Cultural Double Binds in Clinical Practices

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Objectives

1. **Present a framework (Cultural Double Bind, CDB)**
   - For conceptualizing and working with multicultural/diverse clients.

2. **Raise awareness**
   - The interactive, dynamic, and domain-specific nature of the “culturation” processes.

3. **Explore**
   - CDB’s clinical implications.
How Powerful is Culture?

A multiculturally competent clinician appreciates the power of culture.
Culture is Embedded in Everything…

- Language
- Body language
- Bathroom
- Hand gesture
- Color
- Arts
- Social norms
- Stories/Fairy Tales
- Logic
- Expectations
- Health practice
- Exercise

- Etiquette
- Commercial
- Music
- Utensil
- Food & drink
- Clothes
- Television show
- Holiday
- Architecture
- Medical practice
- Religion
- And much more…

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Cultural Identity

- The culture which a person identifies with and to which this person looks for *Standards of Behavior*.

- A strongly positive identification with a minority population (in-group) juxtaposed with a negative dissociation from the majority population (out-group). *(Hendry, Mayer, & Kloep, 2007).*
What Happens When a Person Identifies with Two or More Cultures?

1. At least three identities emerge.
3. Cultural double binds
1. Three Identities Emerge…

- **Structure of Cultural Identity,**
  - Based on a diverse sample. (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Rodriguez, & Wang, 2007)
  - Three dimensions were found:
    - American culture identity
    - Heritage-cultural identity, and
    - Biculturalism: “A unique blending of heritage and receiving culture elements.”
2. Frame Switching

- Culture priming $\rightarrow$ Frame-Switching.
- Even in the middle of a paragraph.

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Switch Frame = Switch Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors

- Fundamental attribution biases (Hong et al., 2000)
- Declarative knowledge (values, beliefs, normal and behaviors scripts). (Gardner et al., 1999; Hong et al., 2000)
- Meaning system (Pouliasi & Verkuyten, 2006)
- Cognitive processes (Fu, et al., 2008)
- Self-report; self-description (Sui et al., 2007)
- Conscious deliberation (Wong & Hong, 2005)
- Encoding and recognition memory (Sui et al., 2007)
- “Personality” (Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2006).
- Structure of emotions (Perunovic et al., 2007).

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But, These IDs May Not Get Along

- Individuals can acquire more than one cultural meaning systems, even if these systems contain conflicting theories.

- However, these theories can not simultaneously guide one’s cognition. (Hong, Morris, Chiu, Benet-Martinez, 2000).
Conflicting cultures confused and trapped Southeast Asian American children (Ying, Coombs, & Lee, 1999).
Cultural Double Bind (CDB)
Double Bind  

*(Nichols & Schwartz, 1995)*

- “A conflict
- created when a person receives
- contradictory messages on different levels of abstraction
- in an important relationship, and
- cannot leave or comment.”

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Cultural Double Bind (CDB) (Lee, 2007)

- When a person identifies with or acquires multiple cultural meaning systems, and
- receives conflicting or contradictory messages from these systems;
- Because a human being is a cultural being,
- this person can not ignore or escape from the conflicts.

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A person can acquire or identify with multiple culture meaning systems (Hong et al., 2000),
these systems are domain-specific and activated by context (“frame-switching”) (LaFromboise et al., 1993), but they often are not congruent at same and/or different abstract levels,
Conflicting value systems can be processed simultaneously, but only one systems can be used for decision making or deliberating.
In a multicultural context, CDBs are inevitable.
Paths to the Binds

- Interpersonal/Relational.
- Intrapersonal.
- Interaction between inter- and intra-personal factors.

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Example 1:

“Am I assertive?”
“Am I __?” Neither A Nor B

- Not curvy/muscled enough, too curvy/muscled.
- Don’t have a backbone, too disrespectful.
- Too collectivistic, too individualistic.
- Too traditional, too non-traditional.
- Want to be good at sciences, but not want to be good at sciences.

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Parents worried that their children were “too American”, but children’s peers may considered them “too Asian.” (Ying, Coombs, & Lee, 1999).
Adding Another Layer…

- **Culturation status:**
  - Is domain specific.
  - Is dynamic and context sensitive.
  - Varies at different logic levels.
Example 2:

“We want you to make your own decision.”
“We want you to make your own decision.”

- But as a filial and respectful person, you need to consider and respect others’ wishes.
- Not doing so will make your parents, family, and community lose face, which symbolizes your parents’ failure.
- You have obligations and responsibilities for your family.
- Your parents want the best for you.
- Making your own decision is one of the symbols of adulthood.
- You are responsible for your own happiness and decision.
- Your decisions reflect who you are, not who your parents are.
- Cut the umbilical cord.

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Cultural Double Bind (CDB) (Lee, 2007)

- Different from “cultural conflict” and “cognitive dissonance.”
  - The connotation of “conflict” vs. “being bond.”

- “Cultural Double Bind” emphasizes
  - Culture-related
  - Dynamic
  - Interactive
  - Stressful
  - Multilevel
  - Domain-specific
  - Inescapable

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Pause and Reflect Point

- Different cultural clues/cues activate different systems/frames.
- The system activated in therapy = the system used in clients’ life?
- Same construct/word has the same meanings/connotation to you and your clients?

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“As a result of all these [cultural] differences and having been forced to adapt to this new culture, I have developed another cultural identity which is capable of surviving in this new environment. . . . This identity functions like a second personality that appears when it is necessary to adopt a culturally appropriate behavior in the new culture. (Sparrow, 2000, p. 192)
Consequences of Being Bond?
Consequences of CDB

- **Conflicts:**
  - General (Myyry, 2002; Lee, et al., 2005)
  - Family and intergenerational (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993; Huang, 1997; Chung, 2001; Ying & Han, 2007)
  - Intrapersonal, confusion (Leong & Wang, 2006)

- **Negative Self:**
  - Negative body image & eating disorders (Lake et al., 1999; Yokoyama, 2007)
  - Low self-esteem (Twenge & Crocker, 2002)
  - Withdraw from relationships

- Feeling “trapped” (Ying, et al., 1999), identity crisis, and career indecision (Davison & Huenefeld, 2002)

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Three Punches of the CDB

1. Conflicts
2. Negative Self
3. Poor performance:
   - People tend to perform relatively poorly in situations where they have a conflicted sense of self.
   - Identity-related psychological conflicts tend to interfere with performance – it creates anxiety, self-consciousness, and self-doubts. *(Haslam, Salvator, Kessler, & Reicher, 2008).*
Clinical Implications:

What do therapists do to the binds?
Interventions – I

- Give cultures their due responsibilities.
  - Acknowledge the cultural double bind.
- Identify levels of logic involved & move to a higher logic level.
  - Distinguish “state” from “trait.”
- Explore and clarify possible meanings of the messages at personal, interpersonal, and cultural levels.

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Clarify Meaning and Assumptions

- Traits, norms, and values will have different meanings, connotations, and standards of behaviors in different culture. 
  (Pouliasi & Verkuyten, 2006; Ho, 1996; Rodriguez, Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002).
Clarifying Meaning: Examples  (Lee, 2007)

- Approval = Positively support or celebrate?
- Blame/Criticize = You are not doing fine?
- Humble = Not give self credit?
- Assertive = Disrupt harmony?
- Not able to solve conflicts = Not balanced?
The key dimensions of “friendship” are different in different cultures, for example:

- “American culture”: Personal development, openness, life satisfaction.
- Greece culture: Interdependency, strong sensitivity to intimacy, and mutual loyalty and obligations.

(Argyle, Henderson, Bond, Iizuka, & Contarello, 1986; Sheet & Lugar, 2005)
Interventions – II

● Acknowledge the power of culture – **The symptoms of our students are the symptoms of our cultures.**
Skill Examples: Self-Talk

- Instead of this → Say this
- “I am not assertive!” → “This behavior did not help me achieve that goal for that problem at this context in this culture.”
- “I am so confused!” → “Let me think what are the conflicts in values and meaning I am having here for this issue” then, “I decide that I will do this for this reason.”
- “I am too shy!” → “By this culture’s standard I am shier than the expectations of this and that in this context.” (But you probably will be just fine or too outgoing in Taiwan).
- “I just don’t fit in!” → “The values I have do not match the most popular values in this culture at this time for this problem.”

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Skill Examples: Interpersonal Relationships

- Instead of this → Say this
- This is not right → This may not work for this situation at this time for this group in this culture.
- This is not effective → The other approach may save some time.
- You need to do more → This behavior will help that (be concrete) for this problem at this time in this culture.
- You need to understand → Applying this knowledge/skill (which may seem really weird to you) to this problem will increase this and that.

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Interventions – III

- Balance.

- Increase “integrative complexity.” (Myyry, 2002)
  - “Differentiation,” and
  - “Integration.”

- Increase persons’ tolerance for ambiguity.

- Increase social support. (Lee, Su, Yohsida, 2005)

- Progressing/developing/evolving vs. achieving/solving.

- Facilitate direct coping. (Lee & Liu, 2001)

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Challenging Current Thinking
Challenging

- The validity of research findings on multicultural individuals using instruments/format from mainstream culture.
- Acculturation?
  - Definitions
  - Measures
  - “status” = Outcome-focused
- Racial and cultural identity development theories?
- Bicultural/multicultural identity development?
- Identity “crisis”? 

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Conclusions

- Cultural double bind may be a useful tool for understanding multicultural clients.

- “Acculturation” and “Enculturation” states are fluid, multidimensional, domain-specific, dynamic, and context-dependent.

- “Culturation” process is stressful and constant.
Cautions

- Developed based on clinical observations and literature.
- The effectiveness of any intervention is context-dependent.
- Starting points.