4

Multiculturalism

The goals for the person-centered therapist remain remarkably the same regardless of whom they are working with. The therapist is aiming to be sincerely empathic and accepting. However, how those goals are implemented may look quite different depending on the context. Person-centered therapy was created in and is a proponent of multiculturalism, defined here as a peaceful appreciation, coexistence, and beneficent reciprocal influence between persons of various diversities (Cornelius-White & Godfrey, 2004). These elements include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and economic class. To improve multiculturalism in one's self, context, and therapy work, competencies often need to be developed, at times unlearning as much as learning.

The American Counseling Association has endorsed that multicultural competencies involve awareness of one's own culture and biases, understanding of clients' worldviews, and practicing culturally appropriate intervention strategies (Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development, 1992). The first two relate closely to core relational conditions: congruence involves awareness of prejudice, and understanding of clients' worldviews involves empathy. They both are also helped by learning and living specifics of culture through person-to-person interaction with real people who are different than you. The third is a bit more complicated because both the common factors and person-centered approaches point to the *specificity myth*, the largely unsubstantiated belief that specific disorders require and are best treated by specific interventions. However, at a basic level, appropriate interventions are those that involve empathy and unconditional positive regard, providing therapist responses and tasks when clients request or are implied by the client's

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worldview and confirmed by the client. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the person-centered therapist is free to respond cooperatively to requests from the client for specific interventions or may spontaneously suggest them if persistently experiencing the core attitudes (Cornelius-White, 2003, 2005).

This chapter will encourage the reader to engage with multicultural issues through exploring some central concepts in multicultural competence through a person-centered lens, exploring social justice advocacy competencies, developing an appreciation of the role of multiculturalism in the history of the person-centered approach, considering ethical and religious concepts of the person-centered approach, and understand the paradoxical model that the person-centered approach represents with regard to multiculturalism.

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Central Concepts in Multicultural Counseling Competence

Racism, sexism, and other "-isms" are realities of our world. People experience a lot of cultural trauma due to their cultural statuses, which may be inherited or in some way a life choice. One can argue there has been a decrease in overt discrimination and blunt bigotry during readers' lifetimes, though others will counter that dramatic examples continue. Langton, Planty, and Sandholtz (2013) report that Bureau of Justice Statistics on violent hate crimes show a complicated picture during the last decade. For example, there was a doubling of the percentage of hates crimes that were religiously motivated from 2003 to 2006 compared with 2007 to 2011, and drops in racially motivated hate crimes, but overall the number of hate crimes did not change (Langton et al., 2013). Perhaps more insidious and widespread, subtle, covert, aversive, and institutionalized discrimination and oppression continue (Sue & Sue, 2012). Such bias, misunderstanding, and actions are often explained with concepts such as privilege, power, stereotypes, and micro-aggressions.

Congruence: A Cultural Concept

Congruence involves awareness of feelings, thoughts, and stories about one's self, stories that are often influenced by cultural variables in subtle ways (Cornelius-White, 2006). Rogers (1961) himself discussed "subtle ways of communicating" "contradictory messages" in cross-cultural exchanges, suggesting its relation to congruence (p. 51). Schmid

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(2001) wrote, "You cannot reflect on being congruent if you don't experience and consider diversity" (p. 218). Merry (2001) offers an example:

> A therapist, whose self-picture incorporates the notion that he or she is entirely free of prejudice, would experience some level of anxiety when confronted by a client of a different ethnic group . . . [and] would find difficulty in allowing prejudice feelings into awareness. (p. 179)

Hence at the most basic level, culturally congruent therapists are aware that they have a worldview stemming from their own circumstances and choices, which necessarily includes *stereotypes* (Cornelius-White, 2007b).

Stereotypes are commonly held, relatively fixed, and often oversimplified and under-analyzed ideas about particular cultural groups or persons representing those. Stereotypes often serve socially to reinforce power that accompanies privilege or are unpleasant and therefore avoided, not easily allowing consideration or deconstruction. Who wants to talk about ongoing stereotypes like, "black people are stupid and lazy" or "women are either mothers or whores." It doesn't necessarily matter whether these are views that people would own as their own; it matters more that they are pervasive in media, literature, institutions, and throughout social settings and continue to influence common understanding (Johnson, 2006). Stereotypes often form the basis of biases and prejudices where a person is valued or devalued due to a diversity element without consideration of the whole person or consideration of the underlying stereotype that doesn't hold water once examined. Teachingtolerance.org provides a window into understanding stereotypes and provides a wealth of free resources to improve one's cultural self-awareness as well as pedagogical kits and activities for preschool, elementary, and secondary educational settings, such as the following example.

Examples of Stereotypes

Consider each of these examples and what mental images they evoke (adapted from Lockhart & Shaw, 2013).

- Male and female
- Sons and daughters
- Jack and Jill
- Romeo and Juliet

Now reverse the order and notice how your mental images change. What happens if you say "FEMALE and male," for example? Does a sense of priority or importance or potency or activity or responsibility change? What stereotypes are built into common language uses and how do you

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Table 4.1 Cultural Congruence

Subtle Forms of Communication	Getting Feedback	Examining Widely Socialized and Personally Held Stereotypes
Use of language (e.g., jargon, slang, or conventions like "he" for person), power structures (e.g., titles, time, location), or avoidance of topics	Watching for and learning about contradictory messages, especially on nonverbal communications like proximity, touch, voice tone, body language	Examining stereotypes with various groups and as triggered by particular people and working through them for deeper maturing

hold these without necessarily realizing it? In three of these four examples minors are involved; how might all oppressions be related to society's treatment of children (Rice, 2013)? Table 4.1 describes subtle communication, feedback, and self-examination issues related to cultural dimensions of congruence.

Understanding Client's Worldview: Cultural Elements to Empathy

Privilege is a concept crucial to helping many counselors-in-training and counselors to develop awareness not only of themselves but also of others who are different from them. There are advantages and immunities of people with powerful cultural status (those associated with money, positive media representation, political, corporate, and other positions of power, etc.). For example, white privilege is held if you are perceived as white, male privilege if you are perceived as male, heterosexual privilege if you are perceived as heterosexual. These privileges operate outside typical awareness if you have them but are generally obvious to those who do not. Peggy McIntosh (2013) provided a list of privileges she had as a white woman in 1988 that is representative of many pieces written on the subject.

Examples of White Privilege

- Turn on the television and seeing people of your race widely represented, and frequently in a positive or human light.
- Go to a meeting and not have your lateness be attributed to your race.
- If you need medical attention, be assured your race will not work against you.
- Go shopping without likely being followed or harassed.

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Table 4.2 Communicated Understanding Client's Worldviews Through Privilege

	Indirectly Helps Communication	**Directly Helps Understanding**
Engaging the Concept of Privilege and How It Applies to You	Helps you understand ways in which you may communicate that are not consistent with a client's worldview	Helps you understand a worldview without that privilege if your client doesn't have it

- Feel welcomed and "normal" in public life and institutions.
- Ask to speak to the person in charge and likely be presented with a person of your race. (adapted from Peggy McIntosh, 2013)

Think of another example of privilege right now. What work on privilege could help you better empathize with subtleties that might be present when a client who does not hold a privilege you hold tells a simple story like watching TV, going to a meeting, or shopping?

Privilege Lists is a sassy, accessible website that has been inspired by McIntosh's classic list and provided examples of Masculine Dude ("Bro"), Male, Middle-to-Upper Class, Christian, Heterosexual, and Cisgender privileges (Killerman, 2013). *A List of Privilege Lists* is another web source with several groups of privileges to consider, including some unusual or provocative ones (Ampersand, 2006). Reflecting on one's privileges is a means to help understand not just one's self but also others who may not have those privileges (see Table 4.2).

Culturally Appropriate Interventions and Unconditional Positive Regard

Microaggression is a multicultural concept that explores how specific interactions between people who are culturally different involve small, nonphysical actions of aggression. Sue et al. (2007) defines them as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (p. 271). More generally, microaggressions include subtle insults and dehumanizing implications toward anyone in relation to diversity elements of that person. Like with stereotypes and privilege, microaggressions operate only with partial awareness to many people.

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Most counseling texts focus on interpersonal interactions as ways to show microaggressions, and certainly this is a worthy focus. There are well-documented cases of microaggressions in the interpersonal interactions between counselors and clients and counseling supervisors and supervisees (Constantine, 2007; Constantine & Sue, 2007; Sue et al., 2007). However, many microaggressions are environmental (Cornelius-White, 2007d). For example, Houston and Los Angeles are known as some of the most diverse cities in the United States and are sometimes revered for their thriving ethnic communities, including Latino, African American, and Asian communities in particular. However, Lipsitz (2005) reports that 100% of the dumps in Houston are located in African American neighborhoods and in Los Angeles, twice as many African American and Latino children live in areas with highly polluted air than do white children.

Appropriately intervening from a multicultural perspective within the person-centered approach involves not committing microaggressions and being aware of how microaggressions may affect the daily life of clients. Aside from answering specific or implied requests from clients with directive interventions as discussed in the earlier chapters, learning to improve your unconditional positive regard through an understanding of microaggressions can help (see Table 4.3).

Examples of Microaggression

Consider these sentences and notice microaggressions in relation to various diversity elements inherent in them (adapted from Lockhart & Shaw, 2013).

- Mrs. Smith looks remarkably good for her age.
- I'm just a person.
- Confined to a wheelchair, Mr. Garcia continues to live a productive life.
- May I speak to Mr. or Mrs. White?
- Our founding fathers carved this great country out of the wilderness.

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Table 4.3 UPR and Microaggressions

	Indirectly	Directly
Engaging the Concept of Microaggressions, and How It Applies to Your Communicated UPR	By being better able to accept client's reactions to microaggressions in and out of session	By helping you understand when you might have communicated conditional regard subtly or accidentally

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Do you have an increasing awareness about how privilege, power, and stereotypes operate beyond your awareness to cause microaggressions? Can you think of a microaggression you have experienced in the last week? Can you think of one in which you took part more actively?

Social Justice Advocacy Competencies

In addition to the broad multicultural competencies, the American Counseling Association (2003) has also endorsed social justice advocacy competencies. *Social justice* refers to "a perspective in which a central role for counselors is to work toward increased equity, fairness, human rights and to work to eliminate injustice, oppression and human violation" (Multicultural Counseling and Social Justice Competencies, 2013, para. 1). It is a movement that not only has been growing in strength in recent years, but also one that was influential to the development of the person-centered approach as is explained in the next section. The advocacy competencies articulate two main ideas: empowerment and social action, which can be realized at the student/client, school/community, or public arena levels. *Empowerment* is working directly with clients to remove systemic barriers, while *social action* refers to acting on group, organizational, policy, or legislative levels (Multicultural Counseling and Social Justice Competencies, 2013, para. 3). Table 4.4 depicts the Advocacy Competencies showing the two main ideas of acting with or on behalf of three systemic levels (Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009).

The person-centered movement has also articulated many views on empowerment and social action from the 1920s to today (Cornelius-White, 2005; Klien, 2010; PCE, 2010; Proctor, 2002; Proctor et al., 2006; Rogers, 1977; Rogers & Cornelius-White, 2013). At a most basic level, the person-centered approach empowers the client through unleashing power within the person and using power with the person to remove obstacles inherent in the power difference between counselors and clients

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Table 4.4 Social Justice Advocacy Competencies

Client	Community	Public
Empower	Collaborate	Inform
Individually Advocate	Systemically Advocate	Politically Advocate

Source: Toporek, R. L., Lewis, J. A., & Crethar, H. C. (2009). Promoting systemic change through the ACA Advocacy Competencies. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 87*, 260–268.

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and between the client and the conditions that block them in the world through helping them become more open to their experience (Proctor, 2002; Rogers, 1977). At a more systemic level, Rice (2013) poignantly describes how approaches other than the nondirective person-centered approach disempower the person, beginning in childhood with a process that is replicated throughout other oppressions with adults. Hopkins (2013) and Schmid (2013) among others (Proctor et al., 2006) describe how the person-centered approach relates to social activism. They believe that person-centered practitioners will develop and become activists the more they practice and integrate an understanding of people different from them into their own experiences. The following section describes the history of multiculturalism, including social justice concerns, and how the person-centered approach influenced and was developed through its history.

History of Multiculturalism and the Person-Centered Approach

Rogers's first published writing concerned his travels as a young man to East Asia in 1922. He engaged world leaders like the Chancellor of Germany, Supreme Court Justices in Korea, and the Chair of the World Student Christian Federation as well as thousands of people from all walks of life. It was this trip to several countries, interacting with people from around the world, that yielded ideas that would come to fruition across his lifelong writings. These themes included engaging inhumanity and oppression through nonviolence, openness to diverse experience, and learning through relational dialogue and interconnection. Each of these would be realized through practical applications in the person-centered approach (Rogers & Cornelius-White, 2013).

Early studies of the nondirective person-centered approach showed that it reduced prejudice and fascism in groups during and after World War II as compared to a traditional class format (Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, 2010). The 1960s and 1970s saw the development of the encounter group and civil rights movements in which the person-centered approach was a clear participant. In his late life during the late 1970s and 1980s, Carl Rogers negotiated peace in conflict zones like apartheid South Africa, war torn Northern Ireland, and in cold war "opponent" USSR. Rogers was a beacon of *cross-cultural communication* and a staunch opponent of *social injustice* and an *advocate* for children, women, people of color, labor, and anyone disenfranchised by the social situations in which they found

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themselves (Kirschenbaum, 2009). Indeed, Carl Rogers was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize when he died. The person-centered cross-cultural workshops that began in that decade continue today. Finally, global research in the most recent decade with over 5,000 participants has shown how minority practitioners (people of color) have a greater preference for person-centered approaches than other major approaches to counseling, such as psychodynamic, cognitive behavioral, or systemic (Elliott, Orlinsky, Klein, Amer, & Partyka, 2003).

QUESTIONS TO LEARN WITH

- Have you taken a trip that or encountered a type of person who shifted your thinking?
- What experiences changed your world? Hurt you? Challenged you? Lead you to faith or renunciation?

Ethical and Religious Concepts and the Person-Centered Approach

The person-centered approach is the best-known humanistic model to counseling. As such, it is often considered secular, a practice that developed with intentional connections to science and lived experience rather than belief or dogma. Likewise, most diversity coverage focuses on the visible elements of race, gender, and disabilities, and tends to avoid issues related to religion and faith practices. However, encountering spiritual concepts and differences can be one of the most fundamentally altering and development-oriented means to improving one's fitness in multiculturalism (Cornelius-White, 2005).

Regarding ethics, the person-centered approach is a deliberate attempt to empower through a disciplined practice of respecting each person through noninterference beyond skilled companionship. It is an ethical practice where the means and ends are consistent and the self-determination (with a wide variety of ideas of what self might mean) of each client is a central tenet. In these respects, one might consider the person-centered approach to be somewhat a-religious. Nevertheless, three religious concepts from four traditions each intersect with the practice of person-centered therapy: the Taoist concept of *wu-wei*, the Christian concept of *grace*, and the interfaith and secular concepts of *nonattachment/mindfulness*.

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Wei-wu-wei

Freire (2009) has described how the concept of wu-wei relates to the person-centered approach. Wu-wei means *nondoing*, *nonaction*, or *without controlling*. Wei-wu-wei therefore means *action without action* or *effortless doing*. It is a form of releasing power within through harmony rather than pushing from outside. Lao-tzu in the Tao Te Ching (MacDonald, 1996) describes perhaps the best known description of wu-wei:

> That which offers no resistance,
> overcomes the hardest substances.
> That which offers no resistance
> can enter where there is no space.
> Few in the world can comprehend
> the teaching without words,
> or understand the value of non-action.[1]

The person-centered approach aims for a powerful, influential harmony without controlling others. The person-centered therapist understands and trusts the power of being in tune to help release a person's spirit and capacities. Likewise, the person-centered therapist recognizes that humility and patience help the client bravely face whatever they are going through, which is paradoxically the fastest way to help someone resolve their concerns or develop into a more functional person.

QUESTION TO LEARN WITH

- You probably have a view of therapy or healing that involves therapist action, your expertise, or how persons need others to teach or rescue them somehow from their problems. How does wei-wu-wei sit with these ideas?

Grace

The concept of *grace* in Christian theology is quite simply the love God grants to people without anyone having to earn it, incorporating mercy and forgiveness. One way to describe the person-centered therapist is to say that believing in every client's capacity and granting each one acceptance

[1] Tao #43, *Tao Te Ching*, Lao-tzu. A translation for the public domain by J. H. MacDonald, 1996.

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and love regardless of circumstances or previous, current, or future actions model grace. The counselor's own experience of empathy shines that light of grace into the darkest, hardest to accept experiences a client presents. Likewise, grace can help explain a therapist's own experiences, forming the basis for self-acceptance.

QUESTION TO LEARN WITH

- What do you not accept about yourself? What elements of your past or present situation do you fear or would feel vulnerable to share with another person? With what issues would believing in grace challenge you?

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Nonattachment and Mindfulness

Though perhaps most identified with Buddhism, *nonattachment* is an important concept in Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, Bahai, and secular healing practices (Detachment, n.d.). Stated most simply, nonattachment is freedom from desire and the self-referential connections to people and the world. It is *mindfulness* to the reality of things, a nonpossessive compassion and appreciation for all with whom we come into contact. In Buddhism, attachment is the source of suffering. Letting go of expectations and possessive attachments is the path to mindfulness and mindfulness the path to nonattachment. As long as one desires, then one is vulnerable to frustration and loss, but in freely living one moment to the next an enlightened state is possible (Rahula, 2007). In Christianity, the Latin phrase *incurvatus in se* (curved inward on oneself) conveys the central nature of how our identifications and pride are among the greatest sins. John the Apostle, Martin Luther, St. Ignatius, and others articulated this philosophy (Johnston, 2009).

The person-centered therapist aims to free herself from specific goals regarding her client both in the moment and enduring. She has only general goals of helping the client learn, grow, solve problems, protect agency, and generally become all the client can become. In practical terms, this means the person-centered therapist is as patient and accepting with desperation, fear, and self-negation as with success. Each emotion and experience of the client is viewed compassionately but dispassionately, revering it as an opportunity and something that can be faced to the extent the client faces it. In this way, the person-centered therapist may have a profound, peaceful, yet paradoxically powerful experience of helplessness to change the client in the moment. In the same vein, the person-centered therapist does not aim

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for the client to graduate from school, get married, have a child, succeed at work, or any such typically valued outcomes, but instead to find his or her path. There is a trust in the person-centered therapist that in being a witness and nonattached yet intimately close companion, the person will choose and develop prosocially but not with attachment to conventional outcomes. The phrase "trust the process" is popular among counselor educators to convey this faith in *being with* to facilitate rather than prescribing what a client should do or believe or choose.

QUESTIONS TO LEARN WITH

- What beliefs do you hold? What do you identify with? With what issues might nonattachment be difficult to practice in encountering a person different from you?
- What kinds of people or experiences lead you to fear or desire? What combination of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or religious perspective challenges a freedom from expectations?

The Paradox: A Universal System of Adaptability to Differences

The practice of person-centered therapy is remarkably monolithic and simplistic, namely to be honestly empathic and accepting, recognizing that each person is unique. Individuals are immersed in culture that is gendered, ethnic, sexual, ability oriented, age identified, economics based, and grounded in an infinite number of other group identifications. Furthermore, they have a unique autobiography of internal and external thought processes, feelings, and experiences. In this sense, person-centered therapy is a universal system that adapts to differences (Patterson, 1996/2000).

When a person-centered therapist aims to understand another, they often must hold the tension of all these bits of that person's context. It may include an adjustment to understand a person's entire family or culture or how their geography defines their identity. It will challenge the therapist herself to accept viewpoints and experiences she has never had as her own to further her client's journey. It includes that the therapist will need to understand her own culture, family, class, and a myriad of other parts of her identity. Each difference she encounters helps reveal a new part of herself or an old part that was never acknowledged or accepted.

What may have been perceived as simple becomes in practice exceedingly complicated. How do you empathize with potentially anyone?

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How do you accept things that are dramatically different than your own beliefs or that you have never considered? How do you allow yourself to be open to being changed by each person, especially persons struggling to hang on for dear life, or who may be seen as disgusting or disturbed by many people? The practice of this book is to find answers to each of these questions. The purpose of this chapter is not only to introduce you to the role that multiculturalism and person-centered approach played in developing each movement, identify some ethical and religious concepts that can explain or enrich the practice, but it is also to invite you to explore your own challenges in practicing the person-centered approach in multicultural context.

QUESTIONS TO LEARN WITH

- How would you explain the multicultural paradox of the person-centered approach?
- In what ways is the paradox not satisfying? How could you elaborate its shortcomings? What elements of multiculturalism do you need to explore beyond this chapter to understand how to better practice and appreciate multicultural person-centered therapy?

Summary

- Multicultural competencies involve awareness of one's own culture and biases, understanding of clients' worldviews, and practicing culturally appropriate intervention strategies.
- Congruence, empathic understanding, and unconditional positive regard are universally applicable but culturally bound in their internal and communicated applications.
- Concepts like stereotypes, privilege, and microaggressions help foster culturally grounded core conditions and multicultural competencies.
- Person-centered approaches have a rich history related to social advocacy and the two movements may further intertwine and propel each other into the future.
- Ethical and religious concepts such as wei-wu-wei (Taoism), grace (Christianity), and nonattachment/mindfulness (Buddhism and Secularism) can help enrich the understanding and practice of person-centered approaches for counselors.

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