the start. I also feel that the balance of power will equalise as the session's progress and the relationship builds. I think that as the sessions go on the client will become surer of themselves and less in awe of the counsellor.

Finally, I feel that by using the client's language the balance of power becomes equal. I think that many people feel intimidated by those who seem well educated and use "big words". Therefore, I think that it is most important to make sure that the client's vocabulary is considered. This also applies conversely a well-to-do client may feel intimidated by a counsellor who is constantly swearing.

It is also important to remember that as much as the counsellor wants there to be an equality of power the client may not be ready for, or want to be on an even footing with

the counsellor.

DISCUSSION OF SAFETY NEEDS, FOR SELF AND CLIENT AND OWN RESPONSIBILITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES.

If I do not feel safe with my client, I will not be able to function to the best of my abilities. Likewise, if a client does not feel safe in the environment then they will not feel comfortable disclosing their issue to me.

Issues such as fire escapes and the condition of the premises will be down to the organisation, as will the counsellor working alone and panic buttons.

I think that most of the safety measures taken by organisations are there to cover themselves in case of any mishaps and litigation. However, I feel that if the counsellor does not feel safe the relationship will not work and so most of the precautions taken by an organisation will benefit the counselling process even if they seem very constrictive.

WITH APPROPRIATE EVIDENCE DEFINE AND DISCUSS:

STEREOTYPES

The compact oxford English dictionary (1996: p1013) defines stereotypes as “a person or thing that conforms to unjustifiably mental picture, such an impression or attitude.”

Stereotypes are printed on us all from a young age, and it is only when I take time out to analyse my thoughts and feelings that I realise how much I stereotype. Stereotyping happens to me because sometimes it is easier to excuse some ones behaviour if they are expected to act in a certain way.

For example, all gay men are camp and very effeminate. Therefore, if I see a gay man being very camp I can say, “Well that’s typical behaviour for a gay man.”

If I expected to have a client from another culture, I would try to learn about it. However even this, which is done with good intentions, can lead to stereotyping. I may assume that the client adheres to their culture and expect them to behave in a certain way. In addition, I think that it is important to remember that most books that I read are from my own cultural perspective and so will likely be inaccurate.

Stereotyping may block unconditional positive regard because if I already have a preconceived idea about my client then I may never give them, or myself, the chance to explore their issues.

Lago (2003: p14) states, “the profound and often unconscious impact our own cultural heritage has upon our attitudes and perceptions towards others, especially those who are racially and culturally different to ourselves. One challenge that emerges from this, for counsellors, is that of their willingness and capacity to explore their cultural and racial origins in order to try to understand better their own cultural identity, beliefs and value systems. As part of this they also need to become more aware of their attitudes towards other groups and cultures, to become more aware of their stereotypes and their assumptions”.

My own cultural background and experiences will have formed all the stereotypes that I have today; I hope that I am aware enough of this to be able to address it.

## LANGUAGE ISSUES AND DIFFERENCES.

Lago (2003: p54) states that “ Being misunderstood begets anger, frustration even hatred. By contrast, to be understood evokes trust, gratitude, exploration, love and aspiration.

The use of language is absolutely central to the communication process and however much good intent there is, on both sides of a conversation, if misunderstandings persist then the potential for therapy is substantially diminished if not stopped altogether.”

Therefore as well as a means of communication language can form a boundary between two people, this is especially true in the therapeutic relationship. This does not only occur when the client and counsellor speak different first languages but also when they use the same language. Accents and usage of language vary throughout the U.K.; this can lead to misunderstandings between the counsellor and the client. In certain parts of the country and with certain ages, swearing is readily accepted and used everyday. However, in other places and with other ages swearing is frowned upon.

Language can also be a powerful weapon of oppression. If a client feels insecure, and the counsellor uses long and strange language, the client could feel intimidated and withdraw from the relationship.

Therefore, language can be both freeing and constraining. Enabling because it allows us to express our feelings and opinions and communicate with others. Constraining because we cannot communicate with those who do not speak our language, it only allows the use of certain words for certain feelings. For example, the Eskimo’s have many different words for snow and sleet whereas in the U.K. we have just those two. Therefore, if a counsellor has a client with a different first language it could be that the English equivalent does not really mean the same thing in their language.



## DIFFERING BELIEF SYSTEMS

Belief systems are made up from many different parts of a person's psyche and can range from belief in religion to the belief in self. A person's outlook of religion will alter the way that they view the world. For example, I do not believe in any god and so when things happen I say that is life. However, in certain religions whichever god is being worshipped can be blamed or praised for the occurrence.

In the counselling setting, the client's belief systems will affect the relationship. The client may believe for example that it is wrong to talk about certain issues and so if the issues are not talked about openly the relationship will falter, as congruence and honesty are a main component in the person centred approach.

The counselling relationship is there in many cases to change the client's beliefs about their own self-image. For example, a client may believe that they are useless or worthless; this negative self-image will, hopefully, be changed throughout the counselling process so that the client lives a more fulfilled life.

McLeod (2003: p484) states that there has been lively interest in the idea that all effective counsellors possess similar belief systems or ways of making sense of the world. The assumption is that counsellors are able to help people because they see the client's problems in a particular way.

It could be then that as counsellors not only do we have our own beliefs but also we have certain commonalities that make us good at what we do. It is important to remember that there are two people in the therapeutic relationship and that they are both as important as each other.

## FAMILY PATTERNS

All families no matter the size have patterns and positions. The family is affected not just by the size but the ages of its members and their genders. Adler looked more deeply into family patterns and found that those with different positions took on different roles and characteristics. Adler believed that a person's birth position and gender would influence their development and personality. For example, only children may be quite self-centred and unable to consider the needs of others unless reminded; middle children tend to feel squeezed out or sometimes held in, as they have neither the privileges of the eldest nor rights of a youngest.

In addition, there is the difference in how we encourage our children according to their gender. For example, boys are encouraged to get dirty and go exploring and play a bit rough and big boys don't cry, whereas girls are encouraged to play with dolls and play nicely and to be clean and tidy.

If a counsellor understands these issues, it may be easier for him to help the client. The relationship could be affected if the counsellor reminds the client of a member of their family that they did not get along with etc. this is also true of the counsellor.

By understanding these issues, the counsellor could have more insight into the client and how the client's self-concept was formed.

## FAMILY LIFE EXPERIENCES

The life experiences of the whole family will affect how a person develops and their outlook on life. For example if a client moved house as a child and found the experience unsettling and uncomfortable the client could later on develop problems dealing with loss

and change. If the move was pleasant and the client settled into their new house, it is more likely that they will cope with change in a better way.

All families have shared life experiences but each member of the family will remember different aspects of the event and be affected by it in different ways. For example a family may go on a holiday. The parents want to visit all the local sights and there is a lot of driving involved. The parents enjoy the driving because they like the countryside however, the kids cannot stand it because they are trapped in a car and prefer cities to the countryside. So even though all the family went to the same places and had the same experiences they all perceived the holiday in different ways.

These events influence in later life and will affect all the relationships we have.

Obviously, the relationship is one of the most important aspects in the P.C. approach to counselling.

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