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Worldview, The Concept of

Naji Abi-Hashem
Clinical & Cultural Psychologist,
Seattle, Washington, USA
Beirut, Lebanon

Introduction

Worldview is the outlook one has about life. It is a paradigm by which the individual or the group interprets reality and acts upon life. It is how we normally view and conceptualize the world. Worldview can be a personal-subjective endeavor or a communal-collective enterprise, depending on the social context and particular subculture – whether it is predominantly individualistic or collectivistic. Worldviews represent our pragmatic framework on existence and shapes our beliefs, attitudes, actions, and philosophies. Basically, the term worldview is used in a broad sense to entail a collection of impressions, perceptions, and phenomena and has roots in anthropology, psychology, sociology, morality, spirituality, mortality, and cosmology.

The scope and nature of worldviews can be general or specific, reflecting a global perspective (transnational-multicultural) or local heritage (indigenous-monocultural). Worldviews can be informed by religious thoughts, teachings, and practices, by art-music, creativity, and humanities, or by statistical findings and empirical persuasions. In addition, their orientation can be Eastern or Western, heterogeneous or homogeneous, simple or complex, naturalistic-atheistic or theological-theistic, etc. In most cases, a worldview is multidimensional and has a combination of insights, observations, spheres, impressions, and realities, which constantly overlap and interact with each other (cf. Ham 2006; Van Dijk and Withagen 2014; Walker et al. 2010; Webb 2009).

At times, worldviews clash significantly and create further tensions and divisions. Depending on the people involved in sorting out their similarities or differences, such existential discussion can result in a mutual understanding and bridge building or in stereotyping and complete disconnecting. Therefore, the underlying sociocultural heritages and religious-ideological beliefs can be either *complimentary* – enhancing reconciliation and collaboration, or *contradictory* – polarizing relationships and alienating coexistence.

Unfolding Assumptions

The concept of worldview has its roots in the old German word *weltanschauung* which means a system of thought or an extensive ideology. It refers to how people perceive and conceive the world around them. Somehow, worldviews have a specific quality, which characterizes a particular group living in a certain space in time. It is how people interpret time, history, nature, society, self,

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others, and the universe (Toelken 1996; Van Dijk and Withagen 2014). Virtually, no one can claim a totally accurate, comprehensive, and holistic grasp that summarizes all timeless realities.

Furthermore, a worldview refers to people's set of broad assumptions and ways of life. It represents a cluster of approaches and an underlying description of how things fit all together and how they construct the temporal and historical existence. It has a metaphysical dimension as it tries to incorporate the natural and supernatural and the seen and unseen. Schlitz et al. (2011) affirmed that worldviews operate at both the individual and the collective levels. Therefore, while each person or group has their own life-story, they evolve and change over time, along with their genetic tendencies, geographic-regional location, intrinsic-extrinsic experiences, and interaction with the environment, all of which give rise to *worldview* and continue to mold their philosophical perspectives. Consequently, the way we all view ourselves often shapes the way we act upon the world and, in return, the way we act upon the world shapes the way we view ourselves. This process has a significant impact on how we classify, categorize, and relate to others as well.

A certain worldview may be constructed of several integrated components, terminologies, experiences, and schemes. According to Koltko-Rivera (2000, 2004), it is a set of assumptions about the physical and social realities, which may have a powerful effect on cognitions and behaviors. Although there is no one comprehensive definition or psychological dimension of worldview, it is possible to construct a collated model. The author also distinguished between *worldviews* and *schemas* and promoted an integrated theory relating worldview as a concept and as a function to personality traits, motivation, affect, cognition, behavior, and culture. Inspirations from positive and peace psychologies can also be utilized to modify the personal or communal worldview.

Psychosocial Framework

Johnson et al. (2011) tried to formulate a psychology of worldview as an integrative framework for the study of culture and religion. They proposed six aspects or dimensions, each influenced by national and religious cultures (p. 137): ontology, existential beliefs; epistemology, what can be known and how one should reason; semiotics, language and symbols used to describe the world; axiology, proximate goals, values, and morals; teleology, ultimate goals and the afterlife consequences of action; and praxeology, proscriptions and prescriptions for behavior. The authors suggested giving more attention to the concept of worldview in order to help remedy the lack of awareness to the following (p. 137): (a) mutual influences of the different kinds of cultures, including social, national, and spiritual; (b) transnational religious groups; (c) nonreligious belief systems; and (d) psychological predictors of cultural conflicts.

Most people are not aware of their own worldview(s) until they meet another person or party who holds a different set of assumptions and mentality. Suddenly, they become aware of the similarities and differences between them. Therefore, worldviews can readily complement or contradict each other. They can provide a more nuanced understanding of religious-cultural phenomena and provide an ideal platform for constructive interdisciplinary, interfaith, and international dialogues (cf. Johnson et al. 2011; Entwistle 2015). In addition, Tillich (1959) eloquently described the dynamic relationship between culture and religion. He explained that culture is considered as the form of religion and religion as the substance of culture. Tillich refused any dualism between the two constructs and asserted that every religious act is culturally formed in the most intimate movement of the soul. Virtually, many definitions of culture are inseparable from the definitions of religion. Geertz (1973) put it in a very basic term by underlining that religion is simply a cultural system.

According to Kuhn (1996), the notion of worldview is related to a variety of ideas and

structures. One of the key concepts is *paradigm*, which is a shared collection of beliefs and approaches to problem-solving. Paradigms can be shared on an inter- and intragroup level (tribes, families, teams, researchers, etc.). Kuhn emphasized the priority of paradigm patterns and argued that paradigm shifts do occur, even though rarely. This happens when an existing paradigm is replaced by another and when an existing worldview is replaced by another. An example would be when a person or a group shifts from an Aristotelian to a Newtonian scholarly position. Kuhn cautioned against overuse of the term "paradigm shift" and emphasized that it does not occur too frequently. However, if and when this occurs, it is not usually in a sudden, exhaustive, or conclusive manner. All mental maps, social structures, and religious cultures dynamically overlap with each other since by nature, they are not totally exclusive (Chopra and Mlodinow 2012; DeWitt 2010; Smart 1999). Other social thinkers argue that a complete alteration of belief systems, mental operations, and fundamental paradigms is practically possible. Examples are drawn from the dynamics of establishing sects and cults, street gangs, radical religious conversions, fanatic political parties, indoctrination of minds, and extremist-militant groups (cf. Abi-Hashem 2007, 2012a, b).

Multilayered Configurations

There are several levels or layers to a worldview, but many social analysts recognize three main ones: philosophical-theological, scientific-empirical, and social-cultural. The first layer is informed by people's outlook on life, religious beliefs, existential reflections, and spiritual practices. The second is informed by people's exposure to natural science, physics, mathematics, and technology. And the third is informed by people's cultural background, generational experience, and societal heritage (Abi-Hashem 2013a, b; Smart 1999). These three spheres are certainly interconnected and interdependent. They mutually and reciprocally inform and feed into each other.

The process of discovering and understanding a different worldview can actually be a cross-cultural experience. Such encounter requires empathy skills and cultural sensitivity as well as a wide range of creative imagination. Culture and interactive communication are closely related. Inter- and intra-cultural communications are essential for people to relate meaningfully and to understand each other adequately, especially in our diverse and transnational world. These skills are vital for the counseling and therapeutic services and for all helping, teaching, and caregiving professions (Abi-Hashem 2013a; Abi-Hashem and Peterson 2013; Chung and Bemak 2002; Ham 2006; Gerstein et al. 2009; Govere and Govere 2016; Perdersen 2009).

Currently, the process of globalization and digital revolution are changing human relationships and local subcultures. Identity formation and social bonding are taking different meaning. Communities and nations alike are experiencing the stress of change and are struggling with the constant psychosocial and existential adaptation. The level of stress and the speed of transformation are noticeably overwhelming individuals and families across all boundaries. Digital technology is contributing to the growing complexities of our times. In addition, people are trying hard to cope with the overload of information, the exceeding multiple choices, and the acceleration of change (Heylighen 2000). These new developments and fast moving changes are altering everyone's sense of self (intrapsychically), relationship with others (interpersonally), place of value and role in life (socioculturally), and broader view of reality and meaning-making (existentially).

Thus, the worldviews of individuals, groups, and societies are being constantly revised, redefined, and reconstructed over time. Some people enlarge and modify their perceptions or cultural mappings to include other diverse people, who are different from themselves, thus broadening their own views and attitudes toward a balanced realism. Others embrace total changes and enjoy riding the waves of acceleration with no safety guards, so they end up with less boundaries or foundational roots, and therefore find themselves adopting extreme modernism, secularism,

and materialism. Yet others tend to react with strict caution and employ some rigid measures of self-protection and consequently move toward severe traditionalism, emotional inflexibility, mental legalism, and relational isolationism.

Implications for Caregiving

Educators, therapists, healthcare providers, pastors-clergy, and professional caregivers often deal with people from various ethnic, racial, spiritual, and national backgrounds. In today's world, cultures and mentalities are mixing more than ever. Globalization is defusing geographical boundaries, and the digital invasion is reshaping human identities and relationships. Professional helpers are on the front lines in processing and dealing with multiculturalism and transnationalism. Consequently, there is an increased need for better psychosocial awareness and effective cross-cultural skills in the therapeutic professions, when encountering and working with the different other (s). All that begins with the gradual understanding of people's value orientation, religious faith, social norms, traditional customs, relational styles, political preferences, and cultural heritage.

Certainly, there is a clinical implication for discovering the worldview of the people with whom we are working. According to Ham (2006), "A worldview is an unspoken but inevitable outcome of the socialization process, yet it is all but invisible: A worldview is a set of conceptual lenses through which to view the surrounding environment without 'seeing' itself" (p. 479). Worldview affects every aspect of the relating, training, and counseling activity. In addition, it is equally important for the caregiver/clinician to discover his or her own worldview and compare it with that of the client, worker, or student. Essentially, worldviews shape the meaning of health and illness, the expectations of treatment and therapy, the attitude toward life and existence, and the role of helper and caregiver (Abi-Hashem 2013a; Gerstein et al. 2009; Govere and Govere 2016; Ham 2006; Ibrahim and Heuer 2016).

Conclusion

Developing a healthy worldview is actually an art and a challenge, which is eventually much needed in our ever-changing societies and world cultures today. It is a skill that requires time and effort on our part as individuals, group, or communities, and an intentional willingness to periodically check our actions and perceptions against the emerging realities surrounding us. Maintaining a balanced worldview is also an ability to carefully integrate new trends, assimilate old truths and heritages with modern approaches and discoveries, remain true to oneself, realize that the *total* is larger than the *sum* of the parts, and learn from experienced mentors and wise sages along the way. Finally, a healthy worldview ultimately reflects a seasoned personality, a rich journey, and an attitude marked by humility, thoughtfulness, and maturity on the part of individuals and communities alike.

See Also

- ▶ Allah, The Concept of
- ▶ Atheism
- ▶ Collective Unconscious
- ▶ Communal and Personal Identity
- ▶ Cultural Psychology
- ▶ Existentialism
- ▶ Fate
- ▶ Globalization
- ▶ Immortality
- ▶ Individualism: Collectivism
- ▶ Meaning of Human Existence
- ▶ Phenomenological Psychology
- ▶ Psychology of Religion
- ▶ Psychospiritual
- ▶ Purpose in Life
- ▶ Religious Fundamentalism and Terrorism
- ▶ Selfobject

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