

Values, Culture, Family: Journey towards Psychology
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As I was waiting to board a flight at the airport, the airline stated that I checked in late (I checked in 12 hours in advance) and therefore had to forego a seat on the plane. I was frustrated and argued with the airline staff who looked on as if to say, “we apologize...that this is a done deal.” I frantically made alternative arrangements, alerted the concerned authorities at work, and rescheduled clients. After I resigned to conserving my remaining energy, I had a reflective pause: Are these not the very situations psychology addresses? The unpredictability and ambiguity, the challenges, the resilience and coping.

This was one of the main reasons I became a psychologist: To be a mindful connoisseur of life skills, experience challenges, tap into one’s potential, and connect with the moment! The importance of connection came early to me. Having lived within an extended family system since childhood, collaboration, relationships, navigating differences, and celebrating a collective presence were values my family encouraged. When I say family, I mean my parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. I remember spending my evenings hastily finishing homework, so I could join the rest of the neighborhood kids to play, get to know one another, navigate arguments, and celebrate playful victories. Conversing with peers in the neighborhood and knowing the larger community were part of my collectivist identity. These values of cooperation, communal efforts, and genuine connections with people, share some commonalities with those of psychology.

As I transitioned into adulthood, my parents posed the seemingly helpful question: “Who would you like to be?” I said, “Someone who can talk to people.” As I reflect on this innocuous response, it accurately captures my values, and nature of the helping profession in using humor (Ellis, 1987), focusing on the therapeutic relationship (Horvath, 2006), working in groups (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) and a sense of community (Adler, as cited by Corey, 2001). Following suit, I took a liking to psychology as an elective course. I admired the exploration of human behavior, and the intention of addressing presenting concerns using the three tenets of unconditional positive regard, non-judgmental attitude, and empathy (Rogers, 1958) as part of

the therapeutic relationship. Parallely, my father's attitude, conversational style, and ability to work with difference was a huge influence. Equally influential were my mother's assertiveness and my younger sister's sense of humor and authenticity in the moment.

As I began wading through psychology, I was curious about why the same intervention worked well for one family and not the other. Other questions related to differential access to resources within and between groups perplexed me. Similar experiences such as the above, only strengthened my curiosity around values of equity and equality, and against systemic discrimination. Psychology, research, training, and experience also taught me the relevance of advocacy and social justice. In sum, I appreciate the reciprocity between my values and being a psychologist. I am glad to have penned this article as a psychologist.

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