

# The Interface of Social Justice Work, Social Psychology and Psychotherapy

41st Annual Cross Cultural Conference-  
Forging Solutions out of Challenges

Myrtle Beach, SC  
February 22, 2019

Mark Nickerson, LICSW  
culturalcompetenceEMDR.com  
info@marknickerson.com

1

The quest for *cultural competence*  
is  
a *journey* not a destination.

2



3

Social Work  
Social Justice

4

### Minority Stress Model

- **Minority stress** is created by the relationship between minority and dominant values and the resultant social environment experienced by minority group members.
- Extensively documented negative impacts of minority stress.
- Also, many examples of the development of resilience despite the stress.

5

### Minority Stress Model

The impact of **prejudice on wellbeing and mental health is well documented and research substantiated**

Stigmatized/ oppressed people report lower life satisfaction.

#### Opportunity Costs-

Being a member of low-status group can lead to many consequences including less employment, economic, political, medical and educational opportunities

Cultural values of minority groups are threatened by dominant cultures.

6

**Minority Stress Model**

The impact of prejudice on wellbeing and mental health is well documented and research substantiated

- The world is less safe and less functional at every level with irrational intergroup fear and mistrust.
- Inaccurate perceptions and irrational fears increase to intergroup competition rather than cooperation.
- Social-identity related issues link to self-identity and self-esteem.

7

**Social Oppression**

**Social oppression** is the mistreatment of a person or a group of people in a way that reflects systemic inequalities.

Oppressive injustices are typically embedded in social structures and reflected in laws, intolerant attitudes of a dominant culture, and lack of access to important social and economic opportunities and resources.

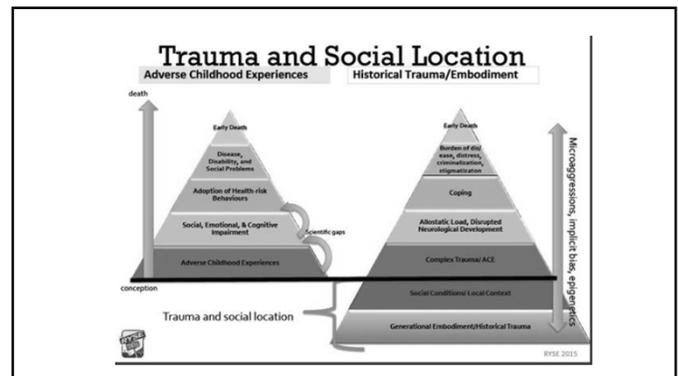
Oppression is maintained through powerful social messages and by people in "positions" of social power who collude with cultural oppression through discrimination, the perpetuation of stereotypes, and other mistreatment.

8

**Types of Social-Identity Based Oppression/Stigma**

- Sexism
- Racism
- Nationalism
- Ethnic discrimination
- anti-Semitism/anti-Muslimism
- Classism
- Elitism
- Heterosexism
- Ageism
- Adultism
- Physical appearance discrimination
- Intellectual style or ability discrimination
- Able-bodyism
- Mental health discrimination
- Otherism
- Family differences (never married, single parents,...)
- Etc., etc.

9



10

**Social Psychology/ Sociology**

11

**Social and Cultural Concepts**

- Culture
- Multiculturalism
- Entitativity
- Social identity or Cultural identity
- In-group and Out-group
- Acculturation
- Bias
- Stigma
- Prejudice, Stereotypes & Discrimination
- Prejudice: Explicit and Implicit
- Microaggression
- Isms
- Social Oppression
- Internalized oppression/stigma

12

### Entitativity

*Entitativity* represents the degree to which members of a group are bonded together in a coherent social unit.

Relevant factors that generally determine entitativity are:

- Group size
- Degree of spatial proximity
- Amount of interaction
- Importance of social identity
- Perceived common goals
- Outcomes of group
- Interdependence
- Interpersonal bonds
- Organization
- Behavior among group members.

(Campbell, 1958)

13



14

### Social identity or Cultural identity

A **social identity** (or **cultural identity**) is one's identity related to associations with social or cultural groups.

Two types:

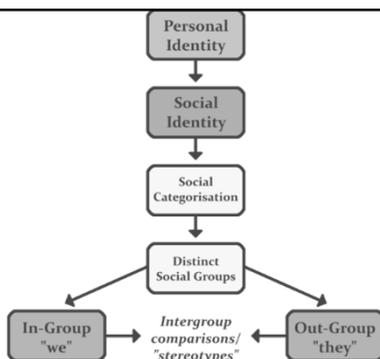
1. The meaning a person gains through a **chosen identification** with a group.
2. The meaning that is **assigned by other people or groups** of people to the person related to the identity, positive or negative

15

### Social Identity- Aspects of the Self

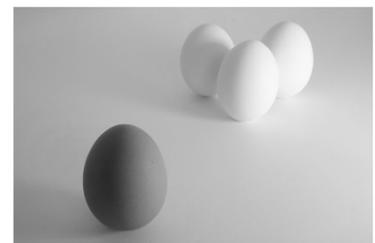


16



17

### Social Information Processing



18

**Evolutionary Adaptations:** It is essential for all age groups including infants to be able the ability to sort the many different objects, events and people encountered quickly and effectively into smaller numbers of meaningful categories.

**Innate Action Systems: Defense and Attachment:** This categorization occurs spontaneously on the basis of physical similarity, familiarity, proximity, shared fate, etc. (entitativity)

This quick and often unconscious assessment of whether someone is "like me or not" leads to *in group* and *out group* attraction and prejudice- "we" and "they"

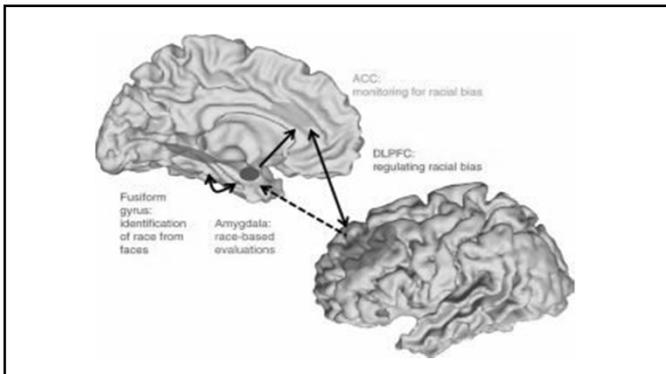
19



20



21



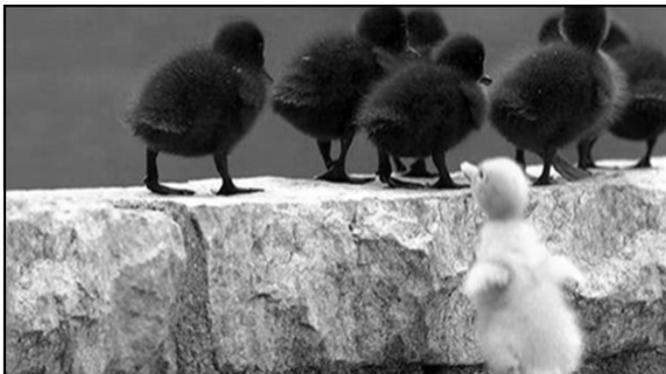
22

Two Primary Dimensions of Social Grouping

Ingroup  
Outgroup

High Status  
Low Status

23



24

**Social Information Processing**

People tend to encode in memory their observations of the behaviors of in-group and out-group members differently.

“The mind tends to categorize environmental events in the grossest manner compatible with action.”  
Gordon Allport (1954)

25

**Social Information Processing**

Although social categorization generally increases pro-in-group orientation rather than anti-out-group orientation...

Pro-in-group bias can provide a foundation for generating negativity in relation to out-groups, especially when there is competition for economic resources and political power.

26

**In-groups and Out-groups**

There are many proven benefits of in-group associations

material benefits	valuable information and experiences	a sense of belonging and security
-------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------

Research shows that powerful instincts for ethnocentrism and group loyalty operate even when the basis for group membership is **randomly assigned**.

27

**Social Information Processing**

While highly attuned to in-group information processing, the social brain can be very ineffective at accurately processing experiences with **out-group members** and **low status** members.

Simply the use of pronouns like “us” and “them” can evoke different templates of information processing.

“Otherizing” has huge social power

28

**Social Information Processing**

**Toward those perceived as in-group members, people tend to:**

- Retain more detailed information
- Be biased toward retaining positive information
- Remember ways in-group members are similar and outgroup members are dissimilar
- Be more forgiving

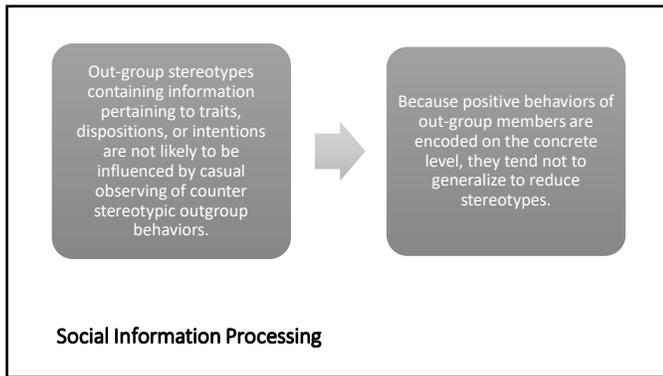
29

**Social Information Processing**

**Toward those perceived as in-group members, people tend to:**

- Encode undesirable actions of out-group members at a more abstract level (e.g. she is hostile vs. she slapped the girl)
- Encode desirable actions of out-group members at more concrete levels (e.g. she walked across the street holding the old man's hand vs. she is helpful)
- Attribute positive behaviors and successful outcomes to internal stable characteristics (the personality) of in-group more than out-group members

30



31



32



33

**Clinical Stance**

The "psychotherapist" culture has been criticized for operating with a *culture-blind* approach that too often tries to separate "cultural" issues from "personal" issues.

*We need to **embrace** culture, **not erase** it.*

34

**Cultural Competence Goals for Mental Health Practitioners**

Understand	Understand the importance of culture and of framing individual client issues within a cultural context
Understand	Understand the important dimensions of culture and social identity specific to each client (including norms, values, beliefs, needs, etc.)
Maintain	Maintain an attitude of humility while being aware of and seeking to overcome one's own cultural bias

35

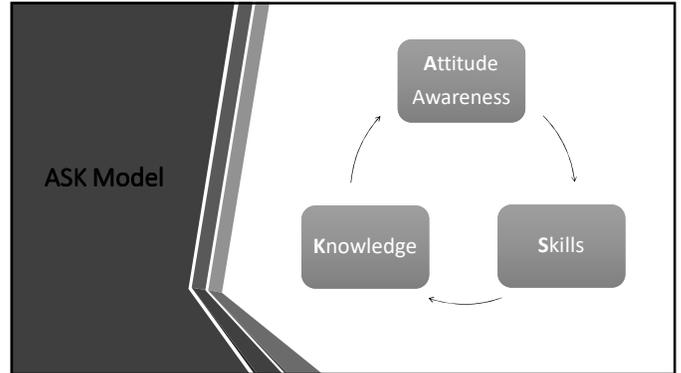
**Cultural Competence Goals for Mental Health Practitioners**

Adapt	Adapt methods to a client's cultural context and needs
Educate and empower	Educate and empower clients to be culturally aware, as appropriate
Implement	Implement interventions that treat the internalized effects of culturally-based trauma

36

<b>Cultural Competence Goals for Mental Health Practitioners</b>	<b>Implement</b>	Implement interventions that treat social prejudice and discriminatory behaviors
	<b>Support and ally</b>	Support and ally with humanitarian efforts for social change including victim/survivor empowerment, social justice, and policy reform
	<b>Build and sustain</b>	Build and sustain therapist organizations which support the cultural competence of practitioners and which are culturally competent organizations

37



38

**Opening the door**

Can I ask you some questions about your social and cultural experiences?

39



40

**Social Trauma (discrimination, stigma/oppression)**

- Do you have any early memories of being included or excluded from a group based upon your race/ethnicity, social class, gender, physical ability/appearance, etc.?
- Do you currently experience social microaggressions? (slurs, denigrating remarks, etc.)
- Have you had difficulties related to assimilating into another culture?

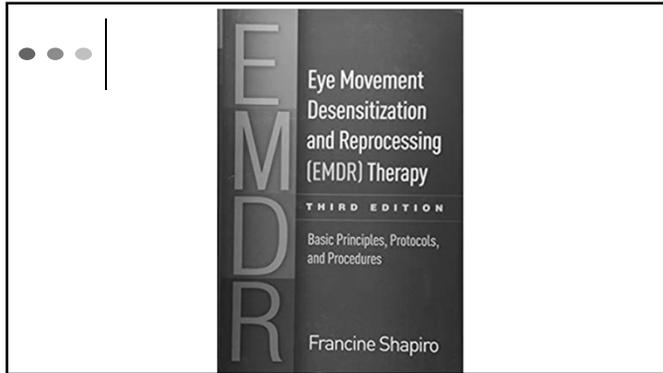
41

**Internalization**

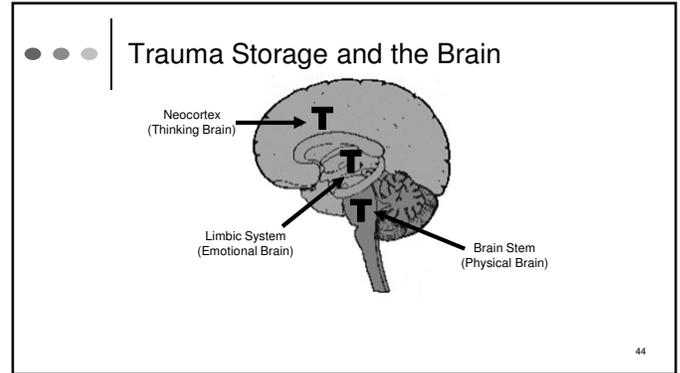
*Internalization* is the process whereby a person, as part of a response to culturally based mistreatment, adopts the negative messages conveyed to them.

The internalized cultural messages can include the social judgments, values, beliefs, or prescription for conduct

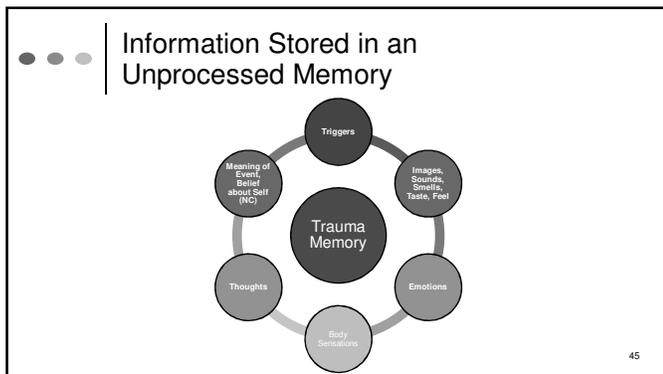
42



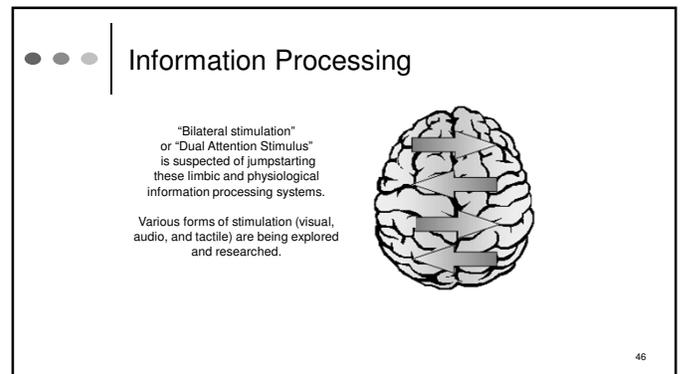
43



44



45



46

### Describing EMDR to a Client

- **Access** the dysfunctionally stored information.
- **Stimulate** the information processing system and maintain it in a dynamic form.
- **Move** the information by monitoring the free association process and initiate procedures to facilitate adaptive (appropriate, positive, functional) resolution.
- **Desensitize:** Reduce the Subjective Unit of Distress (SUD) to 0.
- **Reprocess:** Learning takes place so client adapts their understanding of the event and shifts negative cognitions to positive cognitions.

47

### Social Identity Development

Research affirms that developing a cohesive ethnic identity offers many potential gains including:

- General psychological self-esteem, happiness
- Decreased self-destructive behaviors
- Reduced risk that discrimination will lead to depression
- Greater family cohesion for adolescents

48

Six Forms of Resource Capital

1. **Aspirational Capital** – hopes and dreams
2. **Linguistic Capital** – language skills their advantages
3. **Familial Capital** – family connection, support and culture
4. **Social Capital** – networks of connection
5. **Navigational Capital** – skills in navigating cultural challenges
6. **Spiritual Capital** – religious and spiritual practices and beliefs

*Venkatraman-Levis (2017)*

49

**Internalized Cultural Messages**  
Exploratory questions:

*When you think of your current problem, what judgments or messages do you feel society making? or,*

*What do you hear society saying? When in your life did you first hear that message?*

50

**Internalized Stereotypes**

*Is there a stereotype about some aspect of your social identity? \_\_\_\_\_*

*When you think about that stereotype, what comes to mind (thoughts, feelings, memories)? How disturbing does it feel to you now (SUDs, 0-10)?*

*When in your life did you first hear that stereotype?*

51

**Prejudice:**

- is more easily learned than unlearned
- operates on the unconscious level
- impairs thinking and judgment
- coexists with many mental health difficulties

**Why the Need for Intervention?**

52

**Prejudice Reduction**  
Core components of successful strategies include:

- Increasing motivation and decreasing defensiveness
- Activating mindful attention
- Providing nonbiased information
- Strengthening prefrontal cortex awareness of nonbiased perceptions
- Desensitizing the amygdala reactivity to triggers of prejudice

53

**Collection of Articles: Multiple Authors**

*Stereotypes and Prejudice: Essential Readings,* (Stangor, C., 2000)

*The Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination* (Nelson, 2009)

*The Oxford Handbook of Multicultural Identity* (Bebet-Martinez & Hong, 2014)

54