

IDENTITY, LIMINALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

An intrapersonal view of intercultural sensitivity

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I draw on Milton Bennett's (1986, 1993) work on intercultural sensitivity as a frame for my contention that the key dynamics that play out between cultures in the external world also play out between cultures as they've been internalized as narrative within individuals. I will use elements from my research on rites of passage to outline some of the liminal tensions clients experience as they develop responses to these cultural demands. I will outline the way in which the six stages in Bennett's model can be applied more explicitly at an intrapersonal level and offer a case to demonstrate a narrative approach to this work in coaching. I do so with humility as I would not claim to have mastered all six stages within my own development. Perhaps the gift of writing this chapter is the opportunity to assess where I am on this journey and to share some of what I am learning along the way.

Rebecca was the executive director for a human services program funded by the US federal government. One of the key roles she played in this position was to help the organization continuously adapt to the ever-shifting political and financial landscape. She had developed an agile and savvy leadership style in order to sustain a high level of morale and service in the face of constant change. In doing so, she often mediated between the demands of the employees, the clients and the government while balancing limited budgets, complex guidelines and increasing demands. Rebecca sought coaching when she began to feel, as she put it, 'stretched way too thin' as a result of the significant changes thrust on her program by the new Administration. Of particular concern for her was how to retain a sufficient level of authority and autonomy given these new demands.

In coaching her, it would have been easy to stay at the surface level in dealing with her frustrations around the ideological clashes with her new federal bosses. In addition to being less than productive it would have meant skipping over deeper issues at play for her. Knowing that she had devoted her career to being a public servant on behalf of children and families, I invited her to 'tell me more about what loyalty means for you right now'. Was it loyalty to the internalized stories of her grandparents about how others had helped them – and how she should continue to repay that 'debt'? Was it to the stories of her ethnic culture about doing whatever it took to get things done in the face of power? Was it to the stories of the women on

her staff about being polite and not 'rocking the boat'? As a leader, she had developed each of these aspects of herself in order to fit and thrive in each of these cultures. Now it was time to recognize the conflicts she experienced as a result of her divided loyalties in order to create a more authentic and effective response to feeling stretched too thin.

In working with Rebecca, it was clear that the dilemmas she faced as a leader could be understood, in part, as clashes between the narratives of the cultures with which she identified and in which she worked each day. In looking at her situation this way, she recognized the disconnections between the liberating culture in which she had been raised in the 1960s and the stifling culture in which she was now asked to work. It was through coaching her that I began to think more earnestly of coaching across cultures as an intrapersonal phenomenon in addition to an interpersonal and collective one. While good work has been done on coaching across cultures, insufficient attention has been paid to how clients navigate cultures within themselves. In part this requires coaches to adopt a more critical pedagogy and nuanced understanding of culture so as to move away from the binary systems of thought (McLaren 1993) at the core of Western epistemology toward one more fitting for the demands of the twenty-first century.

As part of this shift, authors who live in border worlds between cultures (Anzaldúa 1987) have helped us think about a dynamic, fluid and identity-based view of cultures as they play out in us in any given situation. As Kenneth Gergen observed, 'Our 'self' becomes situationally defined to a greater degree than ever before.... All the selves lie dormant, and under the right conditions may spring to life' (Gergen 1991: 71). Therefore, coaches can ask 'how are our clients handling the 'selves' that make up their ongoing sense of identity, and the loyalties and roles inherent in each one? In this sense, it seems important for clients to become aware of their positional patterns relative to these cultural narratives and how these identity performances (Mishler 1999) play out for them at work.

Culture is defined here as 'a set of basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and ought to be . . . that determines [a person's] perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and, to some degree, their overt behavior' (Schein 1996: 12). In looking at how clients internalize cultural narratives, I pay particular attention to how they position themselves in the cultural stories that are central to their identity and life (Davies and Harré 1990). This is key because clients tend to see the world from the vantage point of the positions they have taken and in terms of the 'particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned' (Davies and Harré 1990: 46). Clients' stories shed light on the vantage points they've chosen; coaching can open up new possibilities for framing these formative narratives, their ongoing identity, and their responses in current situations. However, this can be challenging for clients if they have internalized positions that conflict with one another. Coaching can help clients increase their positional repertoire so they are more able to move flexibly from one position to another (Hermans 2004; Polkinghorne 2004) in order to achieve their goals.

The notion of 'narrative identity' is central to this pursuit. While there is a drive for continuity, to keep a particular narrative going (Giddens 1991), our identity is also kaleidoscopic in nature as varying cultural 'colors' move in and out of focus as we live out our life story. For example, in my own life I've watched as elements from a previous career have moved in and out of salience in my life and sense of self. I have come to integrate some of these elements, now distinct from the original role, in my identity and my coaching/consulting practice. In this time of accelerated change, it is difficult to sustain a sense of continuity or an ability to embody (let alone evolve) all of the ways in which we are asked to position our 'selves'. Coaches can create holding

environments in which they can attend to clients' stories, their narrative construction of identity, and any ways in which they experience internal cultural discordance. This is particularly useful when the roots of this discordance are in stories that have been carried forward from other generations or on behalf of others.

For example, Maria, a third-generation Mexican woman running a program for first-generation Mexican laborers became increasingly aware of her internal struggles around gender and power differences, levels of acculturation between the generations, and her competing desires to be successful in the eyes of her Caucasian supervisors so she would be promoted and successful in the eyes of her 'brothers' so she would be loyal to the cultural norms around 'la familia'. I helped her create a Venn diagram with four circles representing her key cultures (ethnicity, gender, immigrant status, and management) and then asked her: 'Tell me about what it is like for you in the middle'. We worked with stories from her past in getting to this job, her present in terms of daily decisions she faced, and her future in terms of her aspirations for herself and others. From this coaching conversation she was able to develop ways to artfully educate her supervisors on the nuances of her culture and establish a hybrid style that was effective within the system yet respectful of the ways of her culture.

NARRATIVE IDENTITY

'My wife and I met in English.' With these words, Peter, an American client who had become reasonably fluent in Japanese, came to understand why he had difficulty relating with his Japanese wife in her native tongue. The language in which they had built the relationship and formed the stories of their early years was shaped by the parameters of the English language and the American culture. He found the relationship challenging because they could not bridge some significant cultural differences in making several important life decisions. In a sense, they had met in one language and culture but needed now to make decisions in another. This realization was prompted through my invitation for him to consider the space between both sets of stories as represented by my two outstretched hands. He recognized that his role in the marriage made sense within an American narrative and the stories of how they met in English, but seemed much less so when told within a Japanese narrative and discourse – as when they went to visit her parents in Japan.

Stories bring together and shed light on the connections between the boundaries of discourse and the nature of identity.

A key assumption in this approach is the postmodern belief in the dynamic, relational and multifaceted nature of identity. This approach can be seen in Stevens-Long's (2000) notion of the *prism self* and Bakhtin's (1984) view of the self as a *carnival* in describing efforts to retain a coherent narrative identity and yet be continuously adaptive 'at the threshold between interior and exterior, between self and other' (Rutherford 1990: 24). As such, identity can be seen as a dynamic and relational process of continual negotiation as people interact with their environment through conversations and relationships. Identity is a *situated* (Ochs and Capps 1996) and *psychosocial* process (McAdams, Diamond, de St Aubin and Mansfield 1997) in which people navigate between presenting identities that are acceptable and functional in their social contexts (as experienced and internalized) and embodying identities that are authentic and meaningful in their personal context.

I find William James' (1927) distinction between 'I' and 'Me' helpful for clients in surfacing their navigational patterns as evidenced in their stories. For example, I might ask a client: 'What

did you want to do at that moment?’ then follow with: ‘What held you back?’ and: ‘What might this say about whom others expect you to be?’ Their identity, for better or worse, is situated in the space between these answers. In this way, it may be more fitting to think of identity as a verb than as a noun and for coaches to engage in the narrative processes by which clients identify themselves.

We narrate our identity in large part based on unspoken, implicit cultural models of what selfhood should be, could be, and should not be (Bruner 2002). As a result, certain stories are readily available to us in defining and maintaining our identity, while others are not. We often do not recognize the contours and limitations of our available narratives until we try to cross their normative boundaries or seek to narrate our experiences or selves outside of them. The stories that clients share in coaching provide powerful material through which they can better understand their available plot lines (Polkinghorne 1998) and narrative habits – and renegotiate them as so desired. Rather than just taking a client’s story at face value or, worse yet, imposing their own values on a story, coaches can help the client contextualize the story within the internalized cultural norms and narratives that shaped its form and by which it is measured. It is here we see the value of stewardship in working with the narrative material of clients at these critical junctures where the building blocks of their identities are in play.

We narrate our experiences so as to *accommodate*, to confirm and sustain our identity (the stories we tell about ourselves, others, and the world), or to *assimilate* anomalous events into our identity (and our stories) and restore equilibrium (Block 1982). Our narrative identity evolves over time and is defined in large part by our choices in terms of accommodation and assimilation relative to the cultural narratives in which we are embedded. Many of the tasks in coaching have to do with helping clients surface the choices they have made along these lines, candidly assess the consequences of these choices, and shift these patterns in order to be more *effective* in achieving their desired way of being and/or results.

However, one of the challenges in working with people and their stories is that the dominant narratives in their life tend to blind them to the possibilities that other narratives exist (Drake 2007). Therefore, coaches can help clients understand the tacit cultural forces that shape their views of the world and themselves, their language and behavioral choices, and more. As people recognize limitations inherent in the available narratives in which they are embedded, they can create a sense of distance from these narratives, see them more clearly, and surface the submerged voices of their selves (Polkinghorne 2001). A major step in this process is to help clients identify additional narrative data from their lives that support an alternative view of who they are and how they will be in the world.

Taking this step often creates tension for clients in areas where they closely identify with more than one culture in defining who they are and how they are to act.

For example, a client who has been taught within his ethnic culture to always look after his mother as her oldest son experiences difficulty when he is promoted to a leadership role and is expected to have tough performance conversations with women who work for him. He is torn between pleasing his new boss to honor the cultural norms around status as a man and deferring to the needs of others to honor the cultural norms around service as a son. The initial task for him was to surface the internalized narratives (and their implicit norms) and to sit with the tension of the two competing expectations. I worked with him to reframe them from polarized opposites created by others to parallel qualities within himself. He was able to take who he was at his best in each position and use it to inform the other such that, for example, he was able to give feedback with respect. I knew that any new behavior had to be grounded in a more integrated narrative about himself. As we shall see, it is from within this tension that the richest development can occur in terms of integrating cultural and narrative complexity.

AN INTRAPERSONAL VIEW OF CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT: THE DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY

This model by Milton Bennett (Bennett 1986, 1993; Bennett and Hammer 1998) is based on the premise that as people are able to make more complex and sophisticated distinctions relative to their experience of cultural *difference* they become more competent in relating with others across cultures. The cognitive patterns characteristic of each stage are correlated with patterns in the person's level of awareness, attitudes and behaviors; changes in the former lead to shifts in the latter. I will make the case that changes in cognitive orientation, seen here as both ways of thinking and levels of mindfulness, also help people clarify and evolve their own identity. The goal is not just an increased ability to handle greater cultural complexity in relating to others but also an increased ability to handle greater cultural complexity within oneself. In doing so, clients become more resilient, agile and *effective* across a wider range of experiences and with a larger repertoire of potential responses.

The first three stages are classified as *ethnocentric* because they revolve around the experience of one's own culture as central to reality. The second three stages are classified as *ethnorelative* because they revolve around the experience of one's culture in the context of others (Bennett and Hammer 1998). I have chosen in this chapter to focus on the intrapersonal aspects of this development process. The six stages can be characterized as follows:

- 1 Denial: Unable to recognize cultural *differences*; assumes that one's own culture (inherited or adopted) is the only real one; separates from cultural *differences* through isolation, *indifference* and/or aggression;
- 2 Defense: Can recognize cultural *differences* but evaluates one's own culture as the only good one; organizes the world into us/them, we/they, good/bad; feels threatened by cultural *difference* and responds with judgment and projection.
- 3 Minimization: Recognizes cultural *differences* but assumes that the familiar elements of one's own culture are universal because 'people are people'; cultural *differences* are either minimized or romanticized;
- 4 Acceptance: Enjoys cultural *differences* and recognizes that one's own culture is just one of many equally valid ways of being in and viewing the world; other cultures may still be judged negatively, but there is an underlying sense of respect and curiosity;
- 5 Adaptation: Expands worldview to incorporate other constructs and see the world through another's eyes; experiences another culture in ways that result in perceptions, communication and behaviors appropriate for and *effective* in that culture; and
- 6 Integration: Expands one's experience of 'self' to include movement in and out of *different* cultural worldviews; may be best suited for people dealing with their own cultural marginality rather than being seen as the highest level of intercultural competence (Bennett and Hammer 1998).

I propose that these six stages inform not only the development of clients' intercultural sensitivity but also their *intracultural* sensitivity – the ability to integrate diverse cultural narratives within themselves and to channel the results to achieve their goals. This is critical in this time when many of our clients live what Kenneth Gergen (1991: 109) called the 'pastiche life' with its proliferation of roles and identities. I use the rites of passage model to articulate and explore how my clients and workshop participants move through these stages as part of their development and maturation. In particular, I work with them in the liminal dimensions in between the cultural narratives they have internalized as central to their identity as seen in this example.

For example, I am working with a client who is making the transition from a long career in the engineering culture into the executive culture. Since his new role will place him in charge of the engineering function, we are talking about how he wants to position himself relative to his former peers and to his need to remain fluent enough in his old world while taking on a new one. One way I supported this shift for him was to enlarge the scale of my questions each week. What began as, 'What do you need most right now?' became, 'What does your group need most from you?' became, 'What does the CEO need most from you?' to, finally, 'What does the business need most from you?'

IN BETWEEN CULTURES: A RITES OF PASSAGE PERSPECTIVE ON DEVELOPMENT

One of the ways to view the progress through these six stages is analogous to many Eastern philosophies in which the beginner sees no duality, the student sees only the duality, and the master comes to recognize, albeit at a higher level, that there really is no duality. By developing a greater ability to resolve and integrate intercultural tensions within themselves, clients free up energy previously spent either avoiding full awareness (being unconscious of the duality) or rigidly clinging to one side of the dynamic (being attached to part of the duality). As a result, they are more able to see the whole picture and integrate the cultural elements once seen as separate from one another. Their stories often signal where they are relative to the six stages and their development, and they frequently provide a rich source of material for coaches.

Some would contend that this middle way involves the idea of a 'third' (Evanoff 2000; Lefebvre 1980; Schwartz-Salant 1998). Paul Tillich (1965) contended that the development of a multicultural personality involved the creation of a 'third area' beyond the bounded territories, an area where one can stand for a time without being enclosed in something tightly bounded. Coaching seems like a natural opportunity to 'unbind' our clients and their stories so they can breathe again and create new options for themselves. To do so requires what Freud (1912: 111) called 'evenly suspended attention' so that the tension is allowed to rise without judgment or bias. As Jung repeatedly suggested, the tension of opposites must be held until its meaning, the unknown third, appears as part of an individual's development process (Hollis 2004). There is a clear sense that development first requires the naming of the opposites so they can then be separated and dissolved in order to create the 'third' out of this union. It is *difficult* to travel this road with clients if coaches have not done the work themselves. Fortunately for coaches there are centuries of experience in a number of cultures on how to support individuals – and themselves – to move through this 'rite of passage'.

Van Gennep (1960) distinguished three major phases in a rite of passage: separation (*séparation*), transition (*marge*), and incorporation (*agrégation*). As Turner noted, 'the first phase detaches the ritual subjects from their old places in society; the last installs them, inwardly transformed and outwardly changed, in a new place in society' (Turner 1979: 149). Eliade defined the threshold that separates these two places as 'the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds – and at the same time the paradoxical place where these worlds communicate' (Eliade 1959: 24). The move from one place to the next involves external changes (e.g., states, roles, statuses) and internal transitions (e.g., identities, beliefs, attitudes) at both personal and social levels. This inner/outer, personal/social dynamic also plays out in the formation, narration, and interpretation of people's stories as part of the ongoing employment and enactment of their identity. The rites of passage model is a core element of narrative coaching work (see Drake 2003, 2004, 2005) as a way to help clients to more openly recognize

how they have tended to position themselves, internally and externally, relative to key cultural narratives. The process helps clients take up new positions relative to these narratives such that they experience a greater sense of coherence, peace, and efficacy. For example, I worked with a client who, through her stories, traced her migration from a 'youngest' to 'in the middle' to becoming an 'oldest'.

While it is important for coaches to manage the processes of separation and incorporation to help clients become change-ready and complete their transitions, respectively, most breakthroughs emerge in the liminal phase. It is here that the attachments to the ordinary and familiar plane have been released (or severed) but the new plane and form have not yet been reached. As a result, there is a lot of energy in play that can be channeled in new directions once the way becomes clear. One of the first steps in narrative coaching is to help clients reach this level of clarity where they can finally see both the road they've taken and the one not taken (or at least not owned) as well as the fact that these paths, once polarized as opposites, could come together in some new third way. An important step in this process is for clients to become more fully aware of the cultural narratives that have shaped them so they are more able to reframe and renegotiate the role, meaning and impact of their narratives.

Moving into, through and out of in-between space between the old story and the new one exposes the basic building blocks of a culture and its norms, values and axioms in ways that are not available through a client's everyday experience (Turner 1969). By surfacing these cultural norms, liminality creates a frame within which clients can experiment with the familiar categories of culture – isolating their elements and recombining them in a variety of patterns and unprecedented combinations (Turner 1967, 1974, 1982). Transformation often occurs in the liminal realm as the internal structures of clients' identities are dissolved and surrendered, and new ones are constellated (Alexander 1991; Stein and Stein 1987). It is a place where expectations are challenged, unspeakable subjects discussed, and new roles tested. In the process, clients are not only attaining a new status, role, or identity in relation to their social systems, but there is also a change of being itself, an ontological passage (Carson 1997). Coaches can help clients to integrate energies they have split off into unhealthy dualities that represent conflicting cultural norms and narratives. In doing so, coaches touch on what Jung (1964: 35) described as the 'transcendent function' in which a hybrid inclusive of, yet beyond the original dualism is discovered and enacted.

I saw this in coaching a project management team whose members seemed entrenched in what I came to see as a parent-child dynamic with the leadership team to which they reported. I was initially caught up in the same dynamic as I shuttled back and forth coaching the two teams in a multi-million dollar project. I colluded with the system to a degree, operating as a 'wise uncle' or 'eldest son' who would intercede on their behalf. Once I moved out of my own denial, defenses and minimization, I intervened with the management team, mirrored the dynamic that I had observed and my role in it, helped them to reconfigure their function and identity as a team, and change how they communicated with the leaders. We worked through the binds and sense of powerlessness they felt to help them define and enact a role as 'adults'. They were able to have a significant impact on both the leadership team and the project as a result of following Gandhi's famous maxim to 'be the changes they wanted to see'.

As the coach, I took a large step forward in being to handle cultural complexity within myself as I sorted through the cultural narratives that had shaped my original role with them and how the internalizing framing of my role changed through this work with them. In general, coaches can use this transcendent dynamic to help clients move out of polarized fixations (and

the resulting behavioral ruts) and create openings to renegotiate identity, power, and choice in their lives (Drake 2005). We see here the value of bringing into the foreground the often submerged and conflicted cultural narratives that have shaped the client's identity in order to create a new relationship among them and story about them. As English observed, 'Third space is where we negotiate identity and become neither this nor that but our own' (English 2002: 109).

So, what would Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity reveal if we focused more explicitly on the intrapersonal dimensions – the ways in which a person's identity and stories evolve as her relationships with the larger cultural narratives mature? I have mapped the six stages of his model onto a traditional rites of passage framework in which the 'self' as it is currently constructed and presented (*persona*) is contrasted with the construct of the 'other' as it is projected onto others or introjected from others (*shadow*). At the earliest level of development (Denial), the client is far away from any recognition of the 'other' either outside or inside themselves. It is in these early stages that the 'other' becomes the reified 'Other' and identity is dependent on maintaining this separation. The arrows trace the path through the six stages as the person passes through an in-between space and into the ethnorelative stages. Working in the 'third space', clients can see beyond the dualities and the accompanying narrative patterns, as they have internalized them, to reconcile and integrate them in a more generative fashion.

The following case illustrates the journey of one client as he moved through each of these stages within himself around some key issues in his life. While there was clearly more work to be done, he left coaching a changed man; he had reconciled some conflicting stories within himself about who he and others thought he should be. I make no claim for his movement in terms of his intercultural sensitivity in relation to others – though I observed changes there – but I can attest to changes in terms of his sensitivity within himself and the results of doing so.

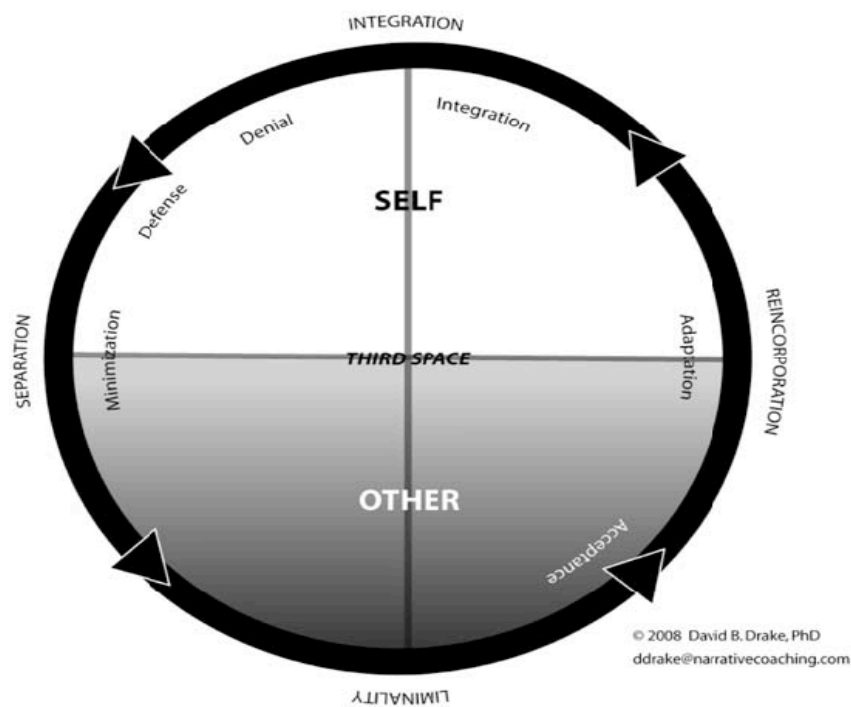


Figure 4.1 An interpersonal and intercultural rite of passage model

In doing so I undoubtedly streamline the nuances of his character. It does not do him full justice, but it enables me to articulate some important points using the intrapersonal and intercultural models.

Denial

In the first session, Don, a department manager for a mid-sized city, talked about the union, his team, the HR director, the mayor and the city council as the sources of the problems he was experiencing. Even as he expressed his interest in being coached, he seemed more interested in complaining about everyone else. He seemed inclined to stay in denial through isolation in overwork and some aggression when people didn't live up to his high standards. He was unable to see at first that (a) much was wrong at all and (b) that there were any other views of the world than his own. What contributed to an opening beyond lots of deep listening was to ask him to talk about some of the other characters in his stories. It was here that he mentioned his family for the first time and created an initial foundation for what was to become a pivotal part of our work together. It was also the one topic about which he was willing to show even the slightest hint of a feeling.

Defense

Over the next couple of weeks we coupled more coaching with opportunities to walk around and talk with people – on my own and with him. Some of the challenges he faced with his family began to surface as I followed my hunch that this was an important vehicle for change. As the perspectives of others began to creep their way into his stories and his awareness in our work together, the denial began to be unsustainable. However, he still saw the world very much as a 'lone ranger' positioned paradoxically in service to others and against the others. As he slowly allowed himself to become aware of his tendencies to work at the exclusion of everything else and admit the consequences of this pattern for his team, his employees and himself, he became more open to the possibility that there were other ways of working. A big part of this shift for clients, as it was for Don, is the recognition of the consequences of one's choices. Defenses kick in to buffer us from full consciousness of this recognition; coaching helped Don slowly release the need to defend himself.

Minimization

At first he didn't think all this fuss was that big a deal. He passed the problems off as the same as others in his position were facing in the city. Three actions on my part seemed to help him shake out of his trance and become aware of his 'competing commitments' (Kegan and Lahey 2001) and move through his 'refusal strategies' (Bennett and Hammer 1998). One was attention to his health. I chose to focus on homework assignments around eating as a way for him to become much more conscious of his actions during the day and to eat in ways that were much healthier. These simple tasks became significant eye-openers for him as he realized how out of touch he truly was with himself and others. Two, I began to gather formal and informal 360-degree feedback for Don. When I presented the findings with him he began to realize that others (a) cared about him and (b) thought that his issues were more significant than he had allowed himself to see. Third, it became apparent that more direct and heartfelt action might be necessary. At one point in the conversation when the timing felt right, I leaned across his desk, looked him straight in the eye, and said, 'If you don't change your

work habits SOON, you will end up dying long before your time . . . and that feels like a great loss to me'. At this point the threshold was breached and we began a very different caliber of conversation.

Acceptance

He acknowledged the way that others saw him in his current state and began to make some adjustments in his work habits such as remembering to eat three meals and taking a walk over his lunch break. Like most everything else he did, he did it without fanfare. We began to examine his stories about his role as a leader, a boss, a husband, a father, a son, and a person. In doing so, we didn't throw out any of them for the sake of the others; instead, I worked with him on his internal conflicts so he could establish a different sensitivity and relationship among them. For example, he was obsessive about work in order to avoid, in both consciousness and behavior, dealing with his difficult family situations. As he grew in his respect for himself, he began to admit the costs of trying to appease too many people in his immediate and extended family and he made some hard choices in confronting them as a prelude to renegotiating those relationships. The weight that lifted from him in doing so was palpable. He no longer had to force the 'other' in them or in himself to remain cut off from how he operated each day. As a result, he started to do more 'management by walking around' instead of commanding from his office. His expectations were still high but they were at least *his* now – and not a result of the expectations others had placed on him about how he was supposed to be for them.

Adaptation

By learning to deal with these issues more effectively, he freed himself to adopt a healthier middle way that included a balanced approach to work. The complaints about others had diminished significantly as he continued to focus on his own health, well-being and leadership. While he retained some rough edges, morale went up while his weight and stress went down. He began to shift his perceptions, communication and behaviors to match what his department actually needed from him in a time of rising requirements and shrinking budgets. He had sorted out all but the hardest choice *vis-à-vis* his family but he had come to a greater sense of peace about the latter for now. At work, there were a variety of responses to the shifts he was making. Some people seemed to have difficulty adjusting and they continued trying to act the old stories back into existence. A lot of my work at this stage was to help Don solidify and stabilize his gains in order to sustain the change. As part of that process, I did some work with his leadership team and a couple of key contributors to help Don be successful. My contract ran out at this time but it seemed like Don was ready to take it from there.

Integration

I learned some months later from the human resources director that Don had repeatedly talked about the coaching work as a turning point in his life. He had decided to take early retirement – now that he had his health and life back – and move to another city to be closer to his young adult children. The director said I would have been proud of the big smile he had on his face as he walked out of the door after nearly thirty years in the same department. I've lost track of him since then but trust that he has found the integration he had been looking for

in our work. It had been a lot of work, but he had made it to the other side and back. He had completed this rite of passage.

CONCLUSION

Passed beyond the pairs...
For he that is freed from the pairs
Is easily freed from conflict.

(Bhagavad Gita)

We tell stories to find out who we were, who we are, and who we are becoming. These stories are formed out of material from larger narratives that existed before we were born and will continue on in some form after we die. The work of coaching is, in part, to help clients make adjustments in their relationship to the primal human drives for continuity *and* change, love *and* liberation, individuation *and* belonging. While none are mutually exclusive and, in fact enrich the other, tensions often emerge when these drives are undefined, undifferentiated, and/or 'unintegrated' within a person. When that is the case, the client is less able to handle the cultural and narrative complexities in their environment and in themselves. The result is a client who is less agile, less resilient, and less productive as they remain captive to the plot lines of others and to the tensions they create.

It is my contention that the development of intercultural sensitivity in relating to others mirrors the development of sensitivity around the cultures within ourselves as seen through the stories we tell. As Earley and Mosakowski remind us, the people who are 'socially the most successful among their peers often have the greatest difficulty making sense of, and being accepted by, cultural strangers' (Earley and Mosakowski 2004: 140). The rites of passage model is so useful in coaching because it supports people to let go of their attachments and defenses around their current story of themselves and others in order to befriend the strangers within themselves. By guiding clients through this process, particularly attending to the liminal phase, coaches can help clients reframe their understanding of and relation to the cultural narratives that once defined them. As a result, clients are actually more able to see the 'Other' and develop a healthier relationship to the projected and introjected characteristics as needed for their own development.

Clients' stories provide valuable material for coaches. Rather than focus on what the story means, coaches should ask: what does this story do? This was one of Freud's strategies: he considered not just what the client said but also what the client was doing with, and through, her story (Sarup 1996). As I've demonstrated in an earlier work (Drake 2008), stories have seven primary functions, each of which is useful to understand in coaching clients in support of their intercultural and identity development. They are: (1) claim and navigate our formal and informal memberships; (2) establish and sustain social identities; (3) discern influential cultural/ contextual norms; (4) observe ourselves from other vantage points; (5) negotiate our identity performances in key environments; (6) test and rehearse new selves; (7) situate ourselves in a meaningful larger narrative. It is important for coaches to understand these functions as they listen to their clients' stories and actively engage with them.

Among the narrative skills that are useful in working with client stories along these lines are:

- 1 Understand change and development as taking place at the boundaries/borders in clients' narratives and identity and in the intermediate realms (Schwartz-Salant 1998)

between and beyond the coach–client dyad. This will involve better abilities to track ‘markers’ (Strauss 1997: 14) in coaching conversations indicative of, and openings to, the liminal boundaries in clients’ stories. These can be seen as points where a narrator is on the edge of entering new (and often unknown and/or unconscious) territory in her narration and approaching a new aspect of her identity;

- 2 Develop a more critical stance on the stories within coaching conversations. This means looking at personal narratives for both coaches and clients in terms of their cultures’ dominant narratives. It also entails recognizing that not all narratives share a similar status; some exist, highly devalued, within society’s rifts and margins (McLaren 1993). If coaches want to support clients to change, they must be more conscious of the larger narratives in which their clients’ identities are situated. Coaches must be willing to ask questions such as: ‘Who decides what are the normative narratives against which client stories should be measured?’ and ‘What stories are not allowed to be lived or told – by coaches and clients?’; and
- 3 Develop a greater respect for the needs of the whole person in coaching and a greater ability to move into liminal and third spaces with client. This requires coaches to be able to stay with clients during the hard work of narrative reconstruction and, in particular, to remain aware of behaviors on their part which perpetuate dualistic thinking and undermine the use of third spaces for their development (Drake 2005). A big part of this process is to balance the transactional, behavioral focus on intercultural relations with a transformational, intrapersonal focus on intercultural identity.

In the end, these narrative skills will help coaches be more effective with clients in facing increasingly complex cultural demands and maintaining a coherent narrative and sense of identity in the process. As we saw with Rebecca, Don and the others, the stories clients tell in coaching are a powerful tool in helping them to move through the six stages in developing greater intercultural sensitivity and integration at an intrapersonal level. Our role in the process is to be stewards and midwives who help clients bring new, more integrated, stories to life.

Note

1 Client names and some case details have been changed to preserve anonymity.

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