

Cognitive Interweaves – Cultural Identity and Culturally Based Trauma and Adversity

Cognitive interweaves, as used in EMDR therapy are strategic interventions initiated by the therapist to facilitate successful memory reprocessing. Cognitive interweaves are employed when the clinician believes the client has lost access to adaptive memory networks. Through questions or statements, the clinician offers or elicits adaptive information and perspectives that all the client to link into adaptive information and proceed with successful reprocessing of the memory.

To offer effective interweaves, the therapist must be attuned to the client. Culturally aware interweaves require the clinician to consider accessible metaphors, resources, or other culturally accessible information. Interweaves must be relatable and often clients will give us a sense of what they need. For example, a client might say, "I miss my family around holidays" and be stuck in sadness despite several sets of eye movements. An obvious but probably powerful interweave might be, "what would you be doing with your family during this holiday if you were with them now." This brings the desired feelings which may be adequate enough to move the person through the intense sadness.

As mentioned above, when working with CBTA we can help clients identify internalized negative cultural messages and related beliefs. As we identify negative messages, we should also guide clients to identify positive adaptive beliefs that contradict the negative cultural messages and affirm the client's adaptive reality.

Additional knowledge and skills offered throughout this book can guide effective interweaves. Although psychosocial education should be provided early on in therapy to help clients understand the societal dimensions of their struggles, often it is in the heat of reprocessing when clients are most in need of and ready to digest this information. In general, the art of a good interweave is reading what the client may most need to see in the right moment of reprocessing.

Questions like the following are examples of possible interweaves:

- Although you think you should have just ignored that (offensive) comment, can you allow yourself to notice how you feel now as you think of it?
- Can you see that you have faced more adversity than that person has?
- Are there ways in which being a _____ (cultural identity) was a factor in this situation?
- Do you think another person of your (name cultural identity) in your position may

have felt that way?

- Can you see that who you are and how you were treated are different?
- Are there ways in which social/cultural/societal expectations came into play in this situation?
- Do you feel this was socially just?
- Can you imagine how being treated this way would likely affect another person?
- Do you think that another person like you (name cultural identity) would have felt the same way in that situation?
- What is it you wish people could understand about you?
- Who in this group do you trust most? Can you imagine a conversation with them?
- What would you like to say or do about this?
- Are there ways you can increasingly be yourself and still know you belong in this group?
- What would you say to others if you felt safe enough to do so?
- Can you understand why you might have chosen to remain silent at that moment?
- As you consider some of the adversity your parents have experienced, what comes to mind?
- Despite the (cultural) challenges you still face, what do you think is under your control at this time?
- What would you tell others who are dealing with what you have been?

Many times, survivors of trauma erroneously blame themselves for not handling things differently. Therapists see self-blame with survivor such as previously abused and neglected children and sexual assault survivors. With CBTA we also want to be sure to help clients externalize responsibility to the source of the adversity and acknowledge the negative consequences our clients have endured.

Interweaves examples that might address this include:

- Can you see what you were up against (provide information needed to client to be able to do so)?
- When you begin to see that you were a victim of discrimination rather than being at fault, are you able to notice other thoughts and feelings you have about the experience?
- Given what you went through, can you now appreciate the ways you have coped with it?
- What has helped you cope as well as you have to this point?
- Are you aware of the resiliency you have developed?
- “Can you see how this response has served you in the past? How are things the same or

different now?

- What do you wish for in the future?