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CONCLUSIONS



Multicultural Psychotherapy

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CONCLUSIONS

Everyone has the potential to have a multicultural orientation to life. However, sociocultural environments can impose barriers that make it difficult if not impossible to achieve the cognitive and cultural flexibility essential to such an orientation.

The barriers to multicultural development fall into three major categories: pressures to conform, prejudice, and oppression. In general, these barriers are reflected in the dynamics of families, of institutions, and of societies. They reflect the messages, whether direct or indirect, passed on to individuals about the desirability of diversity versus ethnocentrism. Through these, the individual learns to view diversity as either positive or negative.

Different individuals are subjected to different barriers to multicultural development and to varying degrees of permeability of these barriers. The cases of Imelda and Harold best exemplify pressures to conform as barriers to multicultural development. Both

were subjected to strong pressures to adopt cultural and cognitive styles that were different from those they preferred. They were encouraged by parents or parental figures to reject their unique selves and to conform to an imposed ideal.

The prevalence of certain mythical ideals imposed by all societies, institutions, and families on their members (Brink, 1984) pressures most individuals to conform. These ideals vary from society to society; the following are examples of mainstream American mythical ideals:

- Blonde, blue-eyed, white-skinned people are smarter than those who have darker complexions.
- Men are better at business, science, and math than are women.
- Engineers, physicians, and lawyers are smarter than those who work in the social sciences or the arts.
- Tall and thin is better than short and stocky.

Everyone has had some type of mythical ideal imposed on them. The result has been feelings of inferiority, because it is impossible to fit these ideals perfectly. Beyond limiting the individual, these mythical ideals prevent members of society from recognizing the value of the

diversity around them and from benefiting from it.

Prejudice was the most important barrier in the experiences of Tara and Raul. Because Tara is a woman and an African American and because Raul is multiracial and suffers from a learning disability, they were made to feel unwanted and were given the message that they did not belong. Rose experienced prejudice because of her impaired vision.

Those who hold the power in society and in institutions deny equality of status to people who are different from themselves through prejudicial practices. The message is: "You can only achieve the 'goodies' of society if you are like us. You can't be like us if your phenotype, gender, values, or sexual orientation are not the same as ours."

Prejudice is destructive to the development of a positive politics of diversity (Castaneda, 1984), because it keeps members of different groups separated from each other and because it promotes the idea that certain groups and cultures are superior to others.

Oppression is more destructive than the other two barriers. Not

only are people pressured to be what they are not and kept from fully participating in society, but they are also exploited for being who they are as individuals (A. Ramirez, 1972).

In Harold's case the barrier was his father's refusal to accept his interest in the arts and his preferred personality style. His father's attempt to force him to be like his older brother was oppressive to Harold. For Imelda, the barrier was her school peers who would cheer her exploits on the basketball court but refuse to include her in their circle of friends, because they felt she did not meet their definition of femininity.

A society that hopes to understand, to nurture, and to value its diversity has to be able to identify and eliminate the barriers preventing multicultural development in its institutions and in its members. How can social scientists and educators encourage the development of positive politics of diversity in families, institutions, and societies? Three approaches may move toward that direction.

First is the development of social science paradigms and research and intervention techniques that are truly based on individual and

cultural differences. For example, Ramirez (1998) proposed a theory, along with a set of research strategies and intervention approaches, which is based on the principles of multiculturalism.

In addition, the rise of a positive politics of diversity is reflected in the development of community psychology intervention programs in developing countries. These programs focus on the empowerment of heretofore disenfranchised peoples. During the 1970s and 1980s, the writings, as well as the research and development work, of psychologists in Latin America and the Caribbean showed a trend toward empowerment programs.

For example, Almeida and Sanchez (1985) describe how an interdisciplinary team of social scientists worked in three rural communities in the state of Puebla in Mexico. The team's objective was to provide assistance in community development without producing radical changes in the native culture of the region. Part of the program involved the development of a marketing program whereby local artisans and farmers could sell their products without losing profits to middlemen. Other members of the team worked with school personnel to upgrade curriculum and instruction techniques. The programs

actively encouraged parental participation in the education of their children.

Venezuelan psychologist Jose Miguel Salazar (1981) advocated the development of a social psychology reflecting the historical and political realities of the cultures of Latin America. Another Venezuelan psychologist, Maritza Montero (1979), called for the development of a community psychology with its primary goal of assisting people in the development of their communities.

An overview of social psychology in Latin America (Marin, 1975) indicated that developments there at that time represented a good amalgamation of scientific objectivity with a definite commitment to the solution of social problems. He concluded that applied social psychology was the most important area of concentration in Latin American psychology.

The third approach is the development of multicultural educational programs. These programs address the goal of teaching children and adolescents to recognize, to respect, and to learn from individual and cultural differences in order to prevent the

development of negative stereotypes and vulnerability to coercion by the mythical ideals of society.

Ramirez and Castaneda (1974) and Cox, Macaulay, and Ramirez (1982) described a cognitive flex multicultural program that evolved from the perspective of Latinos, based on the philosophy of cultural democracy. Hale- Benson (1986) described a multicultural educational program specifically relevant to African Americans. Darder (1991) advocated combining cultural democracy with the ideas of Paulo Freire (1970) and Henry Giroux (1981) to develop a critical bicultural framework for bicultural education.

The challenge for social scientists and educators in encouraging the evolution of a positive politics of diversity is great. It will be difficult to eradicate notions of superiority and inferiority in the perception of individuals, groups, cultures, and nations. Equally challenging is overcoming negative stereotypes and suspicions peoples hold regarding others. However, the rewards of a positive politics of diversity are high. It is multicultural orientations to life that can lead to the fullest development of the personality, and to peace and cooperation in the world.

For the people whose lives we have followed in this book, a multicultural perspective and a flexible orientation toward life were the keys to self-acceptance, to harmony in interpersonal relationships, to greater awareness of how the environment was affecting their lives, and to the further development of their potential. A multicultural orientation to life gave Imelda, Harold, Raul, Tara, Alex, Rose, and Tony the empowerment they needed to increase control over their own destinies. It also furnished the tools they needed to help the people and societal institutions in their environments to achieve greater multicultural awareness. For Wanda and Javier, as well as for members of the Rosales family, and for Camila, Robert, Tracy, and Lavis, multicultural perspectives reduced conflict and contributed to increased awareness and understanding of individual and cultural differences.

Imelda became more assertive and outgoing. Because of this she was able to develop a circle of friends and mentors who served as a support system to her and who were models and sources of increased knowledge as she strove to develop flexibility in her values and cognitive styles. As she began to work closely with the student council at her school, her efforts in that organization gave students a greater

voice in making changes in the curriculum and teaching approaches, as well as in counseling services offered to female athletes. Her relationships with her parents and grandparents improved as she learned to recognize and match their values and behaviors more effectively. They, in turn, became more supportive of her interests and more responsive to her requests for treatment equal to that given to her half sister.

Harold's relationship with his family improved dramatically. He and his wife developed a satisfying and productive partnership in the art gallery they had opened. The family's mutual interests in photography and travel brought them together as they had never been before. After Harold recognized that he had been relating to his own children in much the same way as his father had related to him, he became more involved in their interests and activities while at the same time giving them the opportunity to develop their own styles.

Harold was also successful in convincing his business partners of the need to develop a new graphic-art software product line. This revitalized his interest in the firm. He felt more enthusiastic about playing the role of charismatic leader and about developing a sense of

community in the firm. For the first time since he was a student in middle school, Harold returned to the piano. This renewed interest in music helped him to reestablish his relationship with his mother. His efforts at initiating the Silicon Valley support groups for technical professionals who were experiencing symptoms of burnout was also a source of great satisfaction for him.

Harold was happy to have been able to make peace with his father and to establish a meaningful relationship with him. His ability to match his father's style eventually led his father to empathize with him and to apologize for trying to transform him into the image of his older brother.

Raul was able to establish healthier intimate relationships. In these relationships he focused more on match and mismatch in cultural and cognitive styles and less on physical appearance. He made amends to his siblings and became more accepting of his parents, resenting them less for the past. He renewed his visits to his uncle who lived on the reservation and increased his participation in the reservation's tribal and spiritual life.

Tara, after scriptwriting and role-playing with the therapist, confronted her parents and brothers regarding their pressures for her to reunite with her former boyfriend and to marry. Her family eventually came to respect her decision to remain a single parent for the time being. She developed a good adjustment in her new job and continued participating in sports with her coworkers. Eventually she gained financial independence from her parents. She felt that, because of this independence, her family came to accept her as an adult who could make her own decisions and be a responsible parent to Tamisha.

Alex enlisted the help of his favorite aunt and uncle, and, after scriptwriting and role-playing exercises, they were able to tell his parents about Alex's sexual orientation and about his new academic goal. He was accepted for a master's program in social work at a university in another state and completed the program successfully. When Alex last contacted the therapist, he was enrolled in a Ph.D. program and had been awarded a four-year fellowship.

After careful consideration and after repeatedly being turned down in requests to her spouse that they participate in either family or couples counseling, Rose decided to file for divorce. She and her

children moved to a city three hundred miles from her hometown. She found a part-time job and enrolled in a bilingual special education college program, planning to earn a bachelor's degree and teaching credentials so that she could teach blind and visually impaired children.

Tony learned to be more assertive and tenacious in his dealings with public service agencies and institutions. He became less embarrassed and more self-disclosing about his memory impairments; whenever he would encounter a longtime acquaintance in the community, he would say that he was sorry but, although he recognized the person's face, his memory loss kept him from remembering names and past events. His communication with his children improved, and he became less authoritative in his relationship with them. When Tony was last in contact with the therapist, he reported a good relationship with a woman with whom he was living.

These individuals and families were able to develop the flexibility of personality and worldview they needed to function effectively in a diverse society. They were able to effect changes in their

environments and to assist others who, like themselves, felt mismatched to situations and to people around them.

These clients had a profound effect on me as the therapist: Through them I learned that the definition of pluralism and culture I had been using when I first began my work in multicultural therapy was too limiting and static. I learned that the "differentness" experience is not limited to members of cultural, ethnic, and gender minority groups. Most important, I learned to look beyond the superficial, the external characteristics of differentness, to look for the internal expressions and signs of uniqueness. As a therapist, I learned to examine my value system and my preferred cognitive style and to understand how these affect the clients with whom I work.

As a researcher, I rediscovered the value of intensive study of the individual case. I came to understand that the life history is the path to arriving at understandings about the meaning of life in individuals and families.

The experiences with my clients reminded me of the words of my colleague and mentor, Al Castaneda: "You can learn something from

everyone because every person has, through their life experiences, discovered some truths about the meaning of life." These words are an effective statement of the principal mission of multicultural counseling and psychotherapy.

It is my fervent hope that through this book readers will arrive at a greater appreciation of their uniqueness as well as the uniqueness of others. I hope they will appreciate the diversity in themselves and in society as an opportunity for greater self-knowledge and growth.

GLOSSARY

Attitude of Acceptance a nonjudgmental, positive, accepting atmosphere devoid of conformity or assimilation pressures. In therapy this enables the client to express his unique, or true, self.

Bicognitive Orientation to Life Scale (BOLS) a personality inventory composed of items that reflect the degree of preference for field sensitive or field independent cognitive styles in different life domains. Assesses cognitive flex by determining the degree of agreement with items that reflect preference for either field independent or field sensitive cognitive styles. A balance or bicognitive score is also attained.

Bicognitive Style a cognitive style characterized by an ability to shuttle between the field sensitive and field independent styles. Choice of style at any given time is dependent on task demands or situational characteristics. For example, if a situation demands competition, the bicognitive person usually responds in a field independent manner. On the other hand, if the situation demands cooperation, the bicognitive individual behaves in a field sensitive manner. People with a bicognitive orientation also may use elements of both the field sensitive and field independent styles to develop new composite or combination styles.

Bicultural/Multicultural Style a cultural style characterized by an ability to shuttle between the traditional and modern cultural styles. Choice of style at any given time is dependent on task demands or

situational characteristics.

Change Agent a person who actively seeks to encourage changes in the social environment in order to ensure acceptance and sensitivity to all cultural and cognitive styles.

Cognitive and Cultural Flex Theory (or Theory of Multicultural Development) the theory that people who are exposed to socialization agents with positive attitudes toward diversity, participate in diversity challenges, interact with members of diverse cultures, maintain an openness and commitment to learning from others, and are more likely to develop multicultural patterns of behavior and a multicultural identity. People who have developed a multicultural identity have a strong, lifelong commitment to their groups of origin as well as to other cultures and groups.

Cognitive Style a style of personality defined by the ways in which people communicate and relate to others; the rewards that motivate them; their problem-solving approaches; and the manner in which they teach, socialize with, supervise, and counsel others. There are three types of cognitive styles: field sensitive, field independent, and bicognitive.

Cultural and Cognitive Flex (Personality Flex) the ability to shuttle between field sensitive and field independent cognitive styles and modern and traditional cultural styles.

Cultural Democracy (1) a philosophy that recognizes that the way a person communicates, relates to others, seeks support and recognition from his environment, and thinks and learns are products of the

value system of his home and community; (2) refers to the moral rights of an individual to be different while at the same time be a responsible member of a larger society.

Cultural Style an orientation to life related to or based on traditional and modern values or a combination of these values. Assessed by the Traditionalism- Modernism Inventory and the Family Attitude Scale.

Diversity Challenges a catalyst for multicultural development such as cultural and linguistic immersion experiences, new tasks, and activities that encourage the process of synthesis and amalgamation of personality building blocks learned from different cultures, institutions, and peoples.

Empathy Projection the process whereby a person tries to understand the point of view and feelings of others whose cognitive styles and values are different from his own.

False Self the identity developed as a result of attempts to conform to cultural and cognitive styles of authority figures, institutions, and majority cultures.

Family Attitude Scale a personality inventory to assess a person's degree of agreement with traditional and modern family values.

Field Independent a cognitive style characterized by independent, abstract, discovery-oriented learning preferences, an introverted lifestyle, a preference for verbal communication styles, and an emphasis on personal achievement and material gain. People with a preferred field independent orientation are likely to be analytical and

inductive and focus on detail. They also tend to be nondirective and discovery-oriented in childrearing, and in teaching, supervising, and counseling others.

Field Sensitive a cognitive style characterized by interactive personalized learning preferences, an extroverted lifestyle, a preference for nonverbal communication styles, a need to help others. People with a preferred field sensitive orientation tend to be more global, integrative, and deductive in their thinking and problem-solving styles, and they tend to be directive in childrearing, and in teaching, supervising, and counseling others.

Life History Interview focuses on the development and expressions of cultural flex during different periods of life: infancy and early childhood, early school and elementary school years, middle school years, high school years, and post- high school period. The life history interview also focuses on the extent of an individual's actual participation in both traditional and modern families, cultures, groups, and institutions. The life history identifies the type of cultural flex by examining the degree to which a person has been able to combine modern and traditional values and belief systems to arrive at multicultural values and worldviews.

Match and/or Mismatch refers to person-environment fit with respect to the degree of harmony or lack of harmony between cultural/cognitive styles and environmental demands. Two types are cognitive mismatch and cultural mismatch.

Mismatch Shock an extreme case of the mismatch syndrome.

Mismatch Syndrome a lack of harmony between a person's preferred

cultural and/or cognitive styles and environmental demands. This occurs when people feel at odds to the important people and institutions in their lives. They feel alone, hopeless, and misunderstood; they may exhibit a number of symptoms, including self-rejection, depression, negativity, rigidity, and attempts to escape reality.

Model a person whom the client admires and who is dominant in the cultural/ cognitive styles the client wants to learn.

Modeling the process whereby people learn unfamiliar cognitive and cultural styles through imitation and observation of others, through reading and through travel.

Modern a value orientation that emphasizes and encourages separation from family and community early in life. It is typical of urban communities, liberal religions, and of North American and Western European cultures. People who are identified as having a modern value orientation tend to emphasize science when explaining the mysteries of life; they have a strong individualistic orientation; they tend to deemphasize differences in gender and age roles; and they emphasize egalitarianism in childrearing practices.

Multicultural Ambassador a multicultural person who promotes the development of multicultural environments which encourage understanding (multicultural education) and cooperation among different people and groups.

Multicultural Educator a multicultural person who educates others about the advantages of cultural and cognitive diversity and

multicultural orientations to life.

Multicultural Experience Inventory (MEI) an inventory that assesses historical and current experiences. It focuses on personal history and behavior in three areas: demographic and linguistic, socialization history, and degree of multicultural participation in the past as well as the present. The MEI consists of two types of items: historical (reflecting historical development pattern—HDP) and contemporary functioning (reflecting contemporary multicultural identity—CMI). Includes items that deal with degree of comfort and acceptance.

Multicultural Model of Psychotherapy a model of therapy that emphasizes multicultural development by maximizing the client's ability to flex between cultural and cognitive styles when faced with different environmental demands and development of a multicultural orientation to life characterized by serving as a multicultural educator, ambassador, and peer counselor.

Multicultural Peer Counselor a multicultural person who provides emotional support and facilitates change and development of empowerment in those of his or her peers who are suffering from mismatch.

Multicultural Person-Environment Fit Worldview a worldview that is based on the following assumptions: (1) There are no inferior people, cultures, or groups in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, economics, religion, physical disabilities, region, sexual orientation, or language; (2) problems of maladjustment are the result of mismatch between people, or between people and their

environments rather than of inferior people or groups; (3) every individual, group, or culture has positive contributions to make to personality development and to a healthy adjustment to life; (4) people who are willing to learn from others and from groups and cultures different from their own acquire multicultural building blocks (coping techniques and perspectives), which are the basis of multicultural personality development and multicultural identity; (5) synthesis and amalgamation of personality building blocks acquired from different people, groups, and cultures occur when the person with multicultural potential works toward the goals of understanding and cooperation among diverse groups and peoples in a pluralistic society; and (6) synthesis and amalgamation of personality building blocks from diverse origins contribute to the development of multicultural personality development and psychological adjustment in a pluralistic society.

Preferred Cultural and Cognitive Styles Observation Checklists

observational rating scales that list field sensitive and field independent behaviors in five domains: communications; interpersonal relationships; motivation; teaching, parenting, supervising, and counseling; learning and problem solving. The checklists can be used to assess modern and traditional cultural styles and values.

Preferred Styles the dominant cultural and cognitive styles of a person.

Scriptwriting a therapy strategy used, along with role-playing, to promote cultural and cognitive flex development by matching the cultural or cognitive styles of a person or institution.

Theory of Multicultural Development see Cognitive and Cultural Flex Theory.

Traditional a value orientation that emphasizes close ties to family and community throughout life. It is typical of rural communities, conservative religions, and of minority and developing cultures. People identified as having traditional value orientations tend to have a spiritual orientation toward life, are strongly identified with their families and communities of origin, usually believe in separation of gender and age roles; and typically endorse strict approaches to child-rearing.

Traditionalism-Modernism Inventory (TMI) a personality inventory that assesses the degree of identification with traditional and modern values and belief systems. The instrument yields scores indicating the degree of agreement with items reflecting traditionalism or modernism. The degree of flex can be determined by examining the differences between the total traditionalism and total modernism scores (balance score) as well as by looking at the degree of agreement with the traditional and modern items across the different domains of life: gender-role definition; family identity; sense of community; family identification; time orientation; age status; importance of tradition; subservience to convention and authority; spirituality and religion; attitudes toward issues such as sexual orientation, the death penalty, the role of federal government in education, benefits to single mothers and noncitizens, and abortion. Type of flex can be determined by examining the degree of flex within each domain.

Tyranny of the Shoulds an individual's perception of the self based on what

she believes others expect the person to be like. The pressure to conform could contribute to psychological maladjustment—the individual develops a false self based on the "shoulds" of parents, important others, and societal institutions.

Unique Self a person's preferred cultural and cognitive styles before he has been subjected to the pressures of conformity.

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