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"If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place" Margaret Mead (1963, p. 218).

Why Philosophy?

People's experiences require interpretation. Research data require interpretation. In a book otherwise about experience and data, this chapter addresses the topic of interpretation. This shift from evidence to *ideas* requires explanation, which we offer in the form of an anecdote:

At a recent professional conference, a participant asked a prominent panel member why he had dropped his successful career in neuropsychology to teach philosophy—of all things! The question was asked with a tone of unmistakable incredulity. Although not directly raising the issue of sanity, the question seemed based on an underlying disbelief that a rational individual could possibly make such a decision. Why philosophy?

The question "why philosophy?" articulated what many individuals in the audience had thought privately. Isn't the "big money" in neuropsychology? After all, the panelist was quite famous in neuropsychology. Why study ideas rather than save lives? Isn't philosophy the antithesis of neuroscience? Hundreds of challenges could have been offered, but the point of this anecdote is that each challenge would have required the panelist to justify his position—in contrast to alternatives. Each alternative would align with a particular worldview—a philosophy. Philosophy is omnipresent, acknowledged or not.

The premise of this book, that data should inform clinical practice, is based on multiple

assumptions. So are mental health treatments. So are cultural worldviews. Multicultural counseling and psychology seeks to understand and question these assumptions.

Why Ask Questions?

When asked sincerely and thoughtfully, questions seek to bridge gaps between worldviews. Questions seek interpretation. They seek clarity in terms that we already understand. Thus questions expose the assumptions and values of the questioner. What we already know or assume influences what we believe we need to find out. And when we believe we know already, we do not ask. Or, we ask in a way that limits or precludes actually bridging worldviews.

In the introductory anecdote, the incredulous participant did not ask why the famous panelist had started out in neuropsychology in the first place – *assuming* intrinsic value in the study of neuropsychology. The audience had many assumptions about such things as the optimal means for advancing knowledge (empiricism vs. rationalism), the usefulness of neuroscience over philosophy (pragmatism or perhaps utilitarianism), or the individual's own personal interests (psychological egoism). Questions reveal underlying assumptions and values. The process of identifying assumptions and evaluating ideals relative to alternatives is the work of philosophy. Seen in this light, psychology itself is an attempt to *apply* philosophy to understand and improve human experience (Robinson, 1995).

How does philosophy relate to multicultural psychology?

Why include a chapter on philosophical considerations in a book about multicultural research? We purposefully use the term *philosophy* rather than the terms *conceptualization* or *framework* to emphasize the readers' obligation to engage the material through questioning and critical thinking. We seek to prompt thoughtful analysis (Machado & Silva, 2007). And we do so by questioning assumptions in contemporary multicultural psychology.

No doubt some individuals who have read previous chapters in this book bypassed this chapter after a single glance at a title including the word *philosophical.* To them, we can offer no explanation. To the hurried readers who dared to skim this far into the introductory section, we offer no promises. To the one who continues, we offer more questions.

The point of this chapter is that multicultural psychologists should ask questions like the incredulous conference participant. When questions are asked, assumptions and values can be identified. When questions are asked, dialogue occurs. And dialogue explicitly informed by values and assumptions is the essence of multicultural psychology.

Why do assumptions matter?

Assumptions embedded within ideas have substantive power *especially if they remain unchallenged*. They influence decisions and actions without the benefit of thoughtful evaluation. Adverse consequences of assumptions can be obvious: Presidential decisions to support the invasion of Cuba in 1962 or of Iraq in 2003 gave more weight to presuppositions than to contraindications. Such examples are easily apparent. But equally apparent are pathologies in which individuals assume fallacies about their own worth based on the evaluations of others (e.g., not “good enough”) and minimize evidence contradicting their assumptions. Assumptions influence thoughts and behaviors until identified and contrasted with alternatives.

Psychotherapy can challenge faulty assumptions, but reflecting and identifying assumptions are not the exclusive responsibility of clients. Clinicians, students, and instructors assuming certain tenets about multicultural psychology can also benefit from self-evaluation. The data presented in the preceding chapters of this book indicate that several of the assumptions in multicultural psychology research have been proven unreliable. Or perhaps some of the assumptions are correct but the data were unreliable. Which assumptions or which data sets are

accurate? To what degree? Under which circumstances? Questioning prevailing assumptions in multicultural psychology may generate new explanations better aligned with the research data– and may also yield data characterized by greater reliability.

Multicultural psychology does not benefit from maintaining unreliable assumptions. Multicultural psychology benefits when we strive to align our assumptions with the needs and experiences of historically disadvantaged populations.

Is it time to ask hard (philosophical) questions in multicultural psychology?

Examining one's own limitations can be very painful. Wouldn't it be better for a book promoting multicultural psychology to remain positive, rather than ask questions that might be uncomfortable? We desire to improve multicultural psychology, but we understand that questioning traditional practices may provoke varied reactions. We intend no offense. But even the most cherished ideas in multicultural psychology fail to explain the vast complexity of reality, so re-vision and revision of our profession's ideas is inevitable, no matter how presently influential they may be.

In the spirit of working collaboratively, we offer a historical analogy. Like the scientific and philosophical traditions it broke from in the late 1800s, early work in psychology relied exclusively on intellectuals from Europe and North America to the exclusion of alternative worldviews. Assumptions about race and ethnicity influenced the early practice of psychology in a myriad of ways, many harmful (D.W. Sue & Sue, 2012). Women and people of color who received indoctrination as psychologists initially experienced little freedom to question those assumptions without incurring marginalization (Guthrie, 2004), but over several decades harder and harder questions about race and racism kept coming. For instance, psychologists recognizing inaccurate assumptions opposed racial segregation (Clark & Clark, 1939) and other

forms of prejudgment based on stereotypes (Allport, 1954). *Multicultural psychology exists today based on scholarship that uncovered and corrected assumptions.*

We honor the women and men who questioned prevailing paradigms in psychology and those of the subsequent generation who built multicultural psychology upon their work (i.e., elders recognized at the National Multicultural Conference and Summit). After many decades of struggle, multicultural psychology is here to stay (D. W. Sue, Bingham, Porché-Burke, & Vasquez, 1999). However, much work remains to be done, with the rising generation of graduate students needing better preparation to effectively negotiate the complex social realities of our time. In their interest and in the interest of the communities they will serve, will we now collectively improve multicultural psychology by asking harder and harder (philosophical) questions that challenge our previous assumptions?

Some Questions to Consider (with Hopes for Many More to Come)

In our collective efforts to enhance multicultural psychology, open dialogue should not only accelerate its improvement but also model the process it seeks to promote: learning from differences. The field has matured in recent decades, but the complexity of multiculturalism will ensure that the discipline will continue to expand over the next century and beyond. Thousands of questions remain unanswered. Although we provide tentative responses to the three "example questions" we ask in this section, we recognize that it is the process of asking questions that has greatest worth. Questions can prompt additional queries and responses in an iterative cycle.

What "is" multicultural psychology?

Numerous definitions and descriptions of multicultural psychology are available. Their consistent theme is that psychology must embrace the whole gamut of human potentialities, as suggested by the esteemed cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead (1963).

Most descriptions of multicultural psychology are aspirational: they describe what ought to be. In his seminal book *Multiculturalism as a Fourth Force,* Paul Pedersen pointed out, "Multiculturalism refers to a new perspective in mainstream psychology characterized as a fourth force complementing the three other theoretical orientations in psychology, i.e., psychodynamic theory, existentialistic theory, and cognitive-behavioral theory, addressing the needs of culturally diverse populations" (1999, p. 113). He added, "Multiculturalism recognizes the complexity of culture" (p. 113). Additionally Pedersen quoted eminent cross-cultural psychologist John Berry (1991), "Multiculturalism is meant to create a socio-political context within which individuals can develop healthy identities and mutually positive intergroup attitudes" (p. 24).

We share these aspirations. We also recognize that we have not yet arrived at a point where undergraduate students are as familiar with multicultural psychology (the "fourth force") as they are with behavioral, psychodynamic, and humanistic psychology. And multicultural psychological research rarely accounts for "the complexity of culture." We are still largely discussing anti-bias strategies rather than creating socio-cultural contexts conducive to "mutually positive intergroup attitudes." In short, an obvious gap exists between multicultural psychology as practiced and as frequently defined. It is time to bridge that gap, starting with an evaluation of reality. Taking inventory of what multicultural psychology "is" in the real world can help determine where we are relative to what it "ought" to be, with the aim of achieving the envisioned "ought."

When we, the authors, have spoken with psychologists who are unaware of our affiliation with multicultural psychology, we have sensed three general approaches to the topic, with a fourth, atypical approach. Polite, surface acknowledgement is by far the most common response. Yes, multiculturalism is important, but when the conversation starts to go further, no substantive

methods, theories, or even rationale are mentioned. A second approach involves strong and apparently genuine affirmation of multiculturalism, with general principles understood but disconnected from their application; people "talk the talk" but do not know how to "walk the walk." A third approach is silence, a disengagement rooted in apathy or skepticism. We are thankful we encounter the latter approach with decreasing frequency. The rarest of all, thus not yet one of the three "general" approaches, is to successfully practice multicultural psychology.

We occasionally meet people who engage in genuine collaboration with local communities. They understand complex personal, situational, political, and historical influences. They have stretched their methodological, theoretical, and analytic skills to the point that they have acquired new perspective and skills. So the envisioned aspirations are possible to attain. We see it. We would like to see it more. For that to happen, future scholarship needs to address what multicultural psychology means to the people who are attempting to apply it ("What 'is' multicultural psychology?"). Understanding what people perceive multicultural psychology to be will be essential to lifting their vision of what it can become.

How will we more equitably serve historically oppressed populations?

Government initiatives to fund mental health care for economically disadvantaged populations can help improve access to services, but reliance on such programs will be insufficient to meet the vast need. Presently we see few graduate students interested in serving impoverished communities; as students they increasingly incur debt that precludes their entertaining such a notion. Understandably, graduates often seek the highest paying positions available. Professional psychology graduate programs can help by seeking investments and endowments to help offset tuition costs. Even more beneficial, graduate programs can emphasize a service-oriented mentality, providing practicum and/or externship experiences in high need

areas. Internship sites serving disadvantaged populations could be promoted (Casas et al., 2010).

Individual practitioners can also take personal responsibility for better meeting the needs of impoverished individuals needing care. Most psychologists in private practice have a few spare hours in their caseload. Reduced rates (sliding scales) and networking in local communities can increase client service utilization. Rather than merely challenging others to serve impoverished groups, we can take action ourselves. To paraphrase a better statement, we need not ask what our community can do for us, but what we can do for our community.

What aims should multicultural psychology work to achieve?

Multicultural psychology has broad ambitions: no less than to eradicate prejudice and discrimination and to promote the well-being of historically oppressed populations. Nevertheless, it may be useful to specify aims that can contribute to meeting those long-term objectives. For instance, what essential aspects of applied mental health services might bring about the greatest improvements in traditional practices? Within the delimited sphere of mental health services (including prevention/wellness initiatives), four specific aims seem most desirable: (a) reduction of mental health disparities, (b) access to services by those in need; (c) retention of those receiving services; and (d) improved outcomes to the satisfaction of those receiving services.

Other praiseworthy initiatives, such as promoting multicultural competence among therapists, should not divert the primary focus from these four aims. In fact, the ultimate purpose of therapist multicultural competence is to address the four aims, although most contemporary research into this competence relates only indirectly to them. The same could be said of applied psychological research concerning perceived racism, acculturation, ethnic identity, etc. Although the relationship of ethnic identity to well-being is interesting, the application of that knowledge to enhance the efficacy of therapy or prevention initiatives with at-risk youth is of more use.

Multicultural psychology cannot continue to influence the broader profession (Pedersen, 1999; D. W. Sue et al., 1999) by drifting into interesting topics at the expense of the essential ones.

Many authors affirm social justice as an objective for mental health service providers (Toporek, 2006). Social justice is a far nobler objective than the four comparatively mundane aims proposed here. However, these four aims could be considered the focal point of social justice work within psychology, serving as concrete benchmarks for progress in mental health settings towards the broader aim of social justice, a paradigm worthy of our efforts and therefore of our questions.

Questioning a Paradigm: Re-Conceptualizing Social Justice

Early in this chapter we emphasized that assumptions pervasively influence both collectives and individuals. We then asked three "example questions" about multicultural psychology. We now focus on the topic of social justice to explore possible assumptions at the paradigmatic level and to suggest a possible alternative conceptualization. As with the example questions above, the content of this inquiry matters much less than the process. Any paradigm influential in multicultural psychology could and should be similarly questioned.

How central is social justice to multicultural psychology?

Few concepts can rival the influence of social justice on contemporary multicultural psychology. Commonly defined as the application of the concept of justice to a societal level, social justice is more specifically set out by Rawls (1999),

> Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others (p. 3-4)

Social justice, as it aims to promote equity by eradicating discrimination and poverty, has

profoundly shaped multicultural psychology (Arredondo & Perez, 2003; Leong, Comas-Dias, Hall, McLloyd, & Trimble, 2013; Toporek, 2006). Social justice perspectives have moved multicultural psychology forward in many essential ways, including (a) equity in power structures, (b) orientation toward action, and (c) empowerment of community.

Why question a paradigm with benefits so obvious and so widely recognized? Although the concept of social justice is repeated often in multicultural psychology literature, most authors merely mention it in passing, at times seeming to use it as a type of code word to show familiarity with contemporary parlance, with little relevance actually shown in the research. Genuine adherence to the concept of social justice does occur (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2010) but infrequently (Baluch, Pieterse, & Bolden, 2004). Are there assumptions in present articulations of social justice that might constrain its influence or preclude its widespread application?

What assumptions might be embedded in the concept of social justice?

The concept of social justice has been invoked by a variety of scholars advocating for change in psychology (e.g., Arredondo & Perez, 2003; Vera & Speight, 2003) and higher education generally (Worthington, Hart, & Khairallah, 2010), so any generic examination of the concept will fail to represent all perspectives. Although a systematic examination of all possible assumptions within a social justice paradigm would fill an entire volume, we restrict our list to three strengths that frequently receive attention in applied psychology.

1. Primacy of power. Attending to power (i.e., resources, social influence) is the optimal focus of scholarship, with an aim to promote equality through social change.
2. Role of advocacy. Mental health professionals should advocate for oppressed people.
3. Emphasis on empowerment. Power plus advocacy lead to empowerment—giving voice to the voiceless; bottom-up processes are key.

To continue the conceptual analysis, we could examine relevant philosophical positions sharing similar assumptions. But few authors in psychology mention underlying philosophy. Moreover, social justice is multifaceted (Toporek, 2006). Nevertheless, the three above assumptions seem related to the following philosophical concepts: (a) dialectical materialism and critical pedagogy, (b) praxis and political activism, and (c) liberation psychology. Although these positions are rarely cited in manuscripts, their links with social justice have been well articulated (Ivey & Collins, 2003; Ivey & Zalaquett, 2009; Vera & Speight, 2003).

Which of these assumptions might conflict with pragmatic realities in (North American) multicultural psychology?

In our review we found that much of the multicultural psychology literature did not align with the three assumptions just listed. For example, far from giving credence to "the primacy of power," researchers hardly ever measure or even operationalize issues of power (i.e., resources, social influence), even those clearly relevant to their investigation. They pay even less attention to advocacy for social change. Very few publications are driven by "bottom up" community involvement. Undermining the field's intended emphasis on social justice, the variables commonly measured in contemporary multicultural psychology research (e.g., assessment validity, ethnic/racial identity, acculturation) are ancillary to issues of power, advocacy, and empowerment.

Although this neglect may be excused in research (since detachment from reality is sometimes attributed to inhabitants of ivory towers), we find the same trends in literature describing clinical practice, with allusions to issues of power, advocacy, and empowerment but few specifics (Vera & Speight, 2003). Recently a prominent multicultural psychology leader lamented that her work with disadvantaged communities was not valued by her peers and that

she knew of very few psychologists who shared her passion or role as advocate, despite prevailing rhetoric. Very rarely do we hear of true community empowerment in the literature. Fields such as development studies, social work, and social anthropology have developed traditions conducive to participatory action research (designed to promote community empowerment by meeting people's needs and answering their questions); however we find hardly any of that work in multicultural psychology. Despite years of appeals in the literature, the promotion of social justice seems incongruent with present practices. Why?

The most obvious reason for such incongruence is reluctance of adherents to practice the principles (Baluch et al., 2004; Speight & Vera, 2004). But why? Why is social justice not more commonly practiced when the entire field seems to be based on it? The following reasons may apply:

- Issues of power, empowerment, etc. may be too abstract/complex for psychologists to address in therapy or research; these concepts may need to be grounded in lived experience (Gergen, 1995) and operationalized (Cooren, 2006).
- North American psychologists have been raised in a capitalist society that obfuscates power dynamics, even those that are obvious to others. People are rarely paid to be social justice advocates, so they rarely engage in the work.
- Practitioners may perceive liberation psychology as a theory, rather than as a worldview for engagement with reality.
- People who select a career in the mental health professions may prefer working with individuals and small groups, rather than dealing with macro-level issues.
- Methods of social change beyond advocacy and political activism may be overlooked by individuals who narrowly interpret liberation psychology. Not all contexts or

personalities are compatible with advocacy or activism; multiple methods can be effective in raising awareness or facilitating desirable change.

In addition to these practical reasons why the concept of social justice has been characterized more by verbal posturing than the intended actions, we suggest that part of that problem *stems from the underlying philosophy*. Materialism, a philosophy informing liberation psychology, praxis, and critical pedagogy, was a response to oppression with roots in European intellectual paradigms. The underlying assumptions are reactionary and thus delimited, not necessarily aligning with cultures of other origins. That is, philosophical materialism adds a layer of interpretation that can preclude acceptance of other worldviews, an objective of multicultural psychology. Philosophical materialism is a popular worldview among intellectuals, but many indigenous cultures abide by different conceptualizations. Academics and advocates commonly interpret experiences of indigenous populations through the lens of materialism, although they criticize comparable interpretation through the lens of capitalism, individualism, etc. Such interpretation must be distinguished from acceptance of an indigenous cultural worldview as worthy on its own merits.

Although Marx, Fanon, Freire, Martín-Baró, and others advocating philosophical materialism both criticized power dynamics and emphasized relations across all of humanity (humanization), many proponents of social justice do little more than condemn those who abuse power. Motivated by indignation, justified anger, they become "like the oppressors, mimicking their patterns of domination and dehumanization" (Gaztambide, 2009, p. 216). Freire termed this reactionary stance *naïve transitivity* (1973). His urging to transcend reactivity aligns with even novice students' perceptions about animated social justice advocates pounding the pulpit at professional conferences: They seem to be selling a version of psychology insufficiently self-

reflective to earn admiration. A genuinely multicultural psychology would not fix attention on symbols of status (money, influence) at the expense of omitting other important contexts (social/intimate, holistic/spiritual).

So long as social justice is obtained, a pragmatist would embrace any means to achieve that end. But if the end is not being achieved (which is certainly the case), then the pragmatist would explore reasons why and replace those most likely negating efficacy. For instance, if philosophical materialism is an uncertain fit with many indigenous cultures of Africa, Asia, Australia, North and South America, and the Pacific Islands, other motivations for promoting justice may be more desirable for multicultural psychology.

Section Summary: Values and Assumptions. Values and assumptions pervade multicultural psychology–as they do every discipline. Although we cannot escape values and assumptions, we can seek to identify them and improve on them if possible.

In this section we have explored the concept of social justice, demonstrating its relevance to multicultural psychology, listing three assumptions embedded within it, identifying some philosophical underpinnings, and finally listing possible limitations of those assumptions in the practice of multicultural psychology. Any idea or theory prominent in multicultural psychology can be similarly evaluated. However, the purpose of such deconstruction must be re-construction: to retain what is useful and improve on the rest. To that effort we now turn.

How can social justice be re-conceptualized through a relational paradigm?

Karl Marx articulated philosophical materialism in response to his era, the industrial revolution of the latter 1800s. Abuses of power were universal. Protections for citizens were minimal, and protections for disenfranchised groups were either nonexistent or ignored. Certainly oppression of the powerless had always existed–and will always exist–but through

materialism the masses gained the allegiance of scholars, who articulated their plight and proposed means for their empowerment.

Equal opportunity remains an aim to be sought. But social and global dynamics have changed with the times. International cultural exchange now occurs at unprecedented levels. Electronic networks provide enhanced connection with global as well as local diversity, with opportunities for more equity in access to knowledge. Our collective interests now depend on multiculturalism and internationalism, requiring that we move beyond a self-preservation mentality. Just as Marx provided a powerful response to the needs of his time, contemporary multicultural psychology would benefit from a philosophy (not merely a set of loosely connected arguments about power and privilege) that directly responds to an increasingly internet-based society with its need for unity amid diversity. Although the laudable work of Martín-Baró (1994) on liberation psychology provides philosophical underpinning for social justice, our thesis is that a broader *relational paradigm* can provide a more useful philosophical foundation that is compatible with that work but not dependent on materialism.

Humans are innately social beings. A relational paradigm asserts that social interactions are central, not tangential, to psychology (Gergen, 1995; Jordan, 2010; Slife & Wiggins, 2009). Individuals' interactions with others form the structure, process, and content of their lives. Primary relationships (childhood and current) influence other relationships, which vary in importance across time and across contexts. Each person has a unique pattern of relationships that is constantly changing, but clear similarities can be found across individuals and even across cultures because some similar contexts are shared: most notably physiologic, but also environmental, linguistic, historic, and so forth (Cohen, 2001). New relationships and repaired relationships alter individuals' perceptions, emotions, cognitions, and behaviors, which all

influence other relationships in interactive processes.

Aspects of a relational paradigm can be found across history. The philosophy of Confucius emphasized social roles. Aristotle conceived humans as primarily political, by which he meant interactive (Robinson, 1995), necessary parts of the whole—the *polis* (community/city). Our ultimate interests are those of the community.

The relational paradigm is a contemporary movement that links with the tenets of feminism (Miller, 1986), interpersonal psychotherapy (Weissman, Markowitz, & Klerman, 2000), object relations (Clarke, Hahn, & Hoggett, 2008), symbolic interactionism (Charon, 2001), social constructionism (Gergen, 2009), and philosophies advanced by Levinas (1979, 1998) and Bakhtin (1981) among others, including scholars foundational to liberation psychology (Baró et al., 1994). The term *relational paradigm* denotes a broad worldview, a meta-theory. A variety of synonymous terms have been used in the literature: *relational meta-theory* (Lerner & Overton, 2008), *relationism* (Overton & Ennis, 2006b), *relational ontology* (Slife, 2004), *relationality* (Slife & Wiggins, 2009), *relational perspective* (Smith & Draper, 2004; Weissman et al., 2000), and *relational methodological research approaches* (Trimble & Mohatt, 2006). Although specific assertions and assumptions differ (e.g., Oliver, 2001), the core principles align to emphasize reciprocal effects embedded in interpersonal and intergroup interactions. To understand people, we must understand their relationships. The following seven general principles help to clarify how individuals are best understood, not solely as individuals but as interactive agents in the context of multiple relationships past, present, and potential.

Connectedness (mutual edification). An innate yearning for attachment with others characterizes human life (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008). Social engagement provides information exchange and learning (Bandura, 1977), but at deeper levels it can be emotionally fulfilling and

mutually edifying. Interpersonal intimacy provides meaning and purpose in life. In fact, social networks affect longevity as much as light smoking and much more than alcoholism, obesity, and hypertension (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). In contrast, the absence of genuine intimacy coincides with psychological disturbance and poor health (S. Cohen, 2004; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, et al., 2015). The principle of mutual edification provides a philosophical and psychological basis for the aim of multicultural psychology to eradicate oppression and segregation: People who are socially distanced experience negative outcomes; people who are socially integrated experience enhanced well-being.

Holism. A relational paradigm emphasizes contextualization (Overton & Ennis, 2006a). We cannot see the parts without seeing the whole, and we cannot understand the whole without considering the parts. To understand psychological processes, we need to learn about both specific events and their contexts. Multicultural psychology, with its emphasis on contextualization, has provided a holistic perspective previously absent from individualistic conceptualizations of human experience.

Interactive volition. Individuals possess an innate will and volition called *agency* (Adams & Markus, 2001; Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2008; Williams, 1992), but that volition interacts with the environment (Robichaud, 2006). External forces, such as sociopolitical oppression, clearly influence and restrict an individual's choices. Nevertheless, we retain the power to work to modify external environments (e.g., combat oppression). We are not free from external influences, including our own relationship history and culture, but we are free to change our perspective, repair damaged relationships, form new relationships, strengthen our own abilities, and work to modify the environment.

Becoming. Relational development is ongoing. Personal identity and capacity evolve as

relationships evolve. Whereas most of psychology fixes its focus on the present, a relational paradigm emphasizes ongoing processes and potentials: the ontology of becoming (Overton & Ennis, 2006b).

Self-in-Relation. In a relational paradigm, the *self* is seen not as a fixed entity, isolated and independent, but as a highly complex and fluid pattern, a *self-in-relation* (Adams & Markus, 2001; Kaplan, 1986). People understand themselves through their interactions with others, who serve as points of comparison and contrast across circumstances and across time (Overton & Ennis, 2006a). For instance, ethnic identity develops not only through emulation of desired models, but also by contrast with other ethnic groups, particularly oppressive ones (Tajfel, 2010).

Responsibility to others (moral sensibility). Whenever people interact, they influence one another, even if implicitly. Thus people remain responsible to one another for their influence (Gergen, 2009; Levinas, 1979). Given this responsibility, a relational paradigm advocates an *other-engagement* (meaningfully interacting in ways mutually beneficial) and a *we-consciousness* (explicit attentiveness to the relationship) (Levinas, 1998). Other-engagement and we-consciousness diminish self-interest (Stapel & Koomen, 2001), which helps keep interpersonal and inter-group interactions benign rather than oppressive. Thus therapists maintain not only focus on the client but also vigilance for effects on the client of their own actions and assumptions (Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). Sensibility and responsibility to the client comprise the essence of multicultural counseling competence.

Rights. Interpersonal relationships occur across disparate contexts, including different nations and legal systems. However, crossing a geopolitical boundary should not change the core human. So the notion of human rights is necessarily grounded in relationships, not in the myriad of contexts. People bear rights with them wherever they go, irrespective of

organizational policy or national law.

From this perspective a *right* denotes a deserved protection. Rights "follow the person" (irrespective of national/organizational boundaries) because people remain vulnerable to others wherever the location. Human vulnerabilities necessitate protection, so rights link to vulnerabilities (Harré & Robinson, 1995). Social institutions that protect human rights (i.e., government, professional organizations such as APA) hold accountable anyone prepared to compromise others' well-being or take advantage of their vulnerabilities. Multiculturalism has helped to promote recognition of human vulnerability and to promote accompanying protections.

How might a relational paradigm benefit multicultural psychology?

An abstract meta-theory like the relational paradigm is useful to practitioners and researchers to the extent that it facilitates interpretation of lived experience and research data. A relational paradigm has clear implications for social justice and community empowerment, as alluded to in the preceding section. For example, the Miami Youth Development Project applies a relational approach to promoting social justice by relying on contextual resources and the relationships of youth to their parents, peers, teachers, and mentors (Lerner & Overton, 2008).

Most scholars who advise about the conduct of mental health treatments and research with populations other than their own devote attention to the principles and codes of professional ethical standards and norms; that is, they are concerned about what is right and wrong, good or bad, harmless or harmful, intrusive or non-intrusive, and an assortment of other moral and humanistic considerations. Scholars have expanded on normative professional standards to include often unstated ethical principles and guidelines that focus on the importance of establishing firm collaborative relationships with community leaders especially in conducting research with ethnocultural groups (Mohatt, 1989; Fisher et al., 2002).

> It is time to place the collaboration concept in the center of inquiry and work out its importance for community research and intervention. Although some would see it as merely a tool or strategy to getting the 'real' work of behavioral science done, our strong preference is to view the research relationship in community research and intervention as a critical part of the 'real' work itself (Trickett & Espino, 2004, p. 62).

A relational paradigm also has clear implications for psychotherapy (Gelso, 2011; Slife, 2004; Slife & Wiggins, 2009; Smith & Draper, 2004; Wachtel, 2008). This chapter cannot include the many ways a relational paradigm can improve clinical practices, but the basic tenets are obvious: building interpersonal trust with the client, exploring clients' relationship patterns to gain insights into positive and negative coping, strengthening clients' social skills and intimacy with others, involving others in the clients' efforts to improve, attending to counter-transference, modeling desirable interpersonal interactions in the here and now, etc. "Research studies demonstrate that it is the relationship between the client and the psychotherapist, more than any other factor, which determines the effectiveness of psychotherapy" (Clarkson, 2003, p. 4).

The specific implications of a relational paradigm for multicultural psychology are too many to list, but we briefly highlight the relevance of a relational paradigm to the construct of ethnic identity as one example that may suggest possibilities for other topics. Research and theory focused on identity development have received much attention in the literature, but this scholarship typically involves assumptions associated with individualism: identity is often assumed to be a trait, something an individual "possesses" (e.g., noting that Ms. Kim has a strong Korean American identity). In contrast, a relational paradigm would emphasize the dynamic shared nature of identity (e.g., examining Ms. Kim's relationships with her grandparents, workmates, etc. and attending to how those interactions invoke and suppress her

perceptions and actions relevant to cultural values as a Korean American). From this perspective, scholarship on identity development should attend to social influences, primarily family socialization (e.g., Liu & Lau, 2013; Trimble, 2005). Identity undergoes challenges and redefinitions as social encounters broaden outside the home, but then stabilizes as social interactions become predictable and controllable.

> For example, a person's complex identity as bisexual Catholic female accountant with a learning disability is dependent on her interactions with other women, bisexuals, Catholics, accountants, and individuals with learning disabilities, who provide essential modeling and sources of comparison, and people who share none of those attributes, who serve as sources of contrast. If the woman has had positive key interactions with others about her gender, she will likely strongly affirm her identity as a woman. But if she has had negative interactions with others about her learning disability and has failed to meet a positive role model with a learning disability, she may likely minimize or avoid openly acknowledging that aspect of her experience. Identity parallels social interactions. Models of racial identity, gender identity, spiritual identity, etc. may therefore benefit from incorporating interpersonal-level variables such as socialization and predictability of interactions. (Smith & Draper, 2004, p. 319-320)

Although identity development theories often mention social dynamics, relevant research has remained steeped in individualism, measuring the individual without regard to social context.

Similarly, many other variables in multicultural psychology (e.g., the effects of racism on well-being) have clear social foundations that have typically been ignored *because of* assumptions embedded in individualism. A relational paradigm attempts to balance prevailing notions with alternative explanations hopefully representative of lived experience.

We have many reasons to believe that a relational paradigm aligns well with multicultural psychology (Comstock et al., 2008; Fay, 1996). Conceptualizations and assumptions based on a relational paradigm may offer several advantages over existing conceptualizations and assumptions based on alternative paradigms, detailed in the following paragraphs.

Congruence with psychological perspectives. A relational paradigm fits well within social and applied psychology, thus corresponding to psychotherapy better than philosophical paradigms originally conceived by scholars in economics, comparative literature, sociology, or political science. For example, a psychotherapist can work with the relational concept of collective/group well-being (Peterson, Park, & Sweeney, 2008) while also attending to socioeconomic power (for an alternative conceptualization see Gergen, 1995).

Congruence with well-being. Having sufficient resources to sustain life with reasonable predictability is essential to well-being (Diener & Oishi, 2000; Howell & Howell, 2008). Once individuals have sufficient material resources, the basis for human well-being is interpersonal relationships (e.g., Dwyer, 2000; Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2008; Peterson et al., 2008). This research finding, consistent across world cultures (e.g., Haller & Hadler, 2006), has necessarily focused inquiry on social factors associated with well-being. Personal and collective happiness is largely a function of the quality of interpersonal relationships (Myers, 2004, 2008). A multicultural psychology incorporating principles of connectedness, holism, becoming, etc. could improve current efforts to promote well-being (Mohatt, Fok, Henry, & Allen, 2011). A multicultural psychology informed by these relational principles can easily integrate with positive psychology, a possibility open for exploration (Pedrotti, Edwards, & Lopez, 2009). A relational paradigm aligns with the psychology of well-being.

Congruence with a primary cause of trauma and mental illness. A relational

paradigm is not restricted to a positive psychology focus on well-being, although that is its strength (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2008). When negative or unpredictable, relationships yield harmful psychological consequences, sometimes terribly destructive. Psychological damage results from violations of intimacy and dignity: incest, rape, verbal abuse, spousal infidelity, and similar interpersonal desecration unfortunately common among individuals seeking mental health services. Mental illness not directly explainable by neurochemistry has social underpinnings. The psychology of abuse, trauma, and pathology fit within a relational paradigm.

Congruence with means to promote social change. Multicultural psychologists explicitly promote change in their profession and in society (Ivey & Zalaquett, 2009; Totikidis, & Prilleltensky, 2006). Change must involve the social world, particularly relationships, if it is to be sustained. Confrontation and political advocacy can transform institutional policies, but ultimately individuals need to adopt a different worldview for change to persist. For instance, people may continue to tell racist jokes in private despite an anti-racism policy, but they typically stop telling racist jokes once peers frown rather than smile. Real changes occur when social networks reinforce stated organizational values. Multicultural psychology seeks not merely policy change, but genuine social inclusion, with efforts that address many social levels being the most effective.

Congruence with cultural values. A relational paradigm seems aligned with the values of many cultures worldwide. Indigenous African worldviews, Native American Indian worldviews, Central and South American worldviews, Asian worldviews, and Pacific Islander worldviews tend to emphasize family relationships over individualism.

A relational paradigm challenges and stretches individualistic cultures, but it does not necessarily conflict with them. Even in the most extreme individualistic cultures, genuine

interpersonal intimacy has remained a cohesive force (i.e., families); thus these cultures already attend to relational issues to some degree. A relational paradigm provides a bridge between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. It also provides explicit affirmation of cultural values not adequately represented in mainstream psychology.

Congruence with the notion of intersectionality. Race and culture interact with gender and sexual orientation, which interact with family structures and geographic region, among many other variables. Multiculturalism increasingly attends to these intersections (McNeill, 2009; Smith & Draper, 2004). A relational paradigm offers a framework from which to conceptualize and operationalize the complex intersections of human diversity, which ultimately have social meanings, functions, and consequences. We are not merely groups and not merely individuals; investigation of intersections necessitates holistic reasoning.

Clarification summary of benefits of a relational paradigm for social justice work. Earlier we listed three strengths of the concept of social justice for multicultural psychology: its emphasis on power, action, and empowerment. These strengths do not require a paradigm associated with philosophical materialism. Holding people accountable for abuses of power does not necessitate critical pedagogy, but it does require the moral principle of accountability. Accountability pervades the relational paradigm. Its emphasis on interdependence checks self-interest, the primary reason for abuses of power. Moreover, the whole notion of power remains grounded in lived experiences arising from intergroup and interpersonal exchange (Gergen, 1995). Thus the conceptualization of power is made explicitly relevant to applied psychology when power is viewed through a relational lens.

Similarly, the need to take action against oppression does not necessarily require political activism, but it does require the principle of social responsibility. Responsibility to others is

keenly felt through a *we-consciousness*. Action orientation characterizes the principle of other-engagement. Interaction necessarily entails action.

Likewise, empowerment of oppressed peoples can occur not only through raising liberation consciousness but also through integrating social networks. A relational paradigm affirms individual, family, and group rights and their associated protections by emphasizing that separate but equal is not equal. It is insufficient for groups to assert their own rights. Protest may receive attention, but it does not necessarily promote engagement among parties. Equality is not equality without social network integration[1]. A relational paradigm promotes interactions as equals (e.g., Oliver, 2001). When justice is disallowed, steps are taken to re-engage dialogue, such as affirmations of equality, appeals to moral sensibilities, appeals to influential third parties, and explanations for refusals to submit to injustice. A relational paradigm seeks genuine integration and equity that includes but extends beyond the economic and political.

Within a relational paradigm, a primary motive is mutual engagement as equals and rejection of the roles of oppressor/oppressed. This approach seeks to change the contexts that led to the power imbalance in the first place and to replace the disempowering notions that oppressed groups too often internalize when reacting from defensive postures. Rather than promote social justice in terms of "us vs. them," mutual edification provides motivation for continued engagement across divides. Thus a relational paradigm sustains action against oppression because the motivation transcends self-interest.

A relational paradigm and philosophical materialism both attend to issues of power, access, status, coercion, etc. (see Table 1). One cannot accurately conceptualize individuals,

[1] Social integration does not necessarily entail assimilation or acculturation. Engagement across difference is one component of well-being.

families, or groups without those concepts, but to those important concepts a relational paradigm adds sources of affiliation, ideals, etc., such as abilities, gender, geographic region, race, religion, and sexual orientation that are only indirectly addressed by philosophical materialism. Material considerations are crucial, even paramount in desperate situations, and they overlap with social considerations. Thus a relational paradigm maintains the focus on poverty, inequity, oppression, etc. (the strength of materialism) while contextualizing those issues in lived experience.

For these reasons, we propose that *for applied psychology* a relational paradigm is preferable to alternative social justice conceptualizations. Specifically, we believe that social justice (an aim of multicultural psychology) can be better measured, evaluated, and promoted within a relational paradigm relative to prevailing conceptualizations based on philosophical materialism. Whether or not future scholarship takes up this issue, we have attempted to emphasize the point that ideational foundations do matter. Assumptions influence outcomes.

What assumptions/limitations must be expected for a relational paradigm?

Every approach has assumptions and limitations. Just as the strengths of materialism led us to uncover its possible weaknesses, the strengths of a relational paradigm also point to its weaknesses. The following limitations characterize a relational paradigm.

Psychological explanations can obfuscate the value of other perspectives. Human behavior can be explained at numerous levels, from the micro (neurochemical) to the macro (environmental). A relational paradigm clearly emphasizes interpersonal and intergroup exchanges at the expense of other levels of explanation. Relational theorists have tended to ignore biologically oriented research findings, such as those of neuropsychology. Macro issues such as warfare and access to healthcare are relevant to but clearly distanced from purely social causes. And with few exceptions, relational scholarship shies away from the traditionally

influential cornerstones of psychology, such as comparative psychology and radical behaviorism, as well as technically oriented dimensions, such as computer simulations of human cognition. Excessive reliance on the interpersonal level of explanation, even if congruent with the worldviews of mental health professionals, artificially constrains attention when other mechanisms (e.g., ambient pollution or neurochemistry) may be more pertinent.

Complexity restricts the isolation of variables. Although a relational paradigm accounts for the contextuality of human experience, the resulting complexity diminishes the likelihood of isolating explanatory variables. Even when a specific characteristic is isolated, the conditions impacting that characteristic are potentially infinite. Contextuality cannot co-exist with simplicity; causality becomes very difficult to explain.[2]

Reliance on correlation more than causal models has been one of the primary weaknesses of psychological research. Nevertheless, we are just now reaching a point where statistics may enable sufficient complexity in our data collection and analyses to move beyond correlation. Social network analyses have increased in their complexity and utility over time (e.g., Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, & Labianca, 2009; Kirke, 2007), but additional simplification of the tools for conducting social network statistics is necessary before graduate curricula in psychology will routinely cover those statistics. Nevertheless, given the explosion of internet-based inquiry and statistical modeling of social networks, we see their widespread use as an eventuality: Analytics possible through super-computers will examine trillions of paths of social influence such that the network shape and directional flow become apparent and open to inquiry. Until such statistical tools become widely available, however, research conducted within a relational paradigm must

[2] Nevertheless, true experimental designs can be used within a relational paradigm. Social psychologists use a remarkable variety of research methods that could be adopted in multicultural psychology.

rely on traditional methods for attempting to provide causal explanations (Kuhn, 1996).

Including notions of morality would require discourse beyond current parameters. If human interactions are fundamentally moral, as a relational paradigm affirms, then morality must be addressed by psychology. Except for the publication of self-regulating codes of ethics, the profession of psychology has largely sidestepped morality. In fact, psychology was originally developed in partial reaction against the notion of morality and the institutions, religious and aristocratic that overtly enforced their own versions of morality. So psychologists may have difficulties accepting the emphasis of the relational paradigm on moral issues. Nevertheless, psychologists constantly confront questions of *meaning*, not merely questions of description.

Some scholars have argued for decades that psychology's discomfort with moral conceptualizations has not served its interests. Specifically, they emphasize that all scientific inquiry remains influenced by human values; thus openly acknowledging those values is in the profession's best interest. Theory and research should be contextualized (Slife, 1995). And psychology will benefit from greater self-awareness and accompanying transparency. Multicultural psychology advocates for greater self-awareness and transparency as well.

A paramount fear is that entertaining professional discourse about morality would paralyze the field. Wouldn't progress degenerate into the morass of debate and counter-accusation? With little prior experience engaging moral issues, this could happen. Researchers have been systematically taught to hide personal values in professional writing. To overcome discomfort in debating the value, meaning, and purpose of their work, psychology researchers would have to first recognize that questions of value, meaning, and purpose are in fact the most important questions. Discussions of whether variable X correlates with or even causes variable Y becomes appropriate in psychotherapy only after we understand the ramifications of messing

with X and Y for a particular client. Justification for research should be based on arguments about value, meaning, and purpose, with those justifications subject to challenges and refutation. We need to invoke the "so what?" question much more often with our own work and with the work that appears in multicultural psychology journals.

Section summary: Values and assumptions. Social justice is a value—a value based on assumptions about human dignity and fairness. Work that promotes principles of justice and fairness is a moral endeavor. Multicultural psychology embodies that work; thus it is a moral as well as a professional and empirical movement.

Multicultural psychology seeks to promote the well-being of historically oppressed people. The more clearly multicultural psychology can articulate its objectives and its proposed means to achieve them, the more support it is likely to draw. Contemporary struggles for equity, such as the denunciation of racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007), require this articulation in the face of opposition or, more prevalent, apathy. Ultimately, psychologists will embrace and infuse multiculturalism in psychotherapy (and in their personal lives) to the extent that it becomes recognized as the right thing to do. Moral sensibility is embedded in social relations.

In this section we have attempted to delineate how a relational paradigm may provide grounding for social justice work in multicultural psychology. Assumptions and values of the relational paradigm include the aim of mutual edification, the necessity of holistic thinking, the existence of human volition/agency, the developmental perspective of *becoming*, the understanding of identity as a self-in-relation, the inescapability of responsibility for others, and the existence of human rights—moral obligations to protect human vulnerabilities.

The objective of multicultural psychology is not to achieve mere tolerance, the "recognition" of differences (see Oliver, 2001). Rather, multicultural psychology has sought to

promote human well-being through self-affirmation and, although not articulated as such, *other-affirmation.* If multicultural psychology seeks these broad aims, then its work extends beyond even social justice. It may rightly advocate for any salutary principle, such as reconciliation, personal sacrifice for the well-being of others, and deepened interchange across apparent and genuine ideational differences. Applied psychologists are already in the business of promoting values (e.g., Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2008); multicultural psychologists can promote values that benefit disenfranchised populations.

A relational conceptualization of multicultural psychology espouses values that promote mutual enrichment. Whereas the concept of self-affirmation may presently be popular, a relational conceptualization includes the paired concept of *other-affirmation*. Individuals do not exist in a social vacuum. Affirmation of self yields reciprocity through affirmation of others. In other words, when people engage in other-affirmation (e.g., school teachers who empower students in an otherwise harsh environment), we call them praiseworthy (affirming the person who affirms others), but praise for oneself without genuine engagement with others we call narcissism. So it is with multicultural psychology: Our work is insufficient if we merely affirm multi-cultural voices, each one calling out its own music. Expression is far preferable to voicelessness, but cacophony attracts few listeners. No, self-affirmation of culture, race, gender, or any other partitioned aspect of human identity is an aim too delimited for multicultural psychology, even if justice were technically achieved because no one restricted expression.

Continuing the metaphor of vocal music, a relational conceptualization offers multicultural psychology the equivalent of a music school. Voices can tune to surroundings. The quality of individuals' and groups' expressions can improve. In a music school the ear can be taught to hear others' tone and timbre and to recognize the themes and motifs already native to

their inflections. Schools of music enable compositions, orchestrations, and production of quality performances that generate an audience. Unity amid diversity can be attained through multicultural psychology, a school for relationships learned through experience.

A relational conceptualization of multicultural psychology seeks justice toward the aim of mutual enrichment. Voices must not merely be heard but understood, appreciated, and joined.

Bringing It All Together

Psychology consists of ideas about human experience. Those ideas stem from underlying philosophies and their associated assumptions. For most of its history, psychology has presumed the experiences, worldviews, and philosophies of cultures with origins in Western Europe, to the detriment of others (Sue, 2015). Multicultural psychology has sought to represent people previously excluded from mainstream dialogue, and it has brought attention to significant ideas, such as those covered in previous chapters of this book (e.g., multicultural competence). Those ideas can be refined not only through improvements in empirical methods (assessment, participant selection, theory testing, etc.) but also through appraisal of their underlying values and assumptions (Machado & Silva, 2007; Slife, 1995). Just as the assumptions of psychology have benefitted from scrutiny with a multicultural perspective (Sue & Sue, 2012; Sue, 2015), the assumptions of multicultural psychology should benefit from evaluation.

Questioning assumptions, a few readers have likely wondered whether this chapter about philosophy was necessary in a book otherwise about data. We asked these readers to look past the specifics of presentation to our intended messages. We hope that many readers who have previously been skeptical about the relevance of a broad concept like *justice* to psychology have become aware that real-world psychological implications and applications are generated by such principles as “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (quoted from Martin Luther

King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail). Such ideas motivated millions during the Civil Rights movement. Such ideas also motivate our work as mental health professionals: If a relational paradigm enables me to recognize my interconnectedness, I will be more likely to act when I see injustice, but if I fixate on the inequities, I may be more likely to react from a stance akin to naïve transitivity. Is this contrast merely a nuance, too subtle to be consequential? Ask about a person's motives, and you will be in a better position to understand resulting actions and reactions. That sounds like the work of a psychologist.

Too few mental health professionals have addressed the philosophical foundations of multicultural psychology, with the notable exceptions focused on research methods and guiding principles (Cauce, 2011; Gone, 2011; Ponterotto, 2010; David, Okazaki, & Giroux, 2013). Questions posed in this chapter openly challenge commonplace apathy about conceptual analysis. Table 2 contains some steps to consider. Of all people, multicultural psychologists should be keenly aware of our own assumptions and values.

No field can solve astoundingly complex social situations through a single lens. Many voices contribute to effective solutions. Scholarly synthesis and contrast, rather than reverential adherence to a few popular ideas, promotes the aims of multicultural psychology. We are reminded of the words of a Mexican Nobel laureate in literature:

> What sets worlds in motion is the interplay of differences, their attractions and repulsions. Life is plurality, death is uniformity. By suppressing differences and peculiarities, by eliminating different civilizations and cultures, progress weakens life and favors death. The ideal of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life (Paz, 1985).

Across human history, very few societies have been multicultural. What can we learn from those societies that have been? Across human history, no age has been so globally networked as the present. How will we of the present age connect while retaining cultural

plurality? Across human history, no age has had greater intellectual and material resources. How will we foster mutual enrichment? Questions expand the vista of multicultural psychology.

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Table 1

Comparison of Two Philosophical Positions for Fostering Social Justice through Multicultural Psychology

	Philosophical materialism	Relational paradigm
Primary aspiration	Recognition/Equality	Mutual enrichment
Primary emphasis	Access to power	Holistic well-being
Conceptualizations of power	Critical pedagogy, dialectical materialism	Accountability, inter-dependence, moral principles
Action orientation	Advocacy, praxis, transformation of systems	Social responsibility, protection of human rights
Empowerment	Liberation psychology, grassroots political activism	Social network integration, skill development
Level of primary focus	Macro level systems (and other levels as appropriate)	Inter-group, inter-personal
Motivations	Emancipation, fighting against oppression to obtain justice	Engagement as equals, dismantling oppressed/ oppressor roles
Common features: emphasis on local community empowerment, action-oriented promotion of equality and self-determination, explicit opposition to all forms of oppression, and attention to human conditions and contexts, including issues of power, opportunity, status, coercion, etc.		

Table 2

Example Components of Conceptual Analysis

Conceptual analysis component	**Rationale**
Define constructs precisely.	Specification is essential to all subsequent steps of conceptual analysis. Problems arise from imprecision.
Identify the level(s) of analysis to be undertaken (macro to micro, abstract to concrete).	Most constructs are pertinent/valid at only one level of explanation, but multiple levels of explanation are typically necessary in psychology. Constructs should not be generalized beyond their realistic limits.
Identify essential parts of the construct.	Breaking down constructs can help distinguish truly essential features, circumstances, etc., including parts which must be included for the concept to remain viable.
Identify how the parts relate to one another and to the whole.	Dynamics must be observed and considered, particularly relationships between parts that are not explained by the proposed theory/construct.
Identity strengths and limitations.	Construct application requires understanding of when and how it works most and least effectively. Strengths and limitations can be paired: a strength can be a limitation; a limitation can be a strength.
Identify a concrete case that demonstrates the construct, and contrast it with contradictory or hypothetical cases.	Practice requires understanding of when, where, and how concepts fit and do not fit in the real world, including exceptions that remain unexplained.
Identify alternative explanations.	Understanding of similar constructs should be used to inform analysis. This includes existing relevant theories and other disciplines that have addressed similar issues, possibly using other terms.
Identify metaphysics, epistemology, ontology, etc.	Every construct has foundational assumptions: for example the nature of reality, ways we can know about the world, etc.
Consider real-world consequences.	Constructs have many possible ramifications: people who will benefit or be harmed, possible misinterpretations and misuses, consequences of ignoring it, etc.