

## **Exploring cultural and societal experiences in clinical assessment**

There are many ways to learn about a client's cultural identities and experiences. Below is a set of questions which can guide a broad assessment of cultural experiences. These questions are offered as examples of the types of questions that can uncover cultural/social identities and CBTA. In this aspect of EMDR therapy, accessing relevant and useful information in a collaborative manner is the primary goal. These are potentially powerful and evocative questions and should be used flexibly, contingent on client readiness and pacing. As the first question demonstrates, it is important to get the client's explicit permission to discuss culturally related issues. While the therapist should broach dimensions of cultural considerations, client readiness to explore these issues should be assessed and paced with attunement to the client.

### **Phase 1: Cultural Assessment: Exploring social/cultural identity, CBTA, and social prejudice.**

**Primary question: Can I ask you some questions about your social and cultural experiences? If yes,**

#### **Social/Cultural Identity:**

- What social or cultural groups are or have been most important to you?
- What are positive and negative qualities do you associate with these groups?
- Are there any social or cultural groups that others have identified you with and how has that been for you?
- Are there ways you can better understand yourself or the issues that brought you to therapy in a cultural/social context?
- What else would help me understand more about groups or cultures that are important to you?

#### **Extended Exploration:**

- What groups or social identities have you felt most connected to?
- What are any particular sources of pride and/or shame for your social groups?
- Have you ever had to hide your social identity?
- Additionally- Consider using the cultural genogram in this chapter.

- Additionally- Consider using other cultural identity tools in this chapter.

**Culturally Based Trauma and Adversity (CBTA)** (discrimination, stigma/oppression, acculturation challenges)

- Have you ever felt significantly misunderstood or misjudged related to your cultural /social identity?
- Are there ways in which you have been affected by discrimination, social stigma, or oppression during your life?
- Do you have early memories of being avoided, shunned, ostracized, or devalued related to social dynamics?
- 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, or some other social identity factor?
- Do you currently experience social microaggressions (offer examples)
- Have you had difficulties related to being comfortable or adjusting into another social group or culture?

**If issues have opened up at this point, consider asking:**

- How have these experiences impacted you?
- What beliefs did you form about yourself as you were growing up that might be linked to your social experiences and/or culturally based adversity or trauma?
- When did you first become aware of differences between types of people. What was that like for you?
- Did these differences take on positive or negative meaning, or both?
- How did members of your family handle apparent differences between people?
- What were your earliest experiences related to observing social stigma, prejudice, or stereotyping? What was it like experiencing these dynamics?

**Culturally Related Prejudice and Rigid Ideology.**

- Do you avoid certain types of people? . . . Get upset by certain types of people? . . . . Feel powerless/unsafe or inferior/superior related to certain types of people? . . . . Have strong emotional or physiological reactions to certain types of people?

**Strong Beliefs About Society**

- Do you have any strong beliefs about culture or society that you think are extreme, inflexible, or problematic?

**Prejudice or bias toward others**

- Do you have any strong prejudices toward other people or types of people?
- How did you develop these beliefs?
- Do you see problems associated with having these prejudices?
- Do you want to better understand or change them?

**Extended Exploration**

- Explore the previous questions with psychosocial education about how prejudice is developed and its consequences (create safety while offering client reason and motivation to address prejudice)
- When have you objected to prejudice or stereotyping?