

# Culture and Diversity Defined

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*If indeed we could sustain a life in which we would only meet people from our own culture . . . we might need to learn only the rules of our own culture and adhere to them. But such a world is rapidly disappearing if not already gone.*

Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 1998, p. 208

*[My book] celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. . . . It is the great possibility that mass migration gives to the world, and I have tried to embrace it. . . . Throughout human history, the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation, have wrought havoc among mere mixed-up human beings. Like many millions of people, I am a bastard child of history. Perhaps we all are, black and brown and white, leaking into one another . . . like flavors when you cook.*

Salman Rushdie on his novel *The Satanic Verses* (Rushdie, 1992, p. 394)

*Nothing human is alien to me.*

The Roman writer Terence

The three quotes that open this chapter capture the fundamental message of this book: Counselors must embrace the kaleidoscope that is human diversity while at the same time remembering that all humans have much in common. With that paradox in mind, the counselor can be ready to do ethical, culturally alert counseling.

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## COUNSELING AND CULTURE

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The field of counseling cannot be separated from the study of culture. After all, counseling began in the early 20th century with an earnest attempt at social reform by helping poor, orphaned youth to make good life choices.

In that tradition, the work of counseling can be seen as a hopeful, and a moral, enterprise. Counselors embrace a world of possibility, as difficult as that may be at times.

### The Dismissal of the “Other”

Clients come to counselors wounded by the slings and arrows of living. Some of those wounds are created by other humans, humans who find the “other” to be distasteful, foreign, dismiss-able. Some people have been heard to say, “After all, they are ‘not like us,’ and we cannot understand them because they are . . . gay, black, disabled, Jewish, Christian, poor, white, rich, Asian, Mexican, female, Arab, atheist, or Anglo.” And the list of exclusions goes on.

## Counseling: A Hopeful Venture

By contrast, counselors commit to a hopeful vision: They imagine a world in which there are fewer such wounds. And they help create that world. Counselors embrace a moral vision of human solidarity; they commit themselves to principles that go beyond any particular group or place. Counselors cherish the “unexpected combinations of human beings,” to quote Salman Rushdie (1992), that is the world and always has been. Those combinations include the Latino/a migrant worker in North Carolina, the African American father in Seattle, the transgender adolescent in Louisiana, the Muslim immigrant in Michigan, the evangelical Christian in Texas, and the white Southerner in Georgia. And those are but a few descriptors for the ineluctable human diversity.

## The Risk of Stereotyping

Oh, and it must also be said right away that no one individual “is” any one of those categories. The reader must immediately be warned that this book is not a venture into stereotyping. People bring their own versions of the cultural story to life based on unique socialization experiences and individual temperament.

So counselors are hereby welcomed to a world of “mélange” and “hotch-potch,” a world in which their own points of view must be continually extended as “newness” enters. This book is indeed a “love song to our mongrel selves.” The following vignettes will demonstrate the themes and movements of that song. It is a song that the reader must learn to sing, sometimes while improvising, but always with great heart.

*The counselor is a middle-age American white male of second-generation Irish ancestry who was raised Catholic in a working- to lower middle-class neighborhood in Boston. He is middle class and heterosexual. His client is a 53-year-old Boston fire captain who is also Irish and Catholic.*

*The counselor and his client probably share many cultural similarities, such as a tendency to suppress negative feelings, especially sadness and pain; appreciation of having fun with groups of people (called “good craic,” pronounced “crack” in Irish); an inclination to liberally drink alcohol at social gatherings; enthusiasm for a good song or a sentimental occasion; appreciation of “the talk” as a means of elaborating on experience; a predisposition to indirectness in expressing feelings; and the use of humor, especially sarcasm (“slagging”), as a substitute for intimacy. The counselor may, therefore, make some assumptions about his client without asking. Although the counselor will need to confirm these hunches, they will give him a head start in probing his client’s worldview.*

*Yet the counselor and client, for all their similarities, may not see the world through the same eyes. In each of the following areas, counselor and client differ. For example, when discussing his marital difficulties, the client cannot conceive of divorce. In addition, he does not expect his wife to be interested in sex. Unlike the counselor, he does not like to show his feelings or even tell them to anyone. He hides physical discomforts, even from himself. He believes that drinking to excess is an acceptable social practice. He considers his age to be “old,” and therefore he engages in no physical exercise. He is uncomfortable with “darker people,” as he calls them, and considers immigrants to be ruining the city he loves. He belongs to Irish organizations and trumpets Irish accomplishments whenever he can. Finally, he believes that homosexual relationships are unnatural and immoral. Each of these views contrasts significantly with the counselor’s perspectives as the counselor has questioned the inherited norms of his traditional ethnic culture and attempted to construct a more multicultural set of values.*

*A Korean couple and their 15-year-old son come into the public school counseling office unannounced one morning as the children are arriving at school. These recent arrivals to this rural community in western Kansas moved from Los Angeles for a job opportunity. Their son has been in the school for two months and seems morose, commenting that he has no friends among the largely Anglo-American student body.*

*The school counselor, who is a heterosexual European American, the grandson of Swedish immigrants, immediately begins making empathic responses to their concerns, mixed with exploratory open questions about their feelings and the meaning of the situation to them. The counselor probes into how the parents are feeling about the move and about leaving their homeland. The parents respond with few words and many silences.*

*The counselor then tells them that he would like to meet with their son alone to understand his perspective more clearly. He has been taught to encourage students to think for themselves and to express their views in these situations. After hearing the son describe his hesitance at engaging other students in conversation and banter, or about joining any student organization, the counselor calls the parents back into the room.*

*He then suggests that the parents teach their son assertive behavior and that the family members practice direct communication of needs and requests at home so that the son will learn how to have his needs met. He teaches them basic assertiveness principles about believing in one's individual rights, making eye contact, having a firm vocal tone, and clearly stating one's needs without necessarily apologizing or empathizing with others' situations. He further directs them to keep a daily record of successful assertive exchanges. The counselor hopes that this will help their son, and them, adjust to life in this new area. He asks them to come back the following Monday at 9 a.m. to tell him how it has worked. However, the parents do not show up. Furthermore, they take their child out of the public school the week after and send him to a nearby religious private school.*

As demonstrated by the first vignette, culture pervades all counseling exchanges. Even though the counselor and client share the same ethnic culture, gender, social class, sexual orientation, and religion of origin, they are having a cross-cultural encounter because their experiences of those cultures differ significantly. The counselor and client have been enculturated into the same Irish Catholic ethnic group, but each has a different relationship to that culture. There is clearly more to culturally alert counseling than meets the eye.

The second vignette also demonstrates the complexity of culturally alert counseling because the counselor's presumption of Western communication styles and individualism likely resulted in the clients not returning. Here the culture clash was more obvious—an individualistic, direct European American style encountering (unsuccessfully) a collectivist Asian tradition. The counselor lost the clients by promoting an individual, rights-oriented, confrontational communication style that is better suited to the European American notion of assertiveness. The Korean clients instead saw their primary allegiance as being to the group, namely, the family and the community. That message included keeping negative feelings to oneself in favor of harmony for the group. The counselor had also failed to show any knowledge of Korean culture. That is unfortunate because such knowledge might

have engendered trust. In addition, the counselor did not acknowledge the family's cultural isolation and thus failed to connect the clients with Korean persons and resources in the community. Finally, he did not acknowledge the social prejudice that is likely adding to some of the isolation and feelings of displacement.

In these two examples, the themes that will permeate this book emerge. A primary theme is that all counseling encounters are multicultural, in that the cultures of gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religion, and social class are always present. In these two vignettes, each of the following important counseling-related themes are embedded: attitudes toward health maintenance, sexuality, alcohol use, expectations of intimacy with a life partner, socialized gender roles, the valuing of emotional expressiveness versus emotional control, the level of acculturation to a dominant culture, ethnic identity, and being in a nondominant culture versus a more privileged one. And these are only two vignettes. The contemporary counselor is likely to be confronted with many more culturally saturated situations, for culture is everywhere in each human being's life. Culturally alert counseling is therefore defined as *a consistent readiness to identify the cultural dimensions of clients' lives and a subsequent integration of culture into counseling work.*

## Preview of the Chapter

This chapter establishes a foundation for culturally alert counseling by responding to two of the three fundamental questions that must be asked of culturally alert counseling. First, the question “Why are culture and culturally alert counseling important?” is examined. The second question discussed is: “What is culture and culturally alert counseling?” The third and most critical question, namely, “How does one actually do culturally alert counseling?” will be addressed in each chapter, with a culmination in Chapter 20 on key practices in culturally alert counseling.

The current chapter is divided into three major sections. It begins with the aforementioned “Why” and “What” segments, followed by a presentation of the fundamental multicultural counseling competencies.

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### “WHY” CULTURALLY ALERT COUNSELING?

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Whenever two people meet, it is a multicultural encounter. All individuals see the world, and are seen, through culturally infused lenses. Those lenses include ethnicity, race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ability status. Each client, and counselor, also brings a family-of-origin discourse to the encounter, with the accompanying assumptions of how to communicate, what is valued, and other relatively automatic norms. Two individuals never meet purely as individuals, for all humans are socially constructed; that is, they make meaning through their socialized lenses. Until relatively recently, little attention has been paid to culture by mental health professionals. And while the multicultural dimension of counseling has been maturing in the past two decades, there is still much to be learned (D’Andrea & Heckman, 2008).

There are at least two arguments for culturally alert counseling. One is inevitability. The other is equity.

#### Inevitability

One argument for culturally alert counseling is the inevitability of cross-cultural contact. More than ever before, people encounter cultural diversity daily in their schools and neighborhoods and through media. The quote from Robert Kegan (1998) that opens this chapter describes this sea change. He goes on to iterate the inevitability of cross-cultural encounters.

Diversity of cultural experience may once have been the province of the adventurous, the open-minded, and those too poor to live where they wished. Tomorrow it will be the province of all. (p. 208)

Counselors can no longer assume that all they need to do is treat clients as somehow “pure” individuals. If that were the case, then culture wouldn’t matter. But these words from sociologists Carol Aneshensel and Jo Phelan (1999) give the lie to the extreme individualist position:

There are pronounced group differences in the course and consequences of mental illness . . . differences that . . . point to the . . . powerful influence of the social factors that differentiate one group from another. The impact of gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status are apparent at virtually every juncture. (p. xii)

#### Equity

A second argument for culturally alert counseling concerns equity and inclusiveness. The counseling field is dedicated to equity, that is, access for all people to the things that matter in society, like good education and jobs (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of this topic). This commitment has a long tradition, dating to the origin of the field in the early 20th century.

Inclusiveness is closely related to equity. Who creates the counseling practices, from what perspective? With whom in mind? Counseling cannot be an exclusive endeavor for middle-class dominant-group members. Counseling theories and practices are products of culture, despite their being considered universal. Counseling practice has been embedded in a largely heterosexual, male, middle-class, European, and European American perspective, which emphasize cultural notions such as self-actualization, human rights, achieved identity, choice theory, and autonomy.

These towering Western ideas have produced much good for some, reducing human suffering and increasing human potential, and are therefore to be honored. However, they have left others out. Stanley Sue and Amy Lam noted the inequality in mental health practice:

Women, ethnic minorities, gay/lesbian/bisexuals, and individuals from lower social classes . . . have been subjected to detrimental stereotypes,

have not been targeted for much psychological research, and are often underserved or inappropriately served in the mental health system. . . . There is an increasing urgency to provide effective treatment to these groups, as reflected in the “cultural competency” movement, which tries to identify the cultural knowledge, skills, and awareness that permit one to effectively work with clients from diverse populations. (2002, p. 401)

Examples of being “inappropriately served” include the following: Lesbians and gay men have been treated as maladjusted. Women have been seen as overly dependent and emotional and have been encouraged to follow limiting life paths. Many persons of color have been ignored; they, in turn, viewed counseling with suspicion.

That dominant-group bias is no longer possible. Nondominant groups of people have asserted their rights to be heard and to be dealt with. There is no going back to the previously mentioned “bad old days” of white, male, middle-class hegemony over cultural norms, values, and assumptions. “We are everywhere” is the refrain of formerly silent and voiceless minorities.

Here are some of the facts about diversity and culture in the United States:

- African Americans comprise about 13.4% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a).
- Nationally, students of color constituted a majority in the public schools in 11 states and are a majority overall in the Southeast (Southern Education Foundation, 2010).
- Sixty-two percent of people entering the U.S. labor force are women and racial or ethnic minorities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).
- Gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons make up at least 7% of the population and seek out counselors at high rates (Kane & Green, 2009; Rivers, McPherson, & Hughes, 2010).
- In 2016, there were 2,523 single-bias hate crime offenses against members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018).
- Gender roles have become unclear for many, leading to distress over family and career commitments (Williams, 2003).

- In the United States, 74% of adults believe in God (Harris Poll, 2003).
- Asians are the largest recent immigrant group to the United States, comprising 35.9% of new immigrants in 2017 (Department of Homeland Security, 2017).
- The Latino/a community has become the largest ethnic minority in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b).
- African Americans continue to experience segregation and bias in housing and jobs, and their poverty rate is double that of European Americans, despite significant economic gains over the past 30 years (Parisi, Lichter, & Taquino, 2011).
- The median wealth of white households is 10 times that of black households and 8.3 times that of Hispanic households (Dettling, Hsu, Jacobs, Moore, & Thompson, 2017)

These facts matter for two reasons. One is ethical responsibility, and the other is professional self-interest.

### **Ethical Responsibility**

In the case of ethical responsibility, counselors must have an internal commitment to equity in their lives. To undergird that stance, the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics preamble states, “[Counseling members] recognize diversity and embrace a cross-cultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts” (ACA, 2014). Therefore, counselors must ask themselves, “Whom are we serving?” “Are these statistics important for our work?” “Are we part of the problem of, or the solution to, social inequity?” And “How are we acting to change the conditions that lead some people to have fewer obstacles, whereas others must scramble through the thicket of hidden and overt bias, limited opportunities, and legacies of deficit?”

### **Professional Self-Interest**

The second reason for the urgency of culturally alert counseling is professional self-interest. If counselors are not convinced of its importance, their credibility will be challenged by both clients and

employers (Sue & Sue, 2008). Clients will ask, “Can you be trusted to help me?” A counselor’s livelihood may depend on the answer. For example, counselors who adhere to an insight-oriented practice may lose clients from cultural groups who eschew public emotional expression and expect direct problem-solving action for life concerns. Such can be the case for many people from so-called collectivist cultures, such as traditional American Indian and East Asian cultures, where individual emotions are often considered secondary to group welfare.

This section on the “Why” of culturally alert counseling should end with a reminder: Culturally alert counseling is for all people, not only members of non-dominant groups. *All* counselors and clients are “cultured.” Every reader of this book has been constructed through many discourses that surround them, including white European American discourses, middle-class discourses, male discourses, heterosexual discourses, and Christian discourses. Culturally alert counseling is a way of recognizing the social influence in human life. That will become clearer in upcoming chapters of this book.

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## THE “WHAT” OF CULTURE AND CULTURALLY ALERT COUNSELING: KEY NOTIONS

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This section explores the key notions of *culture* and *diversity*. These two notions are foundational. They pervade all chapters of this book. First, definitions are provided. Then related concepts are discussed, including the pervasiveness and invisibility of culture and the notion of discourse.

### Defining Culture

Culture is defined here as the attitudes, habits, norms, beliefs, customs, rituals, styles, and artifacts that express a group’s adaptation to its environment—that is, ways that are shared by group members and passed on over time. There are two parts to this definition representing internal and external dimensions to culture. Most obvious are the external expressions, the customs, rituals, and styles. But the internalized dimensions of culture are especially important for the work of counseling. They are represented by “attitudes, habits, norms, and beliefs” in the definition described. Those internalized assumptions inform clients’ expectations about relationships, their career aspirations, and their self-esteem, to name just a few impacts of

internalized culture. Internal aspects of culture that counselors might encounter include the following. In each case, the counselor needs to be mindful of the cultural dimension and bring it into the work.

- A middle-class African American teacher is uncertain about how to express herself in a culturally congruent way in the largely European American school in which she teaches.
- A man is so bottled up emotionally that he drinks, broods, and isolates himself because he doesn’t feel able, as a male, to ask for help or to show sadness.
- A working-class 20-year-old woman can’t imagine pursuing a medical career because she “doesn’t know where to start” and can’t imagine delaying paid work for school, plus she doesn’t know where the money would come from for her training anyway.
- A Chinese American daughter of immigrants cannot figure out how to put together family loyalty with her desire to move across the country on her own to try an acting career.
- A gay 16-year-old boy is infatuated with another boy in the high school but is terrified of being found out.
- A Southern Anglo American woman would like to express her negative feelings directly but has learned “proper manners” so well that she finds herself being angry at herself for not saying what she feels.

In each of these cases, culture can be both an opportunity and a barrier. Either way, culture is a consistent presence in the counseling room. To start the personal journey, you are invited to explore your cultural identities in a beginning way by completing Activity 1.1, Introductory Cultural Self-Awareness.

### Culture: Pervasive and Invisible

Culture is so pervasive in people’s lives that it can be likened to the water that surrounds a fish or the air that humans breathe—in other words, an ambient element outside of their consciousness. Much of what individuals assume to be individual “choice” is instead culturally constructed and automatic. This invisibility can lead to individuals being ignorant about how saturated a

## Activity 1.1 Introductory Cultural Self-Awareness

Activity 1.1 begins your exploration of the realm of culture by asking you to define your current understanding of your own cultures.

### Description of Activity:

This introductory exercise occurs in two phases. You will respond to each cultural group in terms of two notions: name of group(s) and general status of groups. After you put your responses in the boxes, write your thoughts about doing each phase on the second page of this activity, in the spaces provided, or as otherwise directed by your instructor.

First, complete Phase 1 on the following Cultural Group Memberships Worksheet by naming the cultural groups that you belong to across six categories. Then write down your thoughts on doing this phase.

### Cultural Group Memberships Worksheet

**Directions for Phase 1:** What follows are five cultural categories. As you consider each of the categories in the far left column, name your own particular group identity in the second column under Phase 1. Use whatever label makes sense currently to you. Do Phase 1 first, and then read the directions for Phase 2. (Note: You may be asked to share as many of these as you are comfortable with.)

Cultural Group Categories	Phase 1: NAMES A name for your current group membership(s):	Phase 2: STATUS Whether this group is generally dominant or nondominant in many contexts:	Phase 3: IMPACT One way in which each social group membership affects your life:
Ethnicity			
Race			
Social class, or SES (e.g., upper-middle class, poor, working class)	Of origin: Current:		
Gender			
Sexual orientation			
Religion	Of origin: Current:		

**Comments on Phase 1:** What thoughts came to you as you tried to name your cultural groups?

**Directions for Phase 2:** When directed, note in the next column on the worksheet whether you see each of your groups as “dominant” (e.g., generally in a position of greater power and/or favor at the current time and place)

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or “nondominant” (a group whose access to significant social power is generally limited or denied) in most contexts (e.g., occupations, standards for language, beauty, power, presence, or access to resources). The issue of dominance/nondominance will be taken up more extensively in Chapter 3.

**Comments on Phase 2:** What thoughts do you have on naming your groups’ statuses?

**Directions for Phase 3:** Think of one way in which each cultural group membership affects, or has affected, your life. This can be a general effect or a specific event from the recent past.

This cultural group membership activity is aimed at stimulating your awareness of your being “culturally constituted,” that is, being made up by your cultures. It is meant to begin your movement toward what Paolo Freire (1993) called “critical consciousness,” which is one of the major aims of this book. That topic is discussed later and in Chapter 3.

dominant culture is in a society. For example, what were once seemingly universal standards in American life are now seen as culturally male, European American, middle class, Christian, and heterosexual. This dominant cultural monolith has been toppled by other communities in U.S. society clamoring to be recognized. However, U.S. society never was so monolithic in a fundamental sense because the nation has always been culturally diverse to a great extent. Women, gay people, non-Christians, Africans, Asians, American Indians, non-English-speaking people, poor persons, and individuals with disabilities have always been a part of American life (Takaki, 1993; Zinn, 2003). However, they are no longer to be background to the dominant culture but are, more and more, foreground on the American cultural landscape in numbers and in public voice.

### Culture as Discourse

Another way to describe the pervasiveness of culture and its importance is to understand culture as an expression of a “discourse.” Discourse is a general term for a system of thought, a network of historically, socially, and institutionally held beliefs, categories, statements, and terms that give meaning to the world. The term *discourse* comes from linguistics, where it refers to the connection between sentences and their social context. To understand discourse, as it relates to culture, it may be helpful to keep in mind that every sentence a person utters reflects their historical, social, and institutional context, from the words themselves being part of a language to the ideas being a product of a time and place. A discourse is like the lens in a pair of glasses. People actually wear many “discourse lenses.” Cultures are groups of people who share particular discourses.

A person is always influenced by many discourses. People’s gender, ethnicity, and religious expression, for example, inform the way they view issues, situations, and other people; they implicitly affect how individuals think and act. The reader might think about fashion in hairstyle and clothing. What is “beautiful” to one group can be unattractive to another. Individuals are caught up in a discourse that automatically affects what they see as attractive.

Such discourses set the foundation for the argument that one might make on what is valued in life. That is a dangerous situation for counselors. For example, if a male counselor speaks from within his own gender discourses, he might see an expressive and nurturing female client as emotionally labile and dependent or a working-class client as loud and aggressive instead of being less concerned about respectability and propriety than would a middle-class client.

There is a solution to this embeddedness in one’s discourses. Counselors can be aware of the discourses from which they are speaking or acting—or not. In Kegan’s (1998) terms, they can “have” the discourse rather than it “having” them. Indeed, a major aim of this book is to help counselors become aware of how their discourses are influenced by the groups to which they belong, that is, to know the discourses through which they are thinking and acting. It might be some combination of their middle-class discourse, their Christian discourse, their conservative discourse, or their feminist discourse, to name a few sets of assumptions that individuals might speak through. By being alert to the discourse that is informing their thinking, counselors can see their “truths” as perspectives, not monopolies on the



one “right” way to view an issue. Counselors can then imagine alternate perspectives, ones that are informed by other gender, ethnic, social class, sexual orientation, and religious viewpoints.

### History of the Term Culture

*Culture* is an often-used, yet elusive, term. The earliest known use of the word referred to care for the earth (e.g., “culturing the soil”) so that it would produce (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). The extension of the term to human customs is credited to the Roman writer and orator Cicero, who wrote of the “culture of the soul,” that is, taking care to live well in general. Thus, culture came to refer to the human creation of ways to live well through establishing social norms, roles, and customs.

Through the years, culture became associated with the notion of “civilization” itself, until in 1871 Edward Tylor, one of the great early anthropologists, offered an inclusive definition of the term: the “capabilities and habits acquired by [a person] as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871/1924, p. 1). For Tylor, “knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, and customs” were expressions of culture. The definition given earlier in this chapter is parallel to Tylor’s concept of culture. Each makes reference to the human creation of ways of living well in community. Those means include rituals, languages, celebrations, and hierarchies in relationships.

### Culture Broadly Applied

The notion of culture, in this book, is used broadly. It is not restricted to the traditional anthropological usage, in which culture is equivalent only to ethnicity. Culture includes the customs, norms, and values of nations, regions, generations, and organizations. For example, in academia there is often a less formal dress code than in retail businesses. And in the military, strict hierarchy and obedience are norms. By contrast, in academia, critiquing the status quo is a norm.

Culture also refers to social groups that are identified by gender, class, sexual orientation, generation, organizational affiliation, and religion. Culture in this broad sense can be translated into such notions as “youth culture,” “disability culture,” “school culture,” “male culture,” “gay culture,” “working-class culture,” and “agency culture.” In each case, culture refers to how a group establishes behaviors, and values that help members achieve shared aims, and therefore to live well. The resulting particular expressions of culture, such as accents, dialects, rituals, expressions, and family structures, are human ways of coping, each deserving consideration and respect.

This book explores culture as it is expressed through cultural categories—race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. In addition, military culture and refugee/immigrant culture are included. Seven of these cultural groupings are described in Box 1.1.

## Box 1.1 Major Categories of Culture

The six categories of culture defined here are neither exclusive nor final. For example, “age” is not explicitly included, despite its importance in counseling. Those two concepts are usually addressed in other areas of counselor education.

1. *Race.* “Race” is an especially contested and indeed controversial notion. What is uncontested, however, is its power to affect human relations and individual lives. The most basic definition of race is *a group of people of common ancestry, distinguished from others by physical characteristics, such as hair type, color of eyes and skin, and stature* (adapted from *Collins English Dictionary*, 2010). Like other cultural categories, it is a social construction—the creation of people in a language, a time, and a place. As such, it takes on many meanings, depending on the era, the society, and the speaker. The notion of race is especially intertwined with power and intergroup conflict.
2. *Ethnicity.* Ethnicity, too, carries many definitions. Here it is defined as *the recognition by both the members of a group and by others of common social ties among people due to shared geographic origins, memories of an historical past, cultural heritage, religious affiliation, language and dialect forms, and/or tribal affiliation* (Pinheiro, 1990). As might be seen, it also is an elusive and loose notion.

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Ethnicity matters for two reasons. First, it is a source people's standards, beliefs, and behaviors, even when they are unaware of its impact. Second, for those people from nondominant ethnicities, it is an external marker, one that defines their opportunities or lack thereof.

3. *Class/Socioeconomic Status.* One powerful factor in a person's aspirations and experiences is socioeconomic status, sometimes also called social class. Socioeconomic status inevitably influences many life roles and choices, including religious affiliation, gender roles, career aspirations, diet habits, entertainment choices, health, housing, self-esteem, dress, and recreation.

Class is defined here as *the position in a society's hierarchy occupied by person, based on education, income, and wealth.* As might be seen, this definition is external; here the status is given by others.

Yet social class also is an internalized set of assumptions and an identity. Clients will bring internalized expectations and self-images to counseling based on their social class. Counselors also need to know their own class-based assumptions.

4. *Gender.* Gender is often conflated with the term *sex*. Anthropologists, however, now reserve *sex* for references to biological categories and reserve gender for culturally defined categories. Here the term *gender* refers to *a socially constructed set of roles ostensibly based on the sex of individuals.* Gender stems largely from the division of labor roles in a society, not the physiological differences between men and women. As cultural creations, gender roles can and do shift with social, economic, and technological change. Influences on gender are the formal legal system, which reinforces customary practices; sociocultural attitudes such as ethnic-based obligations; and religious beliefs and practices. Like all cultural constructions, gender is both externally imposed and internalized to a greater or lesser extent by individuals. The culturally alert counselor needs to be aware of both.

5. *Sexual Orientation.* The APA (n.d.) defines sexual orientation as *an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes.*

Sexual orientation is a complex notion because it refers to a continuum of affectional attractions, ranging from exclusive homosexuality through forms of bisexuality to exclusive heterosexuality. Sexual orientation does not imply particular behaviors. Indeed, the exact origins of sexual orientations are uncertain at this time. The APA has declared that sexual orientation is shaped in most people at an early age and that biology plays a significant role in it. Being in a sexual minority can be a source of significant stress and self-doubt. Counselors have a particular role in reaching out to sexual minorities to provide advocacy and support.

6. *Religion and Spirituality.* Religion is also fraught with definitional difficulties. Religion will be defined here as *the organized set of beliefs that encode a person's or group's attitudes toward, and understanding of, the essence or nature of reality.* By this definition, religion does not require belief in a higher power or a deity. Spirituality can be distinguished from religion by its locus in the individual rather than the group. Spirituality refers to a mindfulness about the existential qualities of life, especially the relationship between self, other, and the world. Religion and spirituality are powerful sources of meaning, esteem, and social life to many, but not all, individuals. Religion is an especially powerful force in American life as compared to other industrialized nations. It is part of the culturally alert counselor's task to evoke clients' relevant religious and spiritual beliefs and practices, as well as any related communities to which they might belong. Clients can draw strength from religious and spiritual sources. Such sources can also result in maladaptive attitudes.

7. *Disability.* Most simply put, disability consists of an impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. Disability can be visible or invisible. In this book, five groupings of disability will be discussed. They are: mobility and physical disabilities, sensory disabilities, health disabilities, psychological/psychiatric disabilities, and neurodevelopmental disabilities. The reader might see from these groupings that most human beings can experience either temporary or long-term disability.

## Defining Diversity

*Diversity* is a word that is heard regularly. Diversity is, most simply, the existence of variety in human expression, especially the multiplicity of mores and customs that are manifested in social and cultural life. When used with terms like *celebrate* and *embrace*, *diversity* represents an appreciation of multiple perspectives, a recognition of the contribution that many cultures make to a community.

In contrast to much of the United States today, there are places where diversity is minimal. Members of isolated groups are often unaware of alternative cultural expressions and frequently are surprised by and disapproving of them (Kegan, 1998). If group members associate only with their group, they might consider their ways to be “the” ways to think, judge, and act. But even within mono-ethnic societies, there is diversity. For example, all societies have diversity in gender and sexual orientation.

When members of a group encounter other groups, they become aware of differences between their way of life and those of others. That encounter might be about religious beliefs, culinary customs, communication styles, or sexual behavior, to name a few possible expressions of diversity. Americans in India become vividly aware of diversity as they walk the colorful, filled streets of Mumbai. African Americans who move to a largely Haitian neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, becomes similarly aware of aspects of their culture that are different from those of their neighbors.

Before reading further, readers are invited to check in on their experiences with cultural diversity by completing Activity 1.2, Encounters with Cultural Diversity. This activity is best done privately so that people may be completely honest in their responses.

### Activity 1.2 Encounters with Cultural Diversity

By now you have read about how pervasive culture is in the sensitive work of counseling. However, perhaps you are still not sure about the power of culture in human lives.

Review your life, looking for times when you were aware of culture in a situation. This may have occurred when you were in a nondominant status. Brainstorm as many occasions as possible. Then list up to three examples of situations in which you were aware of cultural differences between you and those around you. Remember, culture includes ethnicity or race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, and religion:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following questions about one or more of the examples you listed:

- What were your automatic assumptions and/or behaviors during the situation? Were your beliefs challenged in any way?
- If you were in a nondominant or minority group, did you experience any discomfort in this role?
- You might use the feelings you had in these situations to remind yourself of the possible confusion and discomfort experienced by others when they are in a culturally unfamiliar situation, such as counseling itself.

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- What did you learn about yourself from this situation?
- Perhaps it is at first unsettling to experience cultural newness; however, it might be exciting, if you open up to it.
- Perhaps you had trouble coming up with experiences when you were aware of culture. That in itself might be an invitation for you to expose yourself to additional culturally different experiences. Try to turn any confusion into curiosity. This book aims to engender that curiosity and encourage such experiences.

### Attitudes Toward Diversity

Proponents of diversity argue that it makes communities stronger. In that vein, novelist Salman Rushdie (1992), in the opening quote in this chapter, refers to “the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs.” Robert Kegan (1998) connects diversity with healthy organisms and societies in this way:

Biologists tell us that the ongoing variability of the gene pool is a key to the health of any organism. . . . The more a family intermarries, for example, and succeeds at preserving the “purity” of its line, as has happened throughout history with several dynasties, the greater the likelihood of physical and mental debilities in its issue. Psychologists tell us that the single greatest source of growth and development is the experience of difference, discrepancy, anomaly. So it is for a society—an encounter with some new custom is a challenge for us to accommodate, to see the power of alternate ways of living. . . . These images . . . raise the possibility that diversity is best conceived not as a problem in need of a solution, but as *an opportunity or a necessity, to be prized and preserved as a precious resource.* (pp. 210–211, italics added)

The “precious resource” that is diversity doesn’t always feel so appealing on a day-to-day level. Instead, many individuals see an encounter with difference as a “problem,” in Kegan’s word, that is a cause for fear and discomfort. A range of attitudes toward difference is possible. One doesn’t simply like or dislike a cultural difference.

### Psychological Processes for Encountering Diversity: Assimilation Versus Accommodation

Diversity challenges people’s habitual, familiar ways of thinking. It can surprise individuals as they encounter a different religious view, or moral position, or child-rearing custom, to name a few examples. Individuals have, in a sense, two ways to encounter diversity: assimilation and accommodation. They can *assimilate* it to their current mode—for example, by deciding that what is different is “repulsive”—or they can *accommodate* it by rethinking their assumptions in light of the new information.

These two notions of assimilation and accommodation come from the work of Jean Piaget (e.g., Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Of the two, assimilation is easier. Psychological assimilation can be defined as the *process of incorporating objects, knowledge or new events into existing schemes that are compatible with what one already knows* (Psychology Glossary, 2011). In assimilation, when individuals are faced with new information, they make sense of it by referring to information processed and learned previously. Thus, a child may fit all men into the category “Daddy.” Children try to fit the new information into the understanding that they already have. In sum, assimilation is the viewing of experience through familiar lenses.

Assimilation is adaptive. If, in early summer, a hiker comes across a mother bear with her cubs in the woods, it is adaptive to assimilate quickly with a thought such as, “This is dangerous. I should flee.” Humans are hard-wired to assimilate in this way to make life predictable at times, especially when encountering situations that might be dangerous.

However, over-assimilation, that is, trying to fit all unfamiliar or uncomfortable phenomena into one’s

current lenses, is maladaptive. Such over-assimilation is exemplified by the person who stereotypes as a means of easily identifying the “other.” Unexamined prejudice of any kind is a form of over-assimilation. Over-assimilation may damage relationships, for example, when a father rejects his daughter because she is a lesbian. His old assimilation of what is right and wrong in human sexual expression cannot accommodate the possibility that his daughter’s sexual orientation might be a positive, natural expression of her attractions. Diversity is therefore dangerous to him. He has only assimilated the data on his daughter’s homosexuality to his current way of knowing. The result of such over-assimilation would likely be a rift in the family, increased emotional distancing, and isolation for both her and him.

By contrast, “appreciation of diversity” might be considered an act of mental *accommodation* to newness. Accommodation can most simply be defined as *the mental process of modifying existing cognitive understandings*

*so that new information can be included.* To make sense of some new information, people who accommodate actually adjust the mental schema they already have to make room for new information. In relation to diversity, accommodation is needed so that individuals can recognize rich differences in human expression and characteristics, even when it is somewhat uncomfortable to do so. Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule (1997), in their landmark study of ways of knowing, found that those who could accommodate diversity were able to “pause” in their thinking process to weigh the value of a phenomenon before judging it. One aim of the multicultural movement, and of this book, is to encourage such pausing before making assimilations.

This section closes with a personal activity. Readers are invited to complete Activity 1.3, *Attitudes Toward Difference*, to help them appreciate a continuum in positions on difference.

### Activity 1.3 Attitudes Toward Difference

What follows are eight possible responses to cultural difference. Read through each and, in the space at the bottom, name a cultural group that is not your own. Then respond to the three questions.

Repulsion	People who are different in this way are strange and aversive. Anything that will change them to being more normal or part of the mainstream is justifiable.
Pity	People who are different in this way are to be felt sorry for. One should try to make them “normal.”
Tolerance	Being different in this way is unfortunate, but I can put up with their unfortunate presence.
Acceptance	I need to make accommodations for this difference because these people’s identity is not of the same value as my own.
Support	I would like to act to safeguard the rights of these people, even if I am occasionally uncomfortable myself. I know about the irrational unfairness toward them.
Admiration	I realize that it takes strength to be different in this way. I am working hard on changing my bias.
Appreciation	I value this diversity for what it offers society, and I will confront insensitive attitudes.
Nurturance	This group is indispensable to our community. I have genuine affection and delight for this group, and I advocate for them.

(Continued)

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1. Name a cultural group that is not your own, whether that be an ethnic group, a race, a social class, a gender, a sexual orientation, a religion or nonreligious group, or a disability.

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2. Name your current attitude toward that group, based on the eight attitudes defined here.

3. What does this exercise tell you? Write a comment:

**Interpreting the results:** This exercise indicates where you and others might have work to do to move toward more positive views of cultural others. The scale is particularly important as it demonstrates that attitudes toward others are not merely “yes–no” matters. There are gradations in attitudes. Note that tolerance is in the bottom half of the levels. Although the U.S. Constitution and civil rights laws require mere “tolerance” of some diversities, that is not sufficient for the counselor. The first four of the attitudes imply that there is something inadequate or even wrong with the cultural group. Even the notions of “tolerance” and “acceptance” do not require a counselor to fully understand the other from their point of view or to peer inside other cultures with respect, interest, and active engagement. The last three—support, appreciation, and nurturance—are positive in that they endorse the diversities as important for a well-functioning, growing society, one that is confronted by newness and made stronger for it. The last three imply that you will take active steps to be an ally or activist to oppose prejudice or oppression.

*Source:* Adapted from the work of Dorothy Riddle (1994)

## THE REQUIREMENTS FOR BEING A CULTURALLY ALERT COUNSELOR

The preceding sections have established some evidence for the importance of culture in counseling. The reader might ask at this point, “What is required to actually do such counseling?” The multicultural counseling competencies are presented here. They guide readings and activities that ensue in this book. Specific counseling practices are discussed in Chapter 20.

### The Multicultural Counseling Competencies

The basic competencies required for culturally alert counseling (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) fall into three categories: awareness, knowledge, and skill. They are enumerated in detail in Appendix A. Although these competencies needn’t be memorized by the reader, counselors should be familiar with them in an overall way and be able to assess their competency in each area.

Broadly speaking, culturally alert counselors must have the following:

- *Awareness of their own cultural values and biases*, that is, cognizance of their own cultures’ impacts on their choices, values, biases, manners, and privileges; comfort with cultural differences; recognition of discrimination and stereotyping; acknowledgment of their culturally based limitations; and readiness to seek further training. The readings and exercises in this book, coupled with other life experiences, can increase counselor competency in this area.
- *Knowledge of clients’ worldviews*, that is, “multicultural literacy,” which consists of a reasonable knowledge of many groups’ and clients’ worldviews as seen through the lenses of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and religion as well as the counselor’s own negative reactions to and stereotypes of other

groups. The readings in the subsequent chapters provide a foundation for understanding cultural worldviews.

- *Intervention strategies or skills* to incorporate cultural knowledge into counseling and advocacy for all members of their populations, including considerations such as clients' language proficiencies, the use of assessment instruments, ability to refer to indigenous helpers, capacity to adapt communication styles, commitment to doing advocacy, and sensitivity to trust issues with culturally different clients. Chapter 20 of this book presents skills needed for culturally alert counseling. Specific strategies are also described toward the end of each of the cultural group chapters.

The first competency, cultural self-awareness, is an ongoing task, one that has been initially addressed in the activities in this chapter. Cultural self-awareness is achieved through personal examination of how one is "cultured" in every aspect of one's life. Culturally alert counselors strive to gain an understanding of themselves and their work with culturally different clients (Torres-Rivera, Phan, Maddux, Wilbur, & Garrett, 2001). One aim of this book, especially of the activities in the first few chapters, is to have readers discover the cultural discourses that guide their thinking and acting. In that regard, relevant awareness competencies are that (1) "culturally skilled counselors are aware of how their own cultural background and experiences, attitudes, and values, and biases influence psychological processes"; and (2) "culturally skilled counselors are comfortable with differences that exist between themselves and clients in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, and beliefs" (Sue et al., 1992, p. 482).

The second competency, multicultural literacy or "knowledge," will be tackled in each of the subsequent chapters. Two of the knowledge competencies are that (1) "culturally skilled counselors possess specific knowledge and information about the particular group that they are working with"; and (2) "culturally skilled counselors understand how race, culture, ethnicity, and so forth may affect personality formation, vocational choices, manifestation of psychological disorders, help-seeking behavior, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of counseling approaches" (Sue et al., 1992, p. 482).

In light of this broad expectation, a counselor might ask, "How many cultural characteristics and groups must I know about to be culturally alert enough?" The question is a legitimate one. Complete

knowledge of every important aspect of all cultures is not possible. "Enough," to start, is a solid grasp of the ideas in this book plus some experience in applying it to the groups with whom the counselor is likely to work. In practice, counselors can extend their knowledge and test it in the fire of experience by having an inquisitive and open mind when they are confronted with cultural unknowns.

A reminder of the limits of cultural generalizations is in order at this point. One factor is *change*. Old norms and customs evolve when they encounter each other in an act of mutual acculturation (see Chapter 3.). Thus, so-called White European American culture has incorporated many Black/African American elements in the past 40 years, leading to the former group's incorporation of African American language expressions and music in its culture. The same might be said of the Jewish American influence on the dominant American culture through the arts and other public expressions of that culture. Cultures are not static, nor can they be rigidly circumscribed by oversimplified generalizations.

An additional limitation on how much one can know about cultures is the fact that all *generalizations must be qualified*, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Even if cultural knowledge was relatively complete and fixed, it would not apply to all individuals at all times. Such overgeneralization would, in fact, be dangerous. Counselors must walk a fine line between assuming that some characteristics are true for members of a cultural group in general and applying them selectively to individual clients.

Thus, instead of questing for perfect cultural knowledge, counselors can aim to become relatively multi-culturally fluent. They should know basic terms and concepts such as *coming out* (for people who identify/associate with the LGBTQIA+ community), *marianismo* (for some Latinx people), *the ethic of care/connected knowing* (for many women), and *filial piety* (for some Asian communities). Nevertheless, counselors will inevitably be looking through a glass darkly, in the Christian Apostle Paul's words; that is, they will always have an obscure or imperfect vision of their own and others' cultures.

The third area of multicultural competence, "skills," is still the weakest area of multiculturalism (Cates, Schaeffle, Smaby, Maddux, & LeBeauf, 2007). Nevertheless, counselors must be ready to apply culturally alert practice immediately (Cates et al., 2007). Therefore, skills in applying multicultural awareness and knowledge must be generated, communicated, and enacted.

Examples of such skills are that (1) “culturally skilled counselors are able to engage in a variety of verbal and nonverbal helping responses. . . . They are not tied down to only one method or approach to helping but recognize that helping styles and approaches may be culture bound”; and (2) “culturally skilled counselors are able to exercise institutional intervention skills on behalf of

their clients. They can help clients determine whether a ‘problem’ stems from racism or bias in others . . . so that clients do not inappropriately blame themselves” (Sue et al., 1992, p. 483). Again, these are general. They must be translated into specific practices. Those practices will be described in all of the upcoming culturally specific chapters as well as in Chapter 20.

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## SUMMARY

This book represents a challenging, even threatening, excursion into the frontier territory of culture and counseling. Counselors cannot bring all of their old supplies for this expedition into this “new world.”

The journey into culturally alert counseling takes counselors through three major territories: cultural self-awareness, knowledge of other cultures, and skill at intervening in a culturally alert way. The book will weave these three themes throughout.

This chapter has offered some basic provisions for the journey in the form of foundational definitions, opportunities for self-examination, a description of the changing landscape in the field of counseling, and ways of knowing that can fortify counselors when they are seemingly lost. Much of this material will be new to counselors as they discard the legacy of universalistic individualism and incorporate social construction into their thinking.

But much is unknown and unknowable until the journey begins. Counselors must also pack provisions of openness and humility along with cultural knowledge. Openness allows counselors to tolerate ambiguity, to discover exceptions, and to allow surprises to occur with clients. Humility helps counselors avoid the

hubris of overgeneralizing and applying pat methods to solve complex human dilemmas.

Counselors cannot look at this landscape from afar: There is no way to know deeply but through experience. Encountering culture is not just an abstract exercise. Personal contact with cultural others will be required, supplemented by reflections on the meaning of those experiences.

And one word of warning for the traveler: The map is not complete. Despite the great progress that has occurred in the field of culture and counseling, all is not settled. As counselors embark on the journey to cultural alertness, they must know that they ought not strive for perfect knowledge of cultures. They can be culturally alert without being completely multiculturally fluent. They must accept that they will always be looking through a glass darkly at their own and others’ cultures. Nevertheless, counselors will be well-supplied with the basic provisions of an inquiring attitude, great empathy, a “leaning in” to difference, an appreciation of diversity in human expression, and a willingness to examine their own standpoints while inviting those of others. The reader who can begin with those qualities will be capable of beginning the work of culturally alert counseling.



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## APPENDIX A

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### Cross-Cultural Counseling Competencies: A Conceptual Framework

Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992)

#### I. Counselor Awareness of Own Assumptions, Values, and Biases

##### A. Beliefs and Attitudes

Culturally skilled counselors have moved from being culturally unaware to being aware and sensitive to their own cultural heritage and to valuing and respecting differences.

Culturally skilled counselors are aware of how their own cultural background and experiences, attitudes, and values and biases influence psychological processes.

Culturally skilled counselors are able to recognize the limits of their competencies and expertise.

Culturally skilled counselors are comfortable with differences that exist between themselves and clients in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, and beliefs.

##### B. Knowledge

Culturally skilled counselors have specific knowledge about their own racial and cultural heritage and how it personally and professionally affects their definitions and biases of normality–abnormality and the process of counseling.

Culturally skilled counselors possess knowledge and understanding about how oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping affect them personally and in their work. This allows them to acknowledge their own racist attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. Although this standard applies to all groups, for white counselors it may mean that they understand how they may have directly or indirectly benefitted from individual, institutional, and cultural racism (white identity development models).

Culturally skilled counselors possess knowledge about their social impact upon others. They are knowledgeable about

communication style differences, how their style may clash or facilitate the counseling process with minority clients, and how to anticipate the impact it may have on others.

#### C. Skills

Culturally skilled counselors seek out educational, consultative, and training experiences to enrich their understanding and effectiveness in working with culturally different populations. Being able to recognize the limits of their competencies, they (1) seek consultation, (2) seek further training or education, (3) refer out to more qualified individuals or resources, or (4) engage in a combination of these.

Culturally skilled counselors are constantly seeking to understand themselves as racial and cultural beings and are actively seeking a nonracist identity.

#### II. Understanding the Worldview of the Culturally Different Client

##### A. Beliefs and Attitudes

Culturally skilled counselors are aware of their negative emotional reactions toward other racial and ethnic groups that may prove detrimental to their clients in counseling. They are willing to contrast their own beliefs and attitudes with those of their culturally different clients in a nonjudgmental fashion.

Culturally skilled counselors are aware of their stereotypes and preconceived notions that they may hold toward other racial and ethnic minority groups.

##### B. Knowledge

Culturally skilled counselors possess specific knowledge and information about the particular group that they are working with. They are aware of the life experiences, cultural heritage, and historical background of their culturally different clients. This particular competency is strongly linked to the “minority identity development models” available in the literature.

Culturally skilled counselors understand how race, culture, ethnicity, and so forth may affect personality formation, vocational

choices, manifestation of psychological disorders, help-seeking behavior, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of counseling approaches.

Culturally skilled counselors understand and have knowledge about socio-political influences that impinge upon the life of racial and ethnic minorities. Immigration issues, poverty, racism, stereotyping, and powerlessness all leave major scars that may influence the counseling process.

### C. Skills

Culturally skilled counselors should familiarize themselves with relevant research and the latest findings regarding mental health and mental disorders of ethnic and racial groups. They should actively seek out educational experiences that enrich their knowledge, understanding, and cross-cultural skills.

Culturally skilled counselors become actively involved with minority individuals outside the counseling setting (community events, social and political functions, celebrations, friendships, neighborhood groups, etc.) so that their perspective of minorities is more than an academic or helping exercise.

## III. Developing Appropriate Intervention Strategies and Techniques

### A. Attitudes and Beliefs

Culturally skilled counselors respect clients' religious and/or spiritual beliefs and values about physical and mental functioning.

Culturally skilled counselors respect Indigenous helping practices and respect minority intrinsic help-giving networks in the community.

Culturally skilled counselors value bilingualism and do not view another language as an impediment to counseling (monolingualism may be the culprit).

### B. Knowledge

Culturally skilled counselors have a clear and explicit knowledge and understanding of the generic characteristics of counseling and therapy (culture bound, class bound, and monolingual) and how they may clash with the cultural values of minority groups.

Culturally skilled counselors are aware of institutional barriers that prevent minorities from using mental health services.

Culturally skilled counselors have knowledge of the potential bias in assessment instruments and use procedures and interpret findings keeping in mind the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the clients.

Culturally skilled counselors have knowledge of minority family structures, hierarchies, values, and beliefs. They are knowledgeable about the community characteristics and the resources in the community as well as the family.

Culturally skilled counselors should be aware of relevant discriminatory practices at the social and community level that may be affecting the psychological welfare of the population being served.

### C. Skills

Culturally skilled counselors are able to engage in a variety of verbal and nonverbal helping responses. They are able to *send* and *receive* both *verbal* and *nonverbal* messages *accurately* and *appropriately*. They are not tied down to only one method or approach to helping but recognize that helping styles and approaches may be culture bound. When they sense that their helping style is limited and potentially inappropriate, they can anticipate and ameliorate its negative impact.

Culturally skilled counselors are able to exercise institutional intervention skills on behalf of their clients. They can help clients determine whether a "problem" stems from racism or bias in others (the concept of healthy paranoia) so that clients do not inappropriately blame themselves.

Culturally skilled counselors are not averse to seeking consultation with traditional healers or religious and spiritual leaders and practitioners in the treatment of culturally different clients when appropriate.

Culturally skilled counselors take responsibility for interacting in the language requested by the client; this may mean appropriate referral to outside resources. A serious problem arises when the linguistic skills of the counselor do not match the language

of the client. This being the case, counselors should (1) seek a translator with cultural knowledge and appropriate professional background or (2) refer to a knowledgeable and competent bilingual counselor.

Culturally skilled counselors have training and expertise in the use of traditional assessment and testing instruments. They not only understand the technical aspects of the instruments but are also aware of the cultural limitations. This allows them to use test instruments for the welfare of the diverse clients.

Culturally skilled counselors should attend to as well as work to eliminate biases, prejudices, and discriminatory practices. They should be cognizant of sociopolitical contexts in conducting evaluations and providing interventions and should develop sensitivity to issues of oppression, sexism, and racism.

Culturally skilled counselors take responsibility in educating their clients to the processes of psychological intervention, such as goals, expectations, legal rights, and the counselor's orientation.

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