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# PREFACE



Multicultural Psychotherapy

# **PREFACE**

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e-Book 2017 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *Multicultural Psychotherapy: An Approach to Individual and Cultural Differences* by Manuel Ramirez

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## PREFACE

This book represents the culmination of my thirty-two years of experience in research and work in public education and in university, community, and clinical settings. My work has centered on the experiences of "the different"—those who, in some way, do not fit the preferred or idealized images of society; those who, because of their uniqueness, are subject to prejudice, oppression, and pressures to conform.

I began my work in this area thinking that only members of ethnic and racial minority groups suffered from the marginality syndrome related to feeling different. Through research and intervention work with people from all ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as with people of varying physical abilities and sexual orientations, I have come to realize that the mismatch syndrome is common to people who live and work in diverse societies.

As I developed and implemented educational programs in schools; taught courses; lectured at different colleges and universities; and did psychological assessments, counseling, and psychotherapy with clients, I came to realize that no one fits society's ideal image perfectly.

For some, the lack of fit is due to external features—skin color, accent, physical appearance, or impairments. For others, the lack of fit is due to "invisible" characteristics—values, thinking style, emotional or expressive style, philosophy of life, or sexual orientation.

My work with the different gradually led me to the realization that traditional approaches to education, counseling, psychotherapy, and personality assessment are not adequate or appropriate for intervention; a new theoretical and research perspective, a new model of personality change was in order.

This new edition, like the one that preceded it, explores a model of counseling and psychotherapy based on the multicultural perspective that evolved from my work with the different. This book introduces five new case studies to supplement the five presented in the earlier edition. I have expanded the case studies to include an African American single mother, an Asian American young adult man, a Latina who has impaired vision and is a single mother, an elderly Latino who is retired and disabled, a multiracial male, an intact Latino family, and a single-parent family. This edition includes a chapter on family therapy and adds insights into counseling and/ or therapy for mixed-race couples. I've also added a new chapter on how the multicultural model can be useful in meeting guidelines introduced through managed care.

The principal objectives of the model are to help people who feel different and alienated accept and understand their uniqueness. The model also seeks to enhance cultural values and to develop flexibility in cognitive styles. Although its primary focus is on ethnic/racial minorities, the model is appropriate for members of any group that differs from the societal ideal. I have varied gender pronouns in referring to clients and mental health professionals. No gender preference is intended.

The ultimate goal of this model is the development of a multicultural orientation to life. This orientation has the following five ideal characteristics:

1. The first is a striving for the maximum development of the personality, a striving for self-actualization. People with a multicultural orientation toward life are motivated to develop as many aspects of their personality as they can. Multicultural people recognize that interacting with diversity stimulates the evolution of underdeveloped areas of the personality. The multiculturally oriented recognize that stereotypes and notions of societal, cultural, and personality superiority or inferiority can block experience and learning filters and prevent them from valuing and respecting people, groups, and cultures who might otherwise act as teachers and catalysts for development. Culturally flexible people are willing to take diversity challenges, to risk situations totally unlike previous experiences. Such individuals learn by observation, by listening, and by exposure to

different worldviews and life philosophies.

2. A second characteristic of multicultural orientation is adaptability to different environmental situations. Regardless of how work, educational, or other environmental conditions change, multicultural people are motivated to adapt and to flex in order to be effective.

3. Third, the person with a multicultural orientation enjoys the challenges of leadership roles in diverse groups. That person evolves innovative solutions for resolving conflict in groups with diverse memberships (Ramirez, 1998; Garza et al., 1982).

4. Another characteristic is the multicultural person's commitment to changing groups, cultures, and nations to guarantee social justice for all members and citizens. Such a person has a goal of helping to develop a perfect society. Although multicultural people may feel more comfortable in their native groups, they develop perspectives as world citizens (Ramirez, 1998). Adler (1974) observed that multicultural people can transcend families, groups, and cultures; that is, they have the ability to step back in order to take an objective look at the groups with which they are familiar and in which they have participated to determine what has to be modified to ensure social justice and equality for all members.

5. The final characteristic of people with a multicultural orientation to

life is the motivation to get the most out of life. Multicultural people seek exposure to as much diversity in life as possible. They enjoy traveling and living in different environments such as different countries, different regions of the same country, or different areas within their communities. They enjoy knowing different people, whether in person or through biographies and autobiographies.

But how does the multicultural model fit into the overall psychotherapy and counseling picture? Although the words "therapist" and "therapy" are used throughout the book, the model is relevant to all mental health practitioners. Do counselors and therapists need to make major changes in the way they do therapy in order to be effective as multicultural therapists? The techniques and strategies of the multicultural model reflect an eclecticism, ranging from the intensive study of the client's life history and the use of insight, to the employment of cognitive behavioral as well as humanistic and cross-cultural approaches. Multicultural therapy, however, is unique in its theoretical concepts and goals for change.

The multicultural model of psychotherapy and counseling is eclectic with respect to techniques and strategies. The model borrows a focus on collecting a detailed life history from the dynamic approaches and theories of therapy. This life history helps the therapist understand the client's past and develop insight for making the unconscious conscious through interpretation.



From the humanistic perspective, the multicultural model borrows unconditional positive regard, that is, uncritical acceptance, to allow a client to accept her unique self. Also from the humanistic approach comes the use of phenomenology, or the therapist's attempt to see the world through the eyes of the client.

From the cognitive and behavioristic approaches and theories, the multicultural model incorporates an emphasis on reducing stress, on establishing behavioral goals, and on emphasizing homework and the client's active participation through role-playing. Finally, from the ethnopsychological, cross-cultural, and community schools, the multicultural model has adopted an emphasis on values and on the assumption that each cultural and environmental set of circumstances or conditions produces a unique set of coping techniques, or cognitive styles, crucial to personality development and functioning.

The theoretical base of the multicultural model of psychotherapy and counseling had its origins in cross-cultural mental health and in the psychology of equality and liberation that evolved from the psychologies of ethnic groups in the United States, of the colonized, and of women. The cross-cultural emphasis emerged from the application of psychoanalytic and behavioristic theories and intervention approaches in different cultures throughout the world (Triandis and Lambert, 1980).

The goals of multicultural psychotherapy and counseling are different from those of traditional schools of personality change. The multicultural model has two categories of goals: individual and institutional, or societal, goals. Individual goals emphasize self-understanding and self-acceptance. In addition, the model encourages understanding the effects of person-environment fit on personality development and adjustment. Multicultural therapy seeks to empower the client to produce significant environmental changes. Institutional and societal goals focus on the identification and elimination of barriers to multicultural development, and on replacing those barriers with the positive politics of diversity in families, interpersonal relationships, institutions, and in society as a whole.

Multicultural therapy and counseling work toward the creation of a truly multicultural society, striving to develop a world of peace, understanding, and cooperation in which each person's individuality is respected. In this model, the diversity of society is viewed as a potential teacher and catalyst to the total development of the personality.

In today's world, all people who live and work in diverse environments and societies are prone to feeling marginalized, confused, and perhaps threatened from time to time. The demands of both cultural and cognitive flexibility in a pluralistic society can be felt in all facets of life. They are part of daily interactions in business, personal relationships, education, community

services, religion, and government. The multicultural model of psychotherapy provides a useful set of coping techniques as well as a worldview that is useful to everyone living and working in pluralistic environments.