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CNS 747

Cultural Immersion Journal

Entry 1 – September 9, 2018

This weekend, my family and I visited an authentic Korean Barbecue restaurant in the Korean section of town. We chose this place because my husband and I had spent some time in Korea and thought it might be a good experience for our children (and my husband craves kimchi once in a while.) We went for lunch and sat at one of the tables with a grill. I noticed after we sat that we were the only non-Asian people in the restaurant. A wave of uncomfortableness came over me. My children were oblivious, and my husband was not affected. He was either used to the feeling after living in Korea or didn't seem to care. We had two staff members serving our table, a man and an older woman. I was under the impression the older woman was the owner, and I was embarrassed every time she came by to place more meat on the table grill. I felt there was something I was missing, or not doing correctly, and I was afraid of looking silly. This experience impacted me more than I thought, and additionally, how I will counsel. I did not realize how my ignorance, or not knowing little things, can stir up certain emotions. I felt like a child, needing to be walked through the correct steps. I don't think she judged me for not knowing, but needing to be helped when I am a grown woman takes away a certain amount of autonomy. It made me think of a friend I had in high school. I took Japanese as my foreign language and befriended a Japanese foreign exchange student. Every time I hung out with her, I thought of her as cute and naïve. Considering back, I don't believe she was naïve at all; it's just English was her second language, and she didn't know what was customary. That is

what I will take into my practice: not assuming individuals are naïve or less intelligent because they have different mannerisms than mine or may not speak with grammatical accuracy.

Entry 2 – September 15, 2018

My initial reaction to the Ta-Nehisi Coates article "The Case for Reparations" (2014) is one of shock and sadness at the systemic nature of racism. After reading the article, I have a deeper understanding of how the system has been stacked against African Americans when it comes to land and home ownership. When counseling African Americans and other people of color, I will look beyond their actions and focus on environmental factors that keep my clients in a state of perpetual trauma. For instance, Coates mentions the percentage of African Americans in prison and the prison's proximity to certain neighborhoods. I would think this plays a role in the mental health of people living nearby, constantly reminded that they are one mistake away from the prison. I am reminded of the tainted water in Flint, Michigan, and the slow response to hurricane Katrina to name a few disasters that affect a disproportionate number of people of color. This article was assigned in a course on multicultural counseling to give future counselors an idea of the history of this country and its relationship to racism. Lynching has taken a different form today, and the trauma people of color are still exposed to is very real. Coates's information and opinion give future counselors background as to why their clients might be destitute or living in a place that is unsafe. It is not that they want to be there, but the oppression our society still places on people of color. Opportunityatlas.org, a tool developed by Raj Chetty and the U.S. Census Bureau, illustrates Coates's point that it is infinitely harder for Black families to reach upper-middle class statuses and move into affluent neighborhoods (Coates, 2014) and it is even more difficult for their children to continue upward mobility. There are a couple of ways Coates's ideas might be divisive to the counseling profession. First, the majority

of counselors and those in the psychology industry are White (APA, 2015). I think there is a tendency of those of us in social psychology to attribute racism seen today as not systemic, but due to the plight of poor White individuals who take out their rage at being poor and marginalized on African Americans. I wrote a paper suggesting the rise of White nationalism and far-right parties in Europe is attributed to increased unemployment rates. I now see how misguided my thoughts may have been. Second, counselors may earn more money than others they are counseling. Bills, insurance, food, and housing costs may weigh more heavily in our client's daily stresses than our own. Coates' article was eye-opening for me in forcing me to reconcile the fact I downplay the racism that is still around us today; at least the fallout from racism. He is right—we need a way to "make right" the practices that caused us to be in this mess and are still perpetuating segregation to this day. What Coates does not address is the gentrification of neighborhoods in poor and Black sections of cities.

In some cases, White people are moving in, injecting money into impoverished areas. But this is not helpful in elevating Black families in the area, and it may even lead to pricing them out of certain neighborhoods. There does need to be a system in place, maybe through legislation or social programs, that "makes right" what was done to a whole race of people. What resonated with me most is that the United States hasn't been able even to study reparations. Also, I'm surprised Coates used Germany and Jewish people as an example without addressing what Israel has done to the Palestinians as it relates to land. My current income status has not negatively influenced my ability to connect to individuals with a low SES as I was poor growing up. I still have a "poor" mentality, and I think any day I could be living in my car. What I need to be keenly aware of is my Whiteness. That is what separates me from African Americans who work hard. I have been afforded opportunities that are not given to some races, and I am now coming

to realize that is a significant factor in my success. What I used to attribute to hard work and study may not be the whole story.

Entry 3 – September 16, 2018

Holy cow today's visit is an eye-opener. I had only meant to tour the Rainbow Center, an LGBTQ advocacy center in Tacoma, Washington, to learn more about their work. I ended up staying to talk with Manny, one of their directors. As we visited, he told me more about the center, how they were a facilitator of information: leading people to mental health services and businesses that were friends of the LGBTQ community. They help all sorts of people and demographics, from gay to straight, poor to rich. They don't turn away individuals for any reason. As we began our conversation, I felt Manny was a bit defensive. It is understandable considering many people jump to conclusions right away, but I thought he was automatically summing me up. This quickly dissipated as I was honest with him: that I was there to become a better advocate for the center. I understand I have a lot to learn, and I apologized in advance if I were to embarrass him or stick my foot in my mouth. I mentioned I lived in Seattle long ago. He asked me what my impression of Seattle was (I was caught a little off-guard by this, as I was asking him questions) and I told him I thought we were progressive and open. He smiled politely and said he had a much different experience as a gay Latino man living there around the same time. He said he felt excluded from the community and never felt at home. Again, I was flabbergasted: I worked in restaurants and around many ethnicities and sexual orientations, but I was in a bubble of sorts. I felt sad that he had that experience. I asked him how he felt living in Tacoma, and he said both he and his husband love it. They are involved in the community and around many more people like themselves. Growing up, Seattle was known as the more "metropolitan" city, and Tacoma, another port city and home of Dale Chihuly among many other

fabulous artists, was thought of as not a very nice place to visit euphemistically speaking. Looking back, I'm sure much of that was due to demographics. Tacoma and Seattle are comparative as far as ethnicities, but the income disparity is more pronounced in Seattle. I'm wondering if some of the isolation Manny felt was also due to income; it is expensive to live in Seattle. Caucasians fill the high-income employment opportunities, which I think causes a rift between Whites and other races. It is less expensive to live in Tacoma, and the equal(ish) playing field gives more people a chance to thrive in their community regardless of race. My main takeaway from this meeting is how complicated feelings are when it comes to race, and I will take that into my practice. Manny used the labels "gay" and "Latino" to describe himself, but not many would call themselves "poor" or "lower middle-class" as it pertains to their own social standing. This visit influences my future work as a counselor in that I need to view feelings holistically (social, economic, biological, environmental factors) and also look at causes that may not be verbalized by the client.

Manny said he was also a Baptist minister and he knew of Wake Forest, which was kinda awesome being on the West coast. By the end of the visit, I vowed to come back and volunteer. At the conclusion of the meeting, I thanked Manny for his time and then made a comment about how tough it is for me to put myself out there and interview people for this class. I immediately regretted this remark; of course, it isn't anywhere near how uncomfortable people feel when they come out, or the microaggressions Manny has had to deal with over his life. He was polite and wished me well. Sigh. I almost got through the visit without making a fool of myself.

Entry 4 – September 22, 2018

Today, I spoke with Sandeep, the owner of the convenience store near my house. Kind and affable, I chose him because he is pleasant to talk with. He moved from India to Gig Harbor

as a young adult in 1986. He seemed to be concerned with my knowing he was wholly assimilated; when I asked if he had traditions he still observed, he said not at all. It seems as if he left his culture behind. He was very proud of the fact everyone in our community knew him, and he told me he has never experienced discrimination of any sort in Gig Harbor. I was a bit taken aback by this (although I'm quite confident I didn't show it.) Our community skews older (median age: 47) and 87% White (City-Data.com). I learned more from Sandeep's body language and what he didn't say than from the statements he made. Overall, I felt even if he had experienced microaggression or even explicit discrimination, he would not acknowledge it. Perhaps he was concerned with how the community sees his role (he is in sales, after all), or maybe he is indeed an optimist and believes people are generally good. I know I have a tendency to give people the benefit of the doubt when they say things that are on the border of being inappropriate. However, I was surprised he did not have a story, not even one that happened long ago in the past. It would be easy to ignore or deny microaggression when one's livelihood is at stake. Also, I sensed his embarrassment at being singled out as a minority business owner; I believe he wants people to think he isn't any different than other community members. This is what I don't like about the community I live in. I wish we could celebrate differences instead of forcing people to embrace "being an American fully." This is the message that is spread when we put out in the universe that all people should celebrate Christmas and speak the same language and wear the same clothing and if we don't, it is an assault on Christianity. This meeting was insightful even though it was superficial. I can now see how I will have to work hard to earn people's trust. I asked Sandeep if he were to go to counseling, would he prefer someone who came from the same culture as himself, would he feel more comfortable with someone who did not know much about his home culture. He told me he would feel comfortable either way. I

believe if I were counseling Sandeep, it would take multiple sessions to get him to open up to me. This meeting has affected how I will counsel in that I learned it is best to be honest and address our differences rather than ignore them. After talking openly and honestly about our differences, hopefully, the relationship can progress.

Entry 5 – October 5th, 2018

I took the day off work today to visit a mosque. This was the visit I was the most apprehensive of: the idea of offending a group of church-goers terrified me. I'm not sure why—I've posed many questions to my Jewish and Mormon friends without fear (like: why do you do that? What is this for? etc.) I'm thinking my anxiety stems from not knowing many Muslim people. At any rate, I made an appointment to interview Sister Kishwar. I chose her and the Islamic Center of Tacoma because of the interfaith work she does, and her charitable works. I was to be at the mosque at 1:00 pm, before afternoon prayer, and enter from the left side of the building. I did not know what to make of this; most churches I have been to have an open-door policy. Also, women on one side, men on the other plays into patriarchal stereotypes Western societies have of the Muslim religion. I opened the door, which was unmarked (the men's entry was clearly marked) and took off my shoes as I entered. I arrived before Sister Kishwar, and one of the older women came to speak with me. I told her I was there to talk to Sister Kishwar, and she warmly invited me to come inside, hang up my coat, and take a seat. The room was small with chairs lining the side wall and the rest of the floor open. The room was oriented toward the center, with a television on the wall to the right. It would later show the sermon being held on the other side of the partition wall. I did not have my head covered like the other women in the room (now numbering around nine or ten), but I did not feel uncomfortable. No one caught my gaze or made me feel out of place. After a few moments, a White woman named Cheryl came over to speak to

me. She began to tell me how she just converted and how Christianity was a big lie and God commanded a woman's head be covered in Corinthians. I looked this passage up when I got home, 1 Corinthians 11:6, and there are many different meanings attributed to this verse. The gist seems to be a man is the glory of God and can remain uncovered, but women are the desire of man and must stay covered particularly in places of worship. Again, this plays into the patriarchal stereotypes that Cheryl tried to dispel. She seemed angry with Christianity, and it made me wonder what experience she had while she was Christian that caused her anger. The same woman who greeted me at the door came over and explained to me what was about to happen: another churchgoer was about to be inducted (I think that is the right word?) into the faith. She stood at a small door in the partition; the door opened, and the pastor spoke words both in Arabic and English. Then it closed again and the woman hugged the others. I was moved and felt I was encroaching as I had the same reverence for this moment as any other religious ceremony. I went back to sit down while the others focused on congratulating their new member. A younger woman, Natasha, had come in at this time. She looked like she was in her 20's. I think she was curious and she had a slight air of suspicion of me. She sat down and began to tell me the central tenets of Islam: the five pillars, traditions, and celebrations. Soon, Sister Kishwar arrived. She and another older woman sat with us. This was a much different conversation than with Cheryl. Sister Kishwar spoke of love and to commit a violent act against one was a violent act against all of humanity. I learned so many of the same tenets of the Muslim faith are similar to the others: worship God (Allah) only, be kind to all people, and prayer. These women were immensely helpful. I liked being separated from the men; there is a certain comfort in being around those of the same gender. The caveat is if I were to identify as a man, how would they treat me? Would I be able to be on the other side of the partition? I learned from Sister Kishwar

that people are more alike than different. I'm sure there are pockets of the religion where oppression occurs, but this might be due to culture as opposed to the religion itself. Going forward, I won't be as intimidated by this faith as I was before. I tried to dig deeper into Sister Kishwar's story itself, but she was insistent on focusing on her faith, which I respected. She gave me a hug at the end of our meeting, and I could smell her perfume on me the rest of the day. It evoked fond feelings. I have been invited to an interfaith tea through this mosque that I am excited to attend.

References

- American Psychological Association Center for Workforce Studies. (2015). Demographics of the U.S. psychology workforce: Findings from the American community survey. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/workforce/publications/13-demographics/report.pdf>
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