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**CULTURAL AND COGNITIVE
MATCH AND MISMATCH IN
PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT**



Multicultural Psychotherapy

**CULTURAL AND COGNITIVE MATCH AND
MISMATCH IN PSYCHOLOGICAL
ADJUSTMENT**

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CULTURAL AND COGNITIVE MATCH AND MISMATCH IN PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT

The flex theory of personality looks to the levels of match and mismatch between individuals and their environments to explain problems of maladjustment. In the flex theory of personality, match and mismatch are assessed in two domains: cognitive and cultural.

Both of these domains have several subdomains, or areas. It is possible for a person to be well matched in certain subdomains while mismatched in others. A person can, for example, be well matched to peers in communication and interpersonal relationship styles but, at the same time, be mismatched in learning and problem-solving styles. A couple can be well matched in personal relations styles, yet mismatched with respect to communication styles. Similarly, members of a family can be matched in motivational styles, but mismatched in their teaching and learning styles. In fact, some members of the same family can be matched with respect to cultural and/or cognitive styles, yet mismatched to other members, resulting in alliances that are manifested in family conflicts and in the lack of effective communication. Frequently, one parent and one or more of the children who are well matched develop alliances against the other parent and mismatched children (see

Chapter 12).

Examining some of the case histories introduced in Chapter 1 in more detail will help to demonstrate how the flex theory of personality can be used to assess the degree of psychological adjustment in degrees of match and mismatch in the cognitive and cultural domains of a person's life.

CASE HISTORIES

The specific focus of this chapter is on trying to understand the problems of adjustment that developed for Imelda, Harold, Raul, Tara, and Alex. The following information was obtained from life history interviews done with the individual clients. (The life history approach is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.) Although the principal focus of this book is on cultural and cognitive factors of maladjustment, general clinical considerations for each case are included to show that these were also of vital importance in the assessment of the clients.

Imelda

Background. Imelda was born and reared in a rural community located in the U.S.-Mexico border region of Texas. She was an only child. Her father, an accountant, and her mother, a homemaker, divorced when she was two years old. Following the divorce, Imelda's mother moved to a city in the northern

part of Texas. Imelda and her father moved in with his parents.

When Imelda was twelve years old, her father remarried and the three of them moved to a house located next door to Imelda's grandparents. Imelda was shuttled between the two residences. Two years later, when she was fourteen, Imelda's half sister Claudia was born. As her half sister grew, Imelda began having conflicts with her stepmother. Imelda claimed that Claudia was spoiled and that the child would do things to aggravate her. Whenever she called the child's transgressions to the attention of her stepmother, Imelda and she would argue. Imelda's perception was that her father would side with his wife against her. Gradually, Imelda became increasingly alienated from her parents and started to spend more and more time at her grandparents' home.

Imelda's grades plunged after her father remarried. Her teachers reported that she acted out in class. Her only solace was sports and her relationship with Robert, her boyfriend. Her interests in sports, however, caused conflicts with her grandparents and most of her peers who felt that her activities were not proper for a girl. Her relationship with her boyfriend had started when she was fifteen. Her boyfriend's parents did not approve of the relationship because of Imelda's interest in sports and because she came from a broken home.

Imelda and Robert got along well because they both felt alienated from their teachers and their parents. However, after much pressure from his parents, Robert succumbed to their wishes and reluctantly broke off the relationship with Imelda. This precipitated Imelda's attempt on her life.

Imelda was socialized in a very traditional Mexican American community. After the divorce of her parents, she was socialized primarily by her grandparents, who strongly identified with traditional Hispanic culture. This culture encourages separation of gender roles and strict obedience to parents and other authority figures. This type of cultural and familial setting tends to encourage the development of a preferred field sensitive cognitive style in female children.

Imelda's father's chosen profession—accounting—requires analytical thinking and great attention to detail. This indicates that his preferred cognitive style is probably field independent, or bicognitive with a preference for field independence. In the elementary grades, Imelda's teachers had used field sensitive teaching styles and had encouraged cooperation and a sense of community. When she began junior high school, however, Imelda encountered a decided shift in teaching style toward field independence. This style had a pronounced emphasis on individual competition and on analytical thinking.

Imelda's relationships with her father, stepmother, and teachers were fraught with conflict. Her relationship with her natural mother seemed to be better than that with her father and stepmother, but the two rarely visited or telephoned each other. As Imelda became more involved in sports, her relationship with her grandparents began to deteriorate. Her only supportive relationship was with Robert, who, like Imelda, seemed to be preferred field sensitive in cognitive style. Robert was also supportive of Imelda's interest in sports. Imelda often said, "Everyone but Robert seems to be against me. They're always criticizing me and trying to force me to live like they do. Why don't they accept me as I am instead of trying to change me?"

Symptoms. Imelda exhibited alienation from parents, teachers, and grandparents. She invested most of her time and energy in her relationship with her boyfriend at the expense of peer relationships.

General Clinical Considerations. Imelda should be evaluated for appropriateness of antidepressant medication. It should also be considered that her attempt on her life places her at risk for future suicidal behavior.

Analysis of Cultural Style Mismatch

Imelda was modernistic in terms of gender roles as related to sports and in challenging the authority of teachers. She was traditional with respect to cultural loyalty and religion.

Imelda's parents and grandparents and Robert's parents were traditional with respect to gender roles. Imelda's teachers were traditional with respect to expecting subservience to authority.

Analysis of Cognitive Style Mismatch

Imelda was preferred field sensitive style.

Her grandparents were more field sensitive and less bicognitive than Imelda was.

Her father's and teachers' styles were preferred field independent.

Harold

Background. Harold was born and reared in an upper middle-class, suburban community in the San Francisco Bay Area. Frank, a brother who was two years older than Harold, died when Harold was sixteen. Harold's father was an engineer and an executive with a major computer electronics firm in the Silicon Valley. Harold's mother taught elementary school.

Throughout childhood and early adolescence, Harold developed strong interests in art and music. He was closer to his mother during these years, and she encouraged his interests, providing solace from the constant frustration Harold felt because his father seemed to prefer his older brother.

Harold's father and Frank both had strong interests in sports, fishing, building model airplanes, and working with audio and television equipment. Harold had done his best to impress his father with his achievements in photography, painting, and music; his father did not seem to appreciate these

things.

When Frank died in an automobile accident, Harold renewed his efforts to win his father's love and approval by trying to fill the gap Frank had left. Harold abandoned his old interests, becoming more involved in sports and working harder at doing well in math and science. Harold's shift in interests did bring him closer to his father, but he never succeeded in developing the close relationship he longed for. To compensate for this, he vowed to prove to his father that he could be successful in business, something his father had always wanted for Frank.

When Harold went to college, he majored in engineering and computer science. When he was at the university, he met Jan, whom he later married. Jan had been reared in a mid-sized southern city. Her large family had close ties. Jan's major in college was art history. Through her, Harold could maintain a vicarious interest in art and music. While in college Harold also met the two friends who would later become his partners. The three of them worked at the same computer and electronics firm as Harold's father did for four years before they decided to establish a software company of their own.

Because the startup of the new company was so demanding of Harold's time and energy, he made an informal agreement with Jan: If she would agree to give up her career temporarily and do most of the parenting of their two

children, he would assume most of the family responsibilities once the company was on solid footing. Jan could then return to her career with Harold's full support. When Harold sought therapy, four years had passed since he had made his pact with Jan, and by then the company was successful, with two branch offices in Southern California.

Socialization and Life Experiences. Harold was socialized in a modernistic community, but his home included both traditional and modern values. Harold's father was traditional in terms of rigidly defined gender roles, yet Harold's mother had a career, albeit one that was gender appropriate in terms of traditional cultural values.

Harold's father had a preferred field independent cognitive style, as reflected by his interests in electronics and engineering. His mother, a music major in college and an elementary school music and art teacher, had a preferred field sensitive cognitive style. Thus, Harold was exposed to both cognitive styles and to both major cultural value systems.

His early interests in art and music attested to his preference for field sensitivity. It was not until his brother's death that he turned to field independent pursuits. His preference for field sensitivity and traditional values were again manifested in choosing Jan for his wife. It was also fortunate for Harold that he could express and develop some of his interests

in field sensitive areas in his work through the development of computer graphics programs and through his leadership of the mid-level managers and workers.

Pattern of Adjustment. Harold's relationship with his father had remained strained. Harold felt that his many efforts to win his father's love and approval had ended in failure. A major rift developed in their relationship when Harold and his partners established their company. Harold thought his father would lend him money for the company and was devastated when, at the last minute, his father changed his mind. Although Harold maintained contact with his mother, he cut off all communication with his father.

Over the years, Harold and Jan lost the intimacy they had enjoyed in their early years of marriage. The long hours and many weekends that Harold devoted to the company, as well as the extensive traveling he had to do as part of his work, made him feel like he was an outsider at home. As Harold said, "It got to the point that I had nothing to say to Jan or the kids. When I came home from work, I would just fix a drink and sit in front of the TV until it was time for supper. After supper, I would go back to work and come in after they had all gone to bed."

He rarely did anything with his children. At the time he came to therapy, Jan told him that if the situation did not change soon and that if he did not live

up to his side of the bargain, she would divorce him. This shock brought Harold to the realization that his behavior with his own children and wife was not unlike that of his father when Harold was young—he, too, was acting indifferent toward his family.

Harold's business partners were becoming unhappy with Harold's interest in moving the company in the direction of computer graphics. They were also noticing signs of burnout in Harold—the charisma and leadership so important to employee loyalty and morale were disappearing as Harold retreated more and more into his own world.

Symptoms. Harold felt lonely, disoriented, and misunderstood. He was shocked by the ultimatum from Jan and by the realization that he had been acting just like his father toward his family. Harold was concerned with the fact that he had lost interest in technical software programs, the mainstay of the company's business over the years. He did not understand why the only things to excite him now were developments in computer graphics.

He also was concerned because he felt more and more alienated from his partners, who were not supportive of his interests. As a result, it was difficult for him to be enthusiastic about the future of the company. Thus, Harold was not investing as much time as he had in maintaining the sense of community within the company. As he said at his first therapy session, "My

world is falling apart, and I don't know where to go from here."

Analysis of Cultural Style Mismatch

Harold's preferred cultural orientation was modernistic-urban, but he did acquire some traditional values from his parents, particularly in the gender role and interpersonal domains.

Jan's cultural orientation was semi-urban, traditional.

Harold's partners had all been reared in cities on the East Coast of the United States, so they were more modern-urban in their orientations than was Harold.

Analysis of Cognitive Style Mismatch

Harold's preferred cognitive style had been field sensitive in childhood and early adolescence, as demonstrated by his interests in art and music. In late adolescence and early adulthood, he had rejected this style and switched to the field independent style (through computer science and engineering) to please his father and to fill the void left by Frank's death. At home with Jan and the children, Harold was behaving as though he were preferred field independent, modeling his father's behavior. At work he had made use of his suppressed field sensitive style to provide leadership and a sense of community in maintaining a high level of employee satisfaction in the company. His interests in computer graphics were beginning to show that he was "field sensitive in field independent clothing." Actually Harold had the potential to be a balanced bicognitive. At the time he came to therapy, he was in a state of mismatch

Harold's father's preferred field independent cognitive style, particularly in the interpersonal domain, mismatched Harold's although Harold did try to match his father in the areas of work and career.

Jan's preferred style was probably field sensitive, and in recent years as Harold moved more in the direction of field independence, her style became increasingly mismatched to his.

Harold's partners' preferred styles were probably field independent, and he became increasingly mismatched to them as his field sensitive interests resurfaced.

in different aspects of his life: He needed to be field sensitive in his behavior at home and to recognize his resurgent field sensitive interests in the domain of work and career.

Raul

Background. Raul, a multiracial (African American, Latino, and Native American) man, was born and reared in a medium-sized city in the southwestern United States. The city was predominantly white with pronounced segregation when Raul was growing up. Even though there was a minority of Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans in the community, there were very few multiracial people.

Raul was the oldest of five children in an intact but dysfunctional family. He recalled that his father was a heavy drinker and had multiple extramarital affairs during Raul's childhood and adolescence. The family lived in government-subsidized housing; Raul was rejected by his peers because of his multiracial appearance. He was often told, "You are not one of us." He often had to fight to gain respect and acceptance. Eventually, through his prowess in fighting, he gained recognition as a leader.

In early adolescence Raul's life changed dramatically when his father's absence from home and gambling losses contributed to serious financial problems for the family. His mother held down two jobs, so Raul was forced

into the role of authority figure for his younger siblings. He felt resentful because he was not able to spend time with his peers in the neighborhood and in school extracurricular activities when his interest in art was just developing. His resentment contributed to his becoming a strict disciplinarian; he was often demanding and harsh in the treatment of his siblings.

When Raul began to date in his middle and high school years he encountered rejection from white women. Although the schools he attended were integrated, both parents and school authorities discouraged cross-racial dating. Another major blow to Raul's self-esteem centered around his poor academic performance. He was diagnosed as having learning disabilities and placed in special education classes. By this time his father had developed health problems and had stopped gambling and discontinued his extramarital affairs. With the increased stability of the family, his parents felt that Raul would do better academically if he were to live temporarily with relatives who resided in a rural community located in the U.S.-Mexico border region.

Raul remembered this time with mixed emotions—his grades improved and his artistic interests were much influenced by Mexican, Native American, and Mestizo art. At the same time, he experienced rejection from relatives and Latino peers who chided him for his inability to speak Spanish fluently and for "acting like an Anglo."

Shortly after he graduated from high school and returned to his family, he was drafted and sent to Vietnam. In the military, he found acceptance from Vietnamese women and their families and he explored Asian and African art styles. However, Raul's combat experiences led to serious posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. When Raul was discharged from the service, he returned to his hometown and went to work for a print shop. He set up a studio at his home and continued to work on his art. On a limited basis, he began to show and sell some of his work—Raul was only willing to show it to his coworkers, family members, and best friends.

The general atmosphere concerning racial/ethnic relations in his home community reawakened the feelings of rejection he had experienced as a child and an adolescent. Even though he dated African American, Native American, Asian, and Latino women, he was most attracted to Caucasian women with blond hair and blue eyes. When he came to therapy, Raul reported that all of his relationships with Caucasian women had failed. He felt discouraged, confused, misunderstood, and used by the women he had developed intimate relationships with.

Analysis of Cultural Style Mismatch

Raul was bicultural (Native American and Latino traditional values and Caucasian modern values). He was predominantly traditional with respect to spirituality, sense of community, and

Raul's mother was mismatched to Raul in the area of human relational and communication styles.

family identification while preferring modern in gender-role definition and subservience to convention and authority.

Raul's father was bicultural. He mismatched Raul in the area of learning style.

The traditional value system he identified with originated in the Native American culture of his father's family (he was close to his paternal grandparents), who took Raul to powwows and family gatherings. His traditional values also had their origin in the Latino belief systems, particularly in the area of the religion of his parents and his maternal external family. His extended family on his mother's side also introduced Raul to the rural traditional values of African-Latino culture (their origins were in the state of Veracruz in Mexico). Raul's modern values had originated in his contacts with Caucasian male peers during adolescence, Caucasian coworkers and friends in the military as well as from urban African American, Filipino, Asian, Latino, and multiracial peers he met in the military.

Raul's Caucasian girlfriends were mismatched to him on communication and interpersonal relationship styles (the principal reason for the failure of his relationships).

His siblings were mismatched to him because of his preferred field sensitive style (he was directive with them).

Symptoms. Raul's self-esteem was low. He blamed himself for the failure of his relationships. He felt misunderstood and was having to contend with feelings of rejection and lack of acceptance that had their origin in his childhood and adolescence. He was also suffering from symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder related to his combat experiences in Vietnam. Further, he was confused about his multiracial-multicultural identity, particularly because he was back in his hometown where multicultural and

multiracial relations are not encouraged.

General Clinical Considerations. Raul should be evaluated for appropriateness of medication for amelioration of depressive and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. He also needs to be evaluated for his addictive tendencies and encouraged to return to Alcoholics Anonymous (in which he has participated in the past). The therapist also needs to evaluate his risk for suicide.

Tara

Background. Tara, a twenty-six-year-old African American woman, was born and reared in a semi-urban middle-sized community in a state in the southwestern United States. The community was predominantly white and Latino with African Americans and Filipino Americans in the minority. Tara is the youngest of three children—she has two brothers. Her mother is a hospital administrator and her father is a farmer who owns his own farm.

Tara's mother was often absent from the family home when Tara was young because of the demands of varying work shifts and because of her promotions, first to supervisor of nurses and then to hospital administrator.

In elementary and middle school and for the first three years of high school, Tara was self-conscious because of her physical appearance—she was

much taller than most of her peers and was slight of build. She remembered that in those days her physique gave her a gangly and "string bean" appearance. She also recalled that she was uncoordinated when she tried to play sports or participate in gymnastics or dance.

At home Tara did her best to fit in with her brothers and her father when her mother was at work. She remembered wanting to be included, even if it meant doing what her father referred to as "men's work." She also remembered spending a lot of time alone making up imaginary friends and taking care of pets and farm animals.

In the last year of high school, Tara's physical appearance changed dramatically, and she was considered by the boys at school to be attractive. She also became more coordinated and was successful as a basketball player. In therapy, however, she still felt negatively about herself. She said, "I still felt that I was awkward and unattractive."

She left home to attend a community college, which was located about two hundred miles from her hometown. For the first time she found herself in a sizable African American community. She began to date and became pregnant during the second semester of her freshman year. Tara was surprised and ashamed about her pregnancy. She did not feel close to the biological father of her child and her academic performance suffered. She

eventually left college in the middle of the second semester of her first year and returned to her parents' home. Her parents felt that, because of Tara's pregnancy and leaving college, they had lost face in the traditional community where they lived and in which they were well respected. Tara remembered tension in her family during her final months of pregnancy, but this finally eased when her child, Tamisha, was born. Two years after the birth, Tara moved about three hundred miles from her hometown to a city where she continued her college education and found part-time employment. She received some economic support from her parents.

Within a few months of her arrival in the new community, Tara established a relationship with a boyfriend who related well to Tamisha and who assumed the role of father to the child. Tara, however, had mixed feelings about the relationship. She described this man as controlling, jealous, and intrusive of her privacy. She recalled that he would hide a voice-activated tape recorder in the apartment to monitor who had visited or phoned when he was not there. He would go through her personal papers when Tara was away from the apartment. At times he would show up unannounced at her workplace or at her college. Eventually she broke up with him, and he moved out of their apartment. Nevertheless, he continued to call her and harass her in other ways—he would drive by her apartment and show up unannounced at her child's day-care center to try to urge Tamisha to convince Tara to take him back.

A few months after the breakup with her boyfriend, Tara began to date an African American man who had immigrated from the Bahamas. He was a college graduate and owned his own business. Tara developed intense feelings for him, but he kept giving her signals that he was not interested in a committed relationship. Tara's mother had met her new boyfriend and liked him so much that she kept pressuring Tara to marry and settle down for the good of Tamisha. Tara was very torn and confused. She was still being harassed by her former boyfriend and the behavior of her new boyfriend reawakened the feelings of rejection she had experienced as a child and an adolescent. Her academic performance began to suffer again and she lost her job; she was completely dependent on her parents economically.

Symptoms. Tara was confused and angry that she had to be economically dependent on her parents: "My mother tries to run my life." She was frustrated by the mixed signals she was getting from her new boyfriend and was concerned about the harassment from the old one. She felt pressured to be a good mother to her daughter, to be successful in college, and to find a new job.

General Clinical Considerations. Tara should be assessed for the need for medication. She also needs to learn stress-reduction techniques in order to manage stress more effectively.

Analysis of Cultural Style Mismatch

Tara developed as a bicultural (African American traditional and bicultural values and Caucasian modern values) although her traditional and modern styles remained separate (almost like two separate personalities) much the same as those of her mother.

Tara's father had traditional values, particularly in the area of gender-role definition.

Tara was mismatched to her mother in the area of time orientation and subservience to authority. Tara felt that her mother did not give her the quality time she needed and that she was trying to tell her how to live her life.

The mismatch with her professors was largely in the areas of her preference for professors who could take an interest in her personally—she felt she lacked a sense of community in the first college she attended. Mismatch with peers was with respect to her traditional values when it came to identification with the family.

Having been reared in urban settings, most of her peers emphasized separation from the family.

Tara mismatched her former boyfriend with respect to her modernistic orientation toward gender-role definition; he did not approve of her friendships with male and female coworkers and of her active role in community sports.

She was mismatched to her parents and siblings on the subservience to convention and authority domain; she felt comfortable being a single parent, while they insisted that she should

marry so her child could have a father.

Analysis of Cognitive Style Mismatch

Tara's cognitive style was mixed. She was preferred field sensitive in the motivational domain (she preferred social rewards), but she was dominant field independent in learning/problem-solving style (she enjoyed finding new ways to do things and to solve problems in her work).

Tara's father was predominantly field sensitive. Tara felt partly mismatched to him on communication style.

Tara's mother was very field independent in the area of human relations style, so they were mismatched. Tara was mismatched to her mother with respect to motivational style (her mother kept pressuring her to be more concerned with financial success). She was mismatched to her boyfriends because of the strong field sensitive teaching-parenting-supervisory-counseling style they used with Tamisha.

Tara's predominant learning style was field sensitive.

Tara felt mismatched to the teaching style of most of the professors at her previous college, leading to her sense of frustration. She felt her present college was a better match to her preferred learning style.

Alex

Background. Alex is a twenty-one-year-old college student of Vietnamese descent who was born in Vietnam and immigrated with his family to the United States at the end of the war. His family eventually settled in a large city in the southwestern United States. During the first six years of his life, Alex

was reared primarily by his grandparents who lived in the family home. Alex's parents had been largely absent from the home during the family's years in Vietnam—his mother was a businessowner and his father was an officer in the South Vietnamese military. Alex remembered the time in Vietnam as a very happy period in his life—he attended a Catholic private school and his classmates were Vietnamese and children of American embassy personnel.

Coming to the United States resulted in a complete change in lifestyle and a severe culture shock for Alex. His parents, grandparents, and siblings moved into a small house. He had a very difficult time learning English when he first attended school in the United States. He found that the few words of English he had learned in Vietnam were not adequate to properly communicate with his teachers and peers in the public school he attended. He struggled academically and was placed in a "slow group" for a year.

He also felt that most of his Anglo peers were prejudiced against Vietnamese and used racial slurs. He also found the teaching styles of his new teachers very different from that of the French Catholic nuns in the school he had attended in Vietnam. It shocked Alex to see the emotional decline of his grandparents. His mother was not able to find work immediately, so she stayed at home and became a homemaker for the first time. She assumed a dominant role because Alex's grandmother appeared to be depressed and

confused in the new culture. His grandfather stayed in his room most of the time.

While at middle school and high school Alex began to develop a bicultural orientation to life. His English language skills had improved considerably, and he continued to speak Vietnamese at home and in the predominately Vietnamese neighborhood where he lived. However, it was at this time that he began to feel different for other reasons—he felt sexually attracted to males rather than to females. This was confusing to him, and he did not have anyone to discuss it with.

Going to a large state university was a turning point in Alex's life—he was finally able to understand and accept his sexual orientation. He befriended others who were Asian and gay. Together they formed a support group to focus on family issues. However, he developed feelings of differentness in another area—his major in college. Alex's parents had encouraged him to become a physician since he was very young, so he came to the university as a premed major. He remembered feeling confused during his first two semesters of college—he felt positive about being homosexual for the first time, but he felt very mismatched regarding the major he had chosen.

Alex had been very traditional prior to his family's immigration to the United States, because of the early influence of his grandparents and of the Catholic school he had attended. Like Tara, his two cultural styles remained separate. After coming to the United States, his mother, who was multicultural, became more influential in his life, so he developed an identity with modern values. In middle school and in high school, he developed close friendships with Caucasian, African American, and Latino peers who were also more modern. By the time he went to the university, Alex was multicultural, but remained preferred traditional in his values orientation.

Alex was mismatched to his grandparents and parents on subservience to convention and authority and on sexual orientation.

As Alex became more modern, he became more mismatched to his grandparents, who remained very traditional.

Alex was mismatched with his heterosexual Asian peers on acceptance of homosexuality. He was mismatched to the professors of his premed courses and to the other premed students because of his tendency to be more cooperative than individually competitive.

He was mismatched to most of his gay peers, particularly those who were not Asian, Latino, Native American, or African American because of his strong feelings of family identity and loyalty.

Analysis of Cognitive Style Mismatch

Alex's behavior reflected a mixed cognitive style; he was dominant field independent in communication style and preferred field sensitive in learning/problem-solving style. He reported that he never felt comfortable in the required natural science and math courses he took when he was a premed student. He felt his learning/problem-solving style was better matched to the requirements of social science courses and the social work courses that he was taking.

Both of Alex's parents were bicognitive, preferred field independent. His father had an engineering degree and his mother a degree in accounting.

Alex's preferred field independent communication style was mismatched to the strong field sensitive style of his peers in the Vietnamese American Student Association. His preference for a field sensitive learning/ problem-solving style was mismatched to the orientation of most of the premed

courses he had taken and also to the teaching style of the professors in the statistics- research design course he was having problems with.

He struggled in all the required premed science courses, and he could not relate well to most of the other premed students. During this time he took an elective course in social work and felt as if he had found his true calling. He did volunteer work at a facility near campus that offered counseling and support services to college students who were gay. He decided to change his major but did so without consulting his parents. His sexual orientation and his academic interests were secrets to his family.

Symptoms. Alex felt guilty about withholding information from his parents. He suffered from insomnia and from an approach-avoidance conflict regarding visits to his family. He was uncomfortable about "living a double life."

General Clinical Considerations. Alex should be evaluated for symptoms of adjustment disorder, mixed type, and consideration should be given to possible need for medication.

SUMMARY

The flex theory of personality helps to identify those areas of mismatch in the cultural and cognitive domains of life that are related to barriers in the

development of multicultural personality styles. The analysis of the areas of mismatch suggests goals for psychotherapy. Cultural and cognitive styles mismatch analyses for Imelda, Harold, Raul, Tara, and Alex help to pinpoint the origins of the feelings of differentness and of the symptoms of the mismatch syndrome. Furthermore, the concepts of the flex theory of personality help to identify those areas of mismatch in the cultural and cognitive domains of life that interfere with the development of multicultural personality processes and lifestyles. The therapeutic approach of choice for adjustment problems associated with mismatch is multicultural psychotherapy.

The focus of multicultural psychotherapy is on the development of personality flex and multicultural orientations to life. In addition, clients gain an awareness of how they have experienced mismatch shock and suffered from the feelings of differentness. Clients are empowered to change the environment, helping to create a multicultural society, sensitive to diversity and oriented toward peace and cooperation.

The flex theory of personality was applied to information obtained through the life histories of Imelda, Harold, Tara, Raul, and Alex in order to understand how the mismatch syndrome developed in these clients. The life histories also helped to identify general clinical considerations as well as some of the goals to be addressed in multicultural therapy.

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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