

Cultural Self Project: A Reflection Through the ADRESSING Model

Understanding my own cultural identities is the foundation of competent and ethical consulting. Hays (2013) introduced the ADRESSING Model to help counselors and those in a helping profession to examine dimensions of identity shaped by systemic privilege and marginalization, cultivating self-awareness and compassion for others. Through this paper, I reflect on my personal experiences across the ADRESSING categories—Age, Disability, Religion, Ethnicity, Socioeconomic status, Sexual orientation, Indigenous heritage, National origin, and Gender—to better understand the values and cultural mores that shape me and how those may affect my work as a clinician.

Age and Generational Influences

I was born in 1979 and fall into the microgeneration of Xennials—those who straddled the analog childhood of Gen X and the digital expansion of Millennials (Snider, 2018). My values have been shaped by witnessing massive global and national shifts: 9/11 occurred when I was 19. I vividly remember our country's obsession with Clinton, Monica Lewinsky, and the cigar. The Iraq wars were a large part of my childhood, as my dad is very interested in wars, so we saved newspaper clippings from Operation Desert Storm.. I am part of the generation that elected Obama; we were there when the endless 24-hour news cycle began, the introduction of Twitter, and now, the deep political and racial polarization ushered in by Trump. Like many of my generation, I was raised to believe in the American Dream—and I find myself grieving its collapse as well as the return to abject hatred and racism and sexism being celebrated on news stations and social media platforms. According to Lee (2019), generational shifts often shape our worldview and emotional resilience, and being a Xennial impacts me daily. I love time without my phone, but I know how to use it for business. I long for days when I believed women

could do anything they wanted, and now I see the reality of the war on women's equality. I am thankful I do not have daughters, but rather sons I can raise to treat women right, because I don't know if I could stomach raising a young woman today.

Developmental and Other Disabilities

While I do not live with a disability, disability has played a significant role in my life. My son was born with Poland's Syndrome, and I spent much of his childhood advocating for his inclusion and equal opportunity. My brother and all of his children have Marfan syndrome, a connective tissue disorder. This syndrome has affected their physical abilities and socioeconomic prospects. They struggle financially because of their physical limitations. I am highly aware of the potential for "invisible" disabilities, and the way we move through the world without a second thought for those who need extra assistance. When Hays (2013) reminds us that privilege includes the absence of barriers, I remember how much privilege I have just because of my physical body. I never have to answer "what happened to your hand" (my son) or "what's that thing sticking out of your chest (my brother's aortic cavity is convex to accommodate his large heart). I have a special love for disabled athletes, and have written papers on athletic identity, disability, and fostering positive athletic identity in every body. Sports and disabilities is an area I would like to work in in the future.

Religion and Spirituality

Raised in a very religious Protestant household where gender roles were rigid and unquestioned, I was deeply impacted by my upbringing. As anyone raised in a strict religion knows, they are a culture all to themselves. Although I no longer identify with any formal religion, my upbringing instilled a deep belief in work ethic, self-sacrifice, and the expectation of constant productivity. These values are not ones I would espouse to others, but I have had to

work to release them as personal definitions of value for myself. My spiritual life includes a connection to all beings, belief in the power of the Universe based on Quantum Theory, and a meditation practice while living in alignment with nature.. I still wrestle with internalized messages of guilt, particularly around prosperity and success, feeling that they must be justified through constant doing. As Hays (2013) discusses, these deeply embedded values often persist beyond belief systems, shaping how we relate to clients, authority, and ourselves. I judge those who do not work as hard as I deem they should, or those who rest often, or rely on their family for support. I see this bias in myself daily.

Ethnic and Racial Identity

I identify as White, as do all my immediate and extended family members, with one transracial adoptee (my sister's son). Growing up in a white environment, I was largely unaware of racial privilege until adulthood. Slowly, through relationships, education, and parenting, I've begun to understand how whiteness impacts my family's movement through our culture. Lee (2019) mentions that whiteness often goes unnamed, and therefore unexamined. It is only since the death of George Floyd that my sons and I have talked about our race! My journey has been recognizing what white privilege is, how it shows up in my daily life (MacIntosh, 1989), how I am comfortable with it, and trying to learn about deconstructing whiteness. At 46, I am highly aware of the racial disparity in our country and the benefits it has given me. I follow a specific black woman on Instagram, @Checkyourprivilege, Myisha T Hill, and she challenges me with my unnoticed behaviors and the racial work I need to do. I am very uncomfortable when she calls out "white women," but deep inside, I know that is when I need to listen to her and examine my heart and role in the racial power structure of our country. **Socioeconomic Status**

I grew up lower middle class. We had enough, but there was always an undercurrent of scarcity. College was not expected of me, and I had to pay my own way. Early work opportunities were blue-collar and service-based, yet I always had bigger dreams. Today, I live in an upper-middle-class reality—but that leap required grit, debt, and relentless self-motivation. I carry the psychological imprint of my upbringing: a sense that success is fragile and must be guarded. Lee (2019) notes that class mobility often creates cultural dissonance, as people move between worlds but never feel fully at home. That is a tension I still hold.

Sexual Orientation

I am a heterosexual woman in a long-term marriage. My orientation has never caused conflict or required explanation. My parents challenged me when I lived with my husband before being married, but not to the extent that I was rejected. I am acutely aware that However, I am aware that my family, mainly my father and brother, are not accepting of LGBTQ+ identities. Their rigidity and inability to look outside of their own experiences feels stunted, immature, and quite honestly, hypocritical, as they are both sex addicts. Their behavior and their beliefs have created friction in our family and severe moral discomfort in my mind. I am committed to being an ally and creating inclusive spaces. However, as Hays (2013) and Lee (2019) both emphasize, privilege includes the luxury of invisibility—my orientation rarely gets questioned, and I never think twice about it. So, how often do I think about discrimination due to sexual orientation? The answer is seldom, if I am being truthful.

Indigenous Heritage

I do not have any Indigenous ancestry or affiliation. I did not grow up near a Native community, nor did my education include accurate or respectful representations of Indigenous history and sovereignty. This lack of knowledge is an area of cultural deficit. As Lee (2019)

suggests, cultural competence includes recognizing what we do not know and actively pursuing understanding through respectful engagement and continuous learning. While I do not know if I will ever work with Native Americans, learning more about their stories would be beneficial.

National Origin

I was born in the United States, as were my parents and grandparents. English is our first language. My nationality has granted me security, access, and legitimacy in countless spaces—another layer of privilege that often goes unrecognized (Lee, 2019; MacIntosh, 1989). I am aware that immigration, documentation, and language barriers are daily realities for many, and I will work to ensure my practice is welcoming for anyone whose national origin is a source of vulnerability.

Gender and Gender Identity

I was raised in a home where traditional gender roles were enforced—my mother submitted to my father, who controlled finances and decisions. I rejected these dynamics early in life, choosing a partner who supports my work and growth. Still, societal expectations endure: I became the default parent, carried the emotional labor, and wrestled with maternal guilt. Hays (2013) discusses how gender socialization leaves deep grooves, even when we actively try to disrupt them. Reading that characteristics such as vulnerability, agreeability, and willingness to cooperate were considered more positive behaviors in therapy (Hays, 2013) made me realize how deeply the gender roles are a part of my own life, even as much as I try to eschew this programming! Being a female sports and performance consultant, I must be aware of how my conditioning impacts potential gender role assumptions, especially when working with female athletes and male coaches, or the opposite dyad.

Conclusion

The self-examination through the ADRESSING Model has deepened my understanding of how cultural conditioning has shaped my identity and values. It has also helped me clarify where I hold privilege and aspects of myself I was unaware of. As an SPP, this ongoing reflection is necessary to meet my clients with respect and acceptance. Both Hays (2013) and Lee (2019) write that ethical practice demands self-awareness, and that our cultural lenses—unless named and examined—will distort our interactions with clients. Using the ADRESSING model and thinking through the various aspects that create a person provided even greater awareness than the Acculturation Interview (Drankus, 2010) in regards to how others experience the world, and I would be curious to go back and complete this Interview now that I understand more about what multiculturalism looks like and how it impacts each person.

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