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**THE MULTICULTURAL  
MODEL OF  
PSYCHOTHERAPY  
AND COUNSELING**



Multicultural Psychotherapy

# **THE MULTICULTURAL MODEL OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND COUNSELING**

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# THE MULTICULTURAL MODEL OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND COUNSELING

## An Overview

In the previous chapter, the principal concepts of the cognitive and cultural flex theory of personality were applied to show how Tara, Raul, Alex, Imelda, and Harold were mismatched with people and institutions in their environments and how mismatch was associated with feelings of differentness, alienation, and despair. This chapter introduces an approach to psychotherapy and counseling which evolved from the experience of treating clients who, like those in the case studies, were suffering from feeling different and from mismatch shock.

The multicultural model of psychotherapy and counseling differs from other treatment approaches in the following ways:

- It views every client as having the potential for multicultural development. It encourages the therapist to respect the client's origins as reflected in unique cultural and cognitive styles, because these are the foundation for

multicultural development and for the development of maximum potential in the personality.

- It views the therapist as also having preferred cognitive and cultural styles. It encourages the therapist to become aware of his unique cultural and cognitive styles and to learn how to flex in order to best match the unique styles of clients.
- The therapist makes use of the opportunities for multicultural growth offered by the client's immediate environment and by encouraging the client to accept that diversity. The helping professional also encourages the client to recognize and use advantages for multicultural development present in the diverse society in which the client lives.
- Clients are encouraged to become multicultural educators, peer counselors, and ambassadors. They are also encouraged to become active change agents, not only to enhance their own multicultural development, but also to help develop a society of social justice, peace, and cooperation that will be responsive and sensitive to the individual differences of all its citizens.

## **TASKS OF THE MULTICULTURAL THERAPIST**

Specifically, the multicultural therapist or counselor has seven

major tasks during therapy, as described in the following sections.

## **Matching Clients in an Atmosphere of Acceptance**

The therapist provides a nonjudgmental, positive, accepting atmosphere devoid of conformity or assimilation pressures. In this climate, clients feel free to express their uniqueness in the form of their preferred cognitive and cultural styles. This accomplishes several objectives:

- It helps clients overcome feelings of differentness and of mismatch shock, which negatively affect their adjustment and prevents openness to multicultural development.
- It allows clients to abandon the false self and to express the unique self, thus allowing the therapist to know how best to match the preferred styles of the client. This helps the client to feel validated and accepted.

The therapist continues to match the client to further eliminate the effects of the mismatch syndrome and to continue to gain the client's trust. The most important initial area of match is communication style because it is important for the client to feel totally understood by the therapist. Continued match procedures gain the trust of the client by

reducing alienation. Matching also helps in the assessment of clients' preferred styles as the false self recedes and the unique self emerges. Additionally, matching by the therapist helps to remove those barriers to learning from diversity that have kept clients from achieving their multicultural potential.

## **Making a Formal Assessment of Preferred Styles**

As a cross-check on the assessment done through observations, the therapist administers three personality inventories that assess the client's preferred cognitive and cultural styles. These inventories accomplish three goals:

1. To indicate how well behavioral observations match the client's self report of preferred styles;
2. To provide materials for discussion of important therapeutic issues; and
3. To encourage client participation in goal setting and in gaining a firsthand understanding of the unique self reflected in their preferred styles.

## **Conducting a Life History Interview**



The life history interview with the client (discussed in detail in Chapter 7) identifies a time or times in the client's life when the pressure to conform or assimilate caused a suppression of a preferred style. The life history helps to identify those people and institutions to which the client has felt most matched and mismatched. It also helps to isolate barriers to multicultural development such as Imelda's strong negative feelings toward mainstream European Americans and Tara's alienation from her parents. In addition, the life history interview helps to identify personality building blocks that can be used in multicultural development. An example is Raul's learning about other cultures by studying their artistic forms and styles and using these in his artwork. Finally, the life history interview helps to survey the resources and potential opportunities present in the client's environment that could facilitate multicultural development.

## **Making a Self-Assessment**

In multicultural therapy it is necessary for the therapist to evaluate his own preferred styles to determine areas of match and mismatch with the client, allowing the therapist to flex in order to better match the client. This self-assessment is important to determine whether the

therapist has a sufficient range of flex to provide an adequate match to the client's preferred styles. It also helps the therapist identify personal biases, prejudices, and preferences. In this way, it can be ascertained whether there are any stereotypes or negative attitudes that might interfere with establishment of rapport. Finally, self-assessment provides the therapist with an opportunity to identify those areas of cognitive and cultural styles in which he will need additional multicultural development.

## **Introducing Cognitive and Cultural Flex and the Multicultural Model**

The clients' active participation in therapy is an essential component of this model. For this reason, the therapist introduces clients to the major concepts of both the flex theory of personality and the multicultural model of psychotherapy. The clients' knowledge and awareness of these concepts enables them to monitor progress. Clients also become more invested in the success of therapy during the process of setting personal goals. In the larger scheme, clients' involvement empowers them to become agents of change. Introducing mismatch to the client's preferred cultural and cognitive styles is the

beginning of the development of cultural and cognitive flex. This introduction is done in the context of match. Clients are encouraged to participate in social situations and relationships that can foster the development of new cultural and cognitive styles.

Mismatch is practiced in the safe atmosphere of therapy through the writing of scripts and role-playing. This practice serves to develop cognitive and cultural flex as well as to encourage clients to learn how to empathize with people whose cultural and cognitive styles differ from their own. Through the use of homework assignments clients experiment with scripts in the world outside the therapy room and evaluate individual progress in these efforts. This phase continues the development of cognitive and cultural flex as well as the development of the clients' preferred styles. Further, clients develop self-confidence in interacting with people and situations that require the use of different styles.

To assess the progress of clients as they proceed through the therapy, the therapist makes ongoing observations of the client, noting progress on the Preferred Cultural and Cognitive Styles Observation Checklists (Appendices E and F). These ratings are compared to the

ones made by the therapist in the initial stages of therapy to note the degree of change.

This ongoing comparison helps the therapist determine the degree of progress on the goals established for therapy and helps clients to see how much progress they are making as therapy proceeds. The comparison also enables the therapist and client to develop new goals or to modify existing ones.

## **Assessing Progress in Flex Development**

Once the mismatch phase of therapy is well under way, the therapist assesses client progress in the different domains of cultural and cognitive styles. The data obtained from readministration of the paper-and-pencil inventories and from the observation instruments are compared to those obtained in the initial stage of therapy. These comparisons help to determine whether it will be necessary to make changes in the therapeutic plan. Feedback to the client ensures continued involvement and commitment to the goals of multicultural therapy and counseling.

## **Encouraging Clients to Become Change Agents**

Clients learn how to encourage changes in the environment to ensure the best match to their preferred styles from others and from those institutions and agencies that most affect their daily lives. Clients also learn how to become multicultural educators and peer counselors for those who are suffering from feeling different and from mismatch shock. At the same time, they learn how to become multicultural ambassadors, facilitating the development of a multicultural society.

Transforming clients into change agents empowers them to gain control over their destinies. Also, clients become more committed to multicultural-ism by helping others faced with mismatch. Working to introduce other individuals and institutions to the advantages and benefits of multicultural-ism helps to promote the development of a society of peace and cooperation, stimulating the maximum development of the individual potential of all its citizens.

## **GOALS OF MULTICULTURAL PSYCHOTHERAPY AND COUNSELING**

The multicultural model of psychotherapy and counseling has four major goals, as described in the following sections.

## **Overcoming the Mismatch Syndrome**

The first goal of multicultural therapy is to reduce alienation and feelings of helplessness and despair. As long as clients suffer from the negative effects of mismatch, they cannot learn from other people and groups who are different. They are unable to discover their unique selves and to develop that uniqueness to its fullest. A person in mismatch shock cannot take full advantage of opportunities offered by a multicultural society. Mismatch shock closes experience and learning filters, causing clients to repeat old behaviors, attitudes, and values that have led to failure in the past.

## **Recognizing and Accepting the Unique Self**

The client in mismatch shock has serious identity problems. The "tyranny of the shoulds," reflected in the conformist and assimilationist approaches of society, forces the client to reject the unique self in favor of a false self. Multicultural therapy helps clients identify the self that may have been suppressed earlier in life and to recognize how pressures from others and/or from society have forced them to try to be someone other than the unique self. This makes

clients aware of how they became victims of conformity and/or assimilation. Multicultural therapy then helps clients to accept themselves and develop to the fullest extent possible by learning how to flex cognitively and culturally.

## **Achieving Cognitive and Cultural Flex**

Once clients accept the unique self and understand how mismatch has led to alienation and unhappiness, and once they recognize the advantages offered by a multicultural society to personal development, multicultural therapy approaches proceed to help in the development of cultural and cognitive flexibility, which facilitates the development and expression of the unique self.

## **Empowering Clients to Become Change Agents, Peer Counselors, and Multicultural Ambassadors**

The multicultural model of psychotherapy teaches clients the concepts and procedures of the flex theory of personality and the multicultural model of psychotherapy so that they can create change in their environments. By encouraging people and institutions in their environments to become more sensitive to diversity, clients ensure a

better match for their unique styles as well as for the unique styles of others. Empowerment also encourages clients to become multicultural peer counselors and ambassadors for the development of a cooperative and peaceful multicultural society.

The preceding major goals are dependent on the accomplishment of a series of subgoals. The first two subgoals are (1) identifying the relationships of pressures to conform and assimilate to choice of cultural and cognitive styles; and (2) identifying possible attitudes and values associated with ethnocentrism and the development of negative stereotypes, which have prevented clients from participating in and learning from diversity. The goals and subgoals identified here can be accomplished by following the steps of multicultural psychotherapy. The therapeutic process generally consists of sixteen sessions and follow-ups. Each session focuses on specific goals, including the following:

- Helping clients recognize that they have been subject to the pressures to conform and assimilate, a product of the tyranny of the shoulds.
- Helping clients to overcome potential barriers to multicultural development. First, clients have to



become aware of forces and factors in their histories that may have resulted in closing learning-experience filters and in an adherence to rigid cognitive and cultural styles that have isolated them from diversity and have resulted in alienation. Closed learning-experience filters are usually associated with ethnocentric attitudes and with negative stereotypes of those who are different from oneself.

- Encouraging clients to try out new values, worldviews, and cognitive styles in the safe environment of match provided in the therapeutic setting and relationship. This initial experience with match helps clients to eliminate barriers that have blocked their multicultural development. It also motivates and prepares clients to participate in diversity challenges that can give them the opportunity to develop the cultural and cognitive flex essential to multicultural personality development.
- Helping clients learn the strategies and concepts of both the flex theory of personality and the multicultural model of psychotherapy. This knowledge can make them active change agents so that people and institutions around them can better match their unique styles as well as those of other citizens. The therapist also empowers clients to become multicultural educators, peer counselors, and ambassadors.

## SESSION-BY-SESSION DESCRIPTION WITH A FOCUS ON THERAPY GOALS

### Session 1

The first session lasts about ninety minutes and focuses on the development of an atmosphere of acceptance and respect, encouraging the expression of the client's unique self through preferred cultural and cognitive styles. During this session the therapist must keep in mind that, because of the effects of pressures to conform and of mismatch shock, the client may not initially be open to self-expression. It is during the initial session that the therapist performs a preliminary assessment of the unique self through observation of the cultural and cognitive styles of the client. The therapist also begins to match and to monitor the effects of match on the client using behavior observation checklists.

The therapist administers four personality inventories to establish the client's preferred cognitive and cultural styles: the Traditionalism-Modernism Instrument (TMI, [Appendix B](#)), the Bicognitive Orientation to Life Scale (BOLS, [Appendix G](#)), the Family Attitude Scale (FAS, [Appendix C](#)), and the Multicultural Experience

Inventory (MEI, [Appendix A](#)). While the client is completing the instruments, the therapist examines her selfobservations and compares them to ratings of the client's preferred cultural and cognitive styles. The therapist then evaluates whether she possesses the range of flex necessary to maximize the chances for success with the client or whether the client should be referred to another therapist.

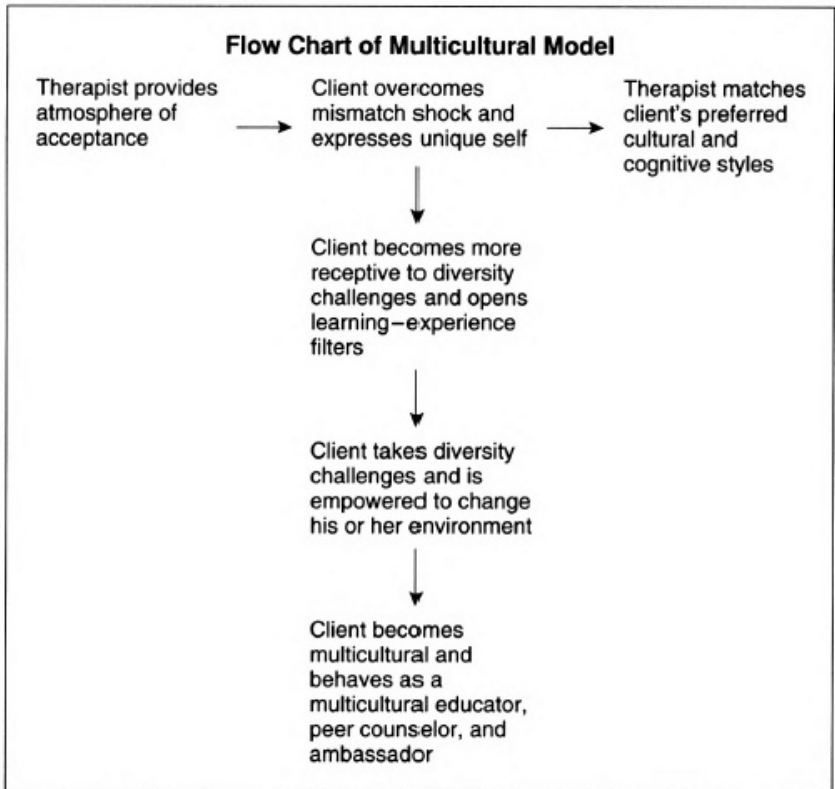
## **Session 2**

In the course of the second session, the therapist continues to match the client and conducts a brief life history. During this session the therapist explains the principal concepts of the flex theory of personality and offers feedback on the results of the assessment instruments the client completed during the initial session. It is during the second session that the therapist and the client set the goals for therapy. The second session lasts approximately seventy-five minutes while all remaining sessions are approximately fifty minutes each.

## **Sessions 3 and 4**

While the therapist continues to match the client's preferred cultural and cognitive styles, she obtains a more detailed life history from the client, with a focus on match and mismatch. The therapist introduces scriptwriting exercises and empathy projection. During these sessions there is continued discussion of the principal concepts of the flex model as well as discussion of the possible diversity challenges available to the client. At this time, the therapist attempts to reduce any negative stereotypes and possible negative attitudes toward diversity. In those cases where the client had been "forcing" himself to use nonpreferred cultural and cognitive styles (the false self), the unique self begins to emerge, thus the therapist may want to reassess the client using the Preferred Cognitive and Cultural Styles Observation Checklists (see Appendices E and F). Any differences in the ratings can be discussed with the client during the feedback session.

*FIGURE 5.1 The major stages of the multicultural model of psychotherapy and counseling*



## Sessions 5 through 10

While continuing to match the client's preferred styles, the therapist introduces mismatch through match, using scriptwriting, empathy projection, role-playing, and diversity challenges during the sessions, as well as in homework assignments.

## **Sessions 11 through 15**

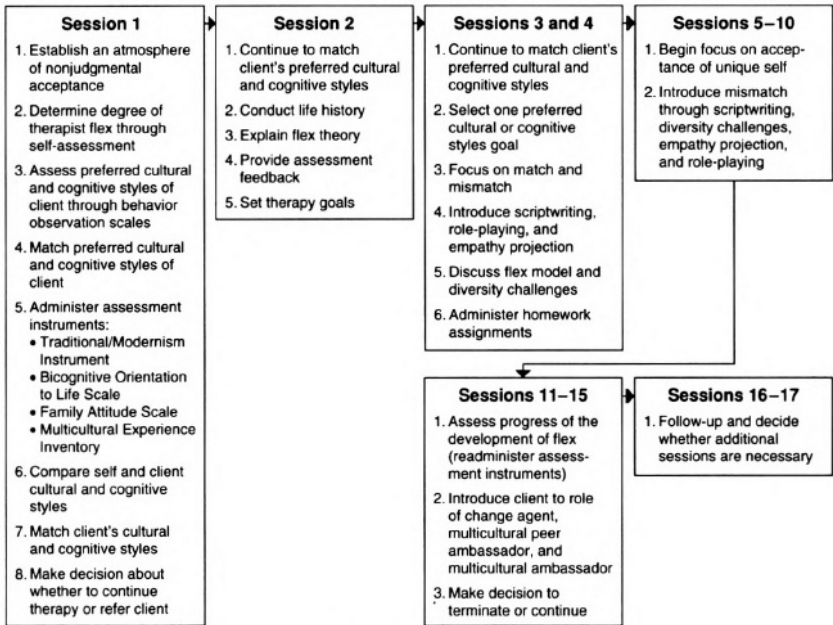
Session 11 is used to assess the progress of the development of flexibility. The remaining sessions of this phase are used to work on areas of flex not yet mastered. It is during these later sessions that the client is introduced to the role of change agent, multicultural peer counselor, multicultural ambassador, and multicultural educator. Session 15 focuses on assessing the progress of the growth of the client in these areas. Depending on the client's progress, more sessions may be scheduled; otherwise regularly scheduled therapy sessions are terminated at this point.

## **Follow-up**

Six months after the last regularly scheduled session, the client and therapist meet in Session 16 to follow up and to determine the necessity for additional sessions. Six months after Session 16, or after the final session of the series of follow-up sessions planned after Session 16, the client and therapist meet for an additional follow-up and to evaluate the need for additional sessions. Figure 5.1 summarizes the major stages of the multicultural model of

psychotherapy and counseling, and Figure 5.2 presents a session-by-session summary in graphic form.

*FIGURE 5.2 Session-by-session description of the multicultural model of psychotherapy*



## SUMMARY

The multicultural model of psychotherapy and counseling evolved from the experience of doing therapy and counseling with clients who experienced feeling different and who suffered from the symptoms of the mismatch syndrome. The model is a unique treatment approach that views every client and therapist as having the potential for becoming multicultural and for fostering the



development of a multicultural society. This chapter presented the major concepts, tasks, and goals of the multicultural model of psychotherapy.

## 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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