Chapter 1
Professional Self-Awareness

Effective helping professionals tend to be very self-aware and maintain an ability to control how they respond to situations (Jennings & Skovholt, 1999; Jennings et al., 2008). Self-awareness and self-control dovetail with each other to create interpersonal effectiveness. The term ''self-awareness'' refers to the ability to tune in to yourself, maintaining an ongoing knowledge of your emotional and cognitive responses to external events. ''Self-control'' refers to the ability to control how you express your feelings and thoughts in interaction with others. Such control keeps your traits, emotional reactions, and personal issues from interfering with ethically grounded professional practice (Brabender, 2007).

Importance of Self-Awareness

The need for practitioner self-awareness is well established in the professional literature (Borrell-Carrio & Epstein, 2004; D. W. Johnson, 1997; Spurling & Dryden, 1989). Because professional practice occurs in an interpersonal context, we must be able to monitor our responses to client situations in order to allow professional skills, rather than reactivity, to govern how we act. Self-awareness serves four critical functions for helping professionals:

1. *A source of personal power.* When people know what they are thinking and feeling, they stay fully informed on how they are influenced by others (Hedges, 1992; Rober, 1999; Tansey & Burke, 1989). When a person is not aware of how others influence feelings and thinking, there is a loss of control and personal power.

Case Example

A practitioner tended to be very protective of misunderstood adolescents. Other than this, she was a very effective practitioner. However, when working with parents and children together, she tended to consistently side with the child, causing angry reactions in the parents. Eventually parental complaints required some focused supervision to help her understand, and gain control of, her side-taking tendencies.

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2. *Source of insight into differences.* When people are aware of their thoughts and feelings, they are better positioned to understand the differences between themselves and other people (Arthur, 1998; Dettlaff, Moore, & Dietz, 2006). A full awareness allows for differences to be explored without feelings of threat (Dettlaff et al., 2006; Manthei, 1997). This is particularly important when cultural or spiritual differences exist in the client situation (Daniel, Roysircar, Ables, & Boyd, 2004; Suyemoto, Liem, Kuhn, Mongillow, & Yauriac, 2007; Yan, 2005; Wiggins, 2009).

Case Example

A practitioner was meeting with a family from a Native American reservation. When the family came in for the first appointment, the father was not willing to talk with the practitioner. As the practitioner explored the reluctance, the father stated that the practitioner was asking too many questions. Even though there had been few questions in the interview, the practitioner allowed the man to express himself and learned that the questionnaires sent out as part of intake were culturally offensive. The practitioner was able to explore his feelings with him and arrange a different way to gather the information needed for the intake.

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3. *A source of insight and control* (Hedges, 1992; Rothman, 1999). Everybody reacts to certain situations based on their feelings and beliefs. If practitioners understand their thoughts and feelings, they can separate their reactions from the client's story and proceed in a way that is most helpful to the client. However, when practitioners are not aware, they may superimpose reactive agendas and proceed based on reactivity rather than on a logical understanding of the client's needs. Concurrently, practitioners may avoid client themes, options, feelings, and issues to diminish the intensity of their own emotional reactions.

Case Example

A female practitioner was working with an elderly couple. The husband's constant criticism of the wife was very similar to the dynamics between her mother and father. As they began exploring options for supported living, the practitioner reacted to the criticisms and prompted the woman to confront her husband and state that her needs were not being met in the relationship. The woman followed the directives but was actually content in the relationship. The confrontations, however, began to alienate the husband and cause deterioration of the relationship. Eventually they stopped coming to see the practitioner and did not move into supported living.

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4. *A source of emotional connection with clients*. Practitioners' abilities to tune in to their own strengths, vulnerabilities, sensitivities, and feelings provide a set of internal experiential hooks on which they can hang the experiences of others (Rothman, 1999). These experiential hooks are drawn on when others speak of their experiences. The practitioner listens to the other's story and draws on these hooks to imagine the full experience of the client. The hooks, coming from self-awareness, consequently provide for empathic understanding of the client and a focus on improving responses (Manthei, 1997).

Case Example

Several rebellious teens were starting service in a school-based group for high-risk youths. The youths were teacher-referred and knew that they might be expelled if they did not attend. The practitioner knew of the coercion to attend and was concerned about how it might affect the group. The practitioner then reflected on past experiences when others had made him go places and do things that he did not want to do. Issues of resentment, passive defiance, and powerlessness filled his head as he thought about these experiences. In the first meeting, he used these experiences to make sense out of the attitudes presented by the group members. This allowed him to explore their feelings about attendance.

Self-Awareness as an Element of Interactive Practice

The goal of self-awareness is to prevent practitioner attitudes and feelings from interfering with professional interactions (Williams, 2008). It is very important to be able to pay attention and respond to client statements (Bachelor, 1995). When you are in a reactive mode, your focus shifts to acting on your reactive impulses rather than attending to the client's statements. To have a good working relationship, you must understand the content of client statements and also respond to the client's emotional experience (Castonguay, Goldfried, Wiser, Raue, & Hays, 1996; Miville, Carlozzi, Gushue, Schara, & Ueda, 2006). When practitioners are able to accomplish such positive and open working relationships, creative problem-solving and a sense of playfulness can be achieved with clients (Creed & Kendall, 2005; Morgan & Wampler, 2003).

Self-Awareness Based Practice Errors
Two common types of self-awareness errors can interfere with a good working relationship: errors of omission and errors of commission. Errors of omission occur when you interact with another person but fail to pick up on important themes or information during the

interaction. Errors of commission occur when you actively insert your own meaning into the situation or take actions that interfere with the helping relationship. Without an awareness of your beliefs, biases, reaction themes, and feeling patterns, you are at high risk of these types of error.

Errors of omission occur when you do not adequately understand what the other person is attempting to communicate. This can occur if your feelings, beliefs, and attitudes intrude on your listening. In such moments your focus shifts to your thinking rather than fully attending to the client communication. When you miss the details of the client experience, you have huge gaps in understanding. When such gaps develop, there is a tendency to fill them with assumptions and theories of what is occurring rather than relying on information provided by the client. Such errors are hard to identify without first understanding your communication patterns and biases.

Errors of commission occur when you impose your beliefs or feelings onto the client situation. In such situations your thoughts and feelings exert more influence on the interaction than your client's statements. When we start imposing our models onto the client, significant problems often emerge in the helping relationship (Borrell-Carrio & Epstein, 2004; Keenan, Tsang, Bogo, & George, 2005; Price & Jones, 1998; Saunders, 1999). Research on helping relationships concludes that clients relate best to nonjudgmental, positive, and responsive practitioners (Bachelor, 1995; Binder & Strupp, 1997; Hilsenroth, Peters, & Ackerman, 2004).

The solution to errors of omission involves increased awareness of your personal traits, but avoiding of errors of commission requires you to apply this awareness to how you are operating in the here and now. Often when errors of commission occur, you will find yourself talking more than the client as you try to convince him or her to accept your point. If you ever experience an emotional pressure to ''sell'' your insight or solution to the client, you may be at risk of a commission type of error. The self-awareness task is to notice a shift in the interpersonal dynamics during the session. These dynamics may indicate errors of commission:

- Clients become less active in the conversation as you take over the discussion.
- You start to believe you know more about the client situation than the client does.
- You start explaining the client's reality back to him or her.
- You believe that you know what clients need to do and start imposing your solution.

As self-awareness develops, it will be important to find a balance between observing yourself and observing your client. If you become too self-focused, you can create a new problem as you spend too much time attending to yourself and ignore the client (Williams, 2008). Indicators of errors should operate like red flags, where you notice something in the interaction that provides a clue that you need to alter your approach. To begin this process, the next sections explore the roots of your beliefs and affective reactions.

Socialization, Self-Awareness, and Initial Skill Sets

It is likely that you have already started some self-reflection in your early professional courses. Often reading theories causes us to reflect on our past experiences and current functioning. This is a common experience for people entering professional education programs. It is your personal history that provides a predisposition to care about other people. This same set of experiences develops an initial skill set for exploring situations, understanding problems, and identifying options. If you did not have such experiences and skills, it is unlikely that you would consider a helping profession.

Process of Socialization

As you enter your professional education, it is helpful to understand your predispositions and initial skill sets. These helping foundations are based largely on socialization experiences. As your skills develop, interpersonal habits form. Some habits involve our thinking

Figure 1.1

**Socialization
Influences Cube**
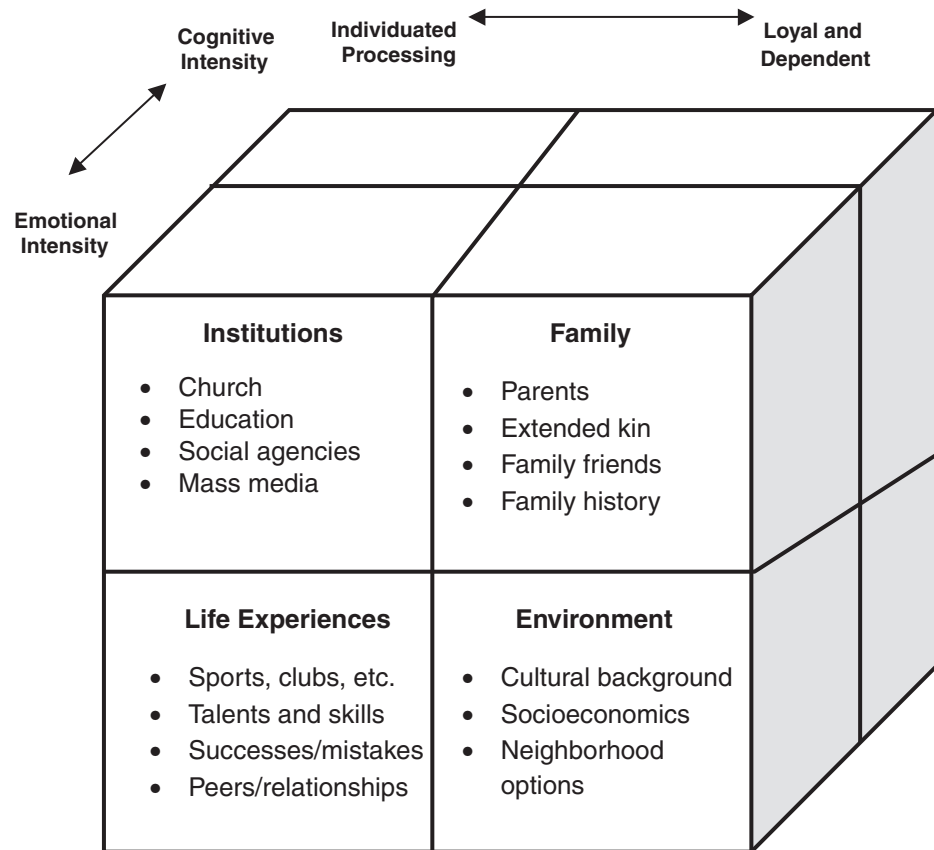
and affective reactions. Other habits involve how you interact with other people. The skill foundation that you bring into a helping profession involves a convergence of your interactive habits and attitudes that promote caring. Although this skill foundation is useful as a starting place, the habitual nature of interpersonal skills leaves you at risk for errors.

To build an awareness of the beliefs and values that control your initial skill sets, it is useful to first understand how socialization forms your thinking and interactive habits. There are several sources of socialization. Figure 1.1 presents four common sources of socialization. Take a moment to consider some of your experiences with these sources and reflect on the values and beliefs that emerged through your socialization experiences.

The nature of our mental socialization is shaped by two continua. The first continuum focuses on how you process events. On one end is reliance on logical processes and thinking. At the other end of the continuum are emotional processes. Although both logical and emotional processes are important, you often tend to favor one type of processing based on your past experiences. The second continuum focuses on the interactive context of socialization. Some people are prone to immediate reactions while others tend to respond slowly through a series of exchanges. Our skill foundation is very heavily influenced by these two continua.

Cognitive-Emotional Elements

The cognitive-emotional continuum ranges from highly cognitive to highly emotional socialization experiences. Emotionally intense experiences tend to stimulate affective reactions. If the experience is positive, you often seek to replicate it in future relationships. If the experience is negative, you tend to avoid similar experiences as you develop. People who have intense emotional experiences during their development may tend to process situations from an emotional position.

At the cognitive end of the continuum, high-intensity experiences promote questioning and critical thinking. This is common in socialization exchanges where experimentation, experiential learning, and negotiation were promoted. Each exchange involves thinking and rethinking situations based on new experiences and outcomes. Lower-intensity experiences may involve socialization experiences where you are told what to think and encouraged to

accept rather than question. If negative emotion is linked to certain thinking styles such as feeling rejected for autonomous thinking, a tendency to accept rather than question can be strongly embedded in our socialization experience.

The variations in our socialization form affective and thinking habits as we age. Our patterns of responding to emotion and expressing feelings, beliefs, and values develop and become second nature. Some of us love thinking through complicated problems and will automatically begin analyzing situations as they emerge. Others are more attuned to affect and can easily identify with people's feelings and internal experiences. Still others react to situations with particular emotional or cognitive themes. These automatic tendencies provide the initial skill foundation for how you respond to client situations.

Interactive Elements

The second continuum focuses on relational elements in our socialization. You develop your interpersonal skills within a social context. There is a group of people you lived with, a group of people you learned with, and a group of people you played with. The nature of these groups provides a context for your interactive habits. You have all read about family systems, attachment relationships, and other theories focused on relationship influences. Consequently, you likely have a strong appreciation of the relational context of human development.

Your interactive socialization experiences form habits for conversing. You have learned to wait for your turn to talk. Consequently, many of us listen until we have a thought, then shift our focus to our thinking to remember the thought until our turn emerges. This and other interactive habits shape your initial interpersonal skills. Everyone carries around invisible rules about what is rude and what is acceptable. To promote social success, habits emerge to inhibit rude behavior.

The interactive habits you develop for managing social relationships provide a set of initial communication skills. These skills are the foundation upon which you build your professional practice skills. Your patterns of listening and exploring situations emerge from social situations in your past. Concurrently, your patterns of problem-solving, managing differences, and decision making often are well set before you enter a helping profession. Given that helping professionals all work in a relationship with clients, these habits are very important to understand and control.

Socialization Influences on Response Systems

The habits that emerge from your socialization often form patterns that influence how you respond to situations. Depending on the sources and the intensity of experiences with each continuum, some habits will be tightly held and others will be flexible. Cognitive-emotional habits form beliefs and codes for living; interpersonal habits form patterns of responding. Although these habits have been instrumental in your social successes, as a helping professional you must move beyond habitual responding by building ''professional'' beliefs and skills.

The discussions and exercises throughout this and the subsequent chapters build on your current beliefs and interactive habits. Through reading, thinking, and applying your knowledge in the exercises, you will start building your professional ''self.'' The professional identity and skill sets you develop should complement, rather than conflict with, the caring habits you have already developed. You will learn to use yourself with greater precision and purpose. This ability to control your responses requires self-awareness.

Understanding Response Systems

As you start building self-awareness, it is useful to first understand your response tendencies. Four areas of experience affect how people react to any given situation. These four areas provide a framework for monitoring reactions. Such frameworks are useful because it is impossible to monitor everything. The four areas of experience can be broken down into two domains: action systems and processing systems. The term ''action system'' refers to the interactive and behavioral responses that occur in response to a situation. The term ''processing system'' refers to the internal thoughts and feelings that emerge in the situation. By concentrating on one or the other system on responding, people can scan and monitor how they react in different situations.

Action Systems

The action systems govern what people say or do within a situation. There are two elements in the action system: interaction and behaviors. The interactive response system governs what you say and how you relate to other people. The behavioral response system controls how you act within a situation. Although the two are closely related, it is worth considering each separately so unique contributions can be understood. In helping professionals, interactive people tend to explain, provide advice, or try to discuss situations. More action-oriented people seek to fix things or take over situations until problems are resolved.

To understand how socialization influences your interactive response system, think about some of the rules that govern how you speak to others. You probably have noticed how your interactions change from situation to situation. In some situations you talk more while in others you are content to be passive. Similarly, in some situations you are tentative while in others outspoken. Students learning to be helping professionals have two very common interactive habits (Piers & Ragg, 2008). The first emerges in situations where you talk more. Often talking is preceded by an impulse to say something. In such situations there is often a socialized interactive pattern.

Case example. Two adolescent females are talking. When you observe the pattern of conversation you can notice that as DiAndrea listens to Juanita, she has a thought that triggers an impulse to share the thought. DiAndrea consequently stops listening and focuses on the thought. When Juanita stops talking, DiAndrea shares the thought or story. DiAndrea's story shifts the focus of the discussion. While the thought is triggered by Juanita's story, the thoughts that are expressed shift to a somewhat related story about DiAndrea. This is common when talking among friends; someone tells a story that causes another person to want to share a similar story.

This example highlights a common socialized pattern of interaction. The pattern emerges from our politeness socialization, where authority figures have told us not to interrupt or to wait our turn. Consequently we have developed a pattern of listening and then disengaging to maintain our thoughts until our turn emerges. This pattern, while very helpful in our social relationships, can interfere with the helping relationship because you end up disengaging from the client while focused on your own thoughts. If this pattern is familiar to you, pay close attention to the tuning in and exploratory skills chapters as they will help you develop new habits. At this point, just take note that this is a habit you may want to control.

A second socialized interactive pattern includes advice giving. Most often you learn how to solve problems from parents or guardians. Reflect for a moment on the types of exchanges that occur when you approach your parent/guardian with a problem. Many parents listen for a short period of time and then provide a solution through advice giving. This pattern of problem solving becomes the template you use when friends approach you with a problem. This habit is very useful with friends and is part of being a caring person. Yet the pattern also can interfere with the helping relationship as it involves imposing our vision of the problem on clients.

Similar situations cause people to take action or express themselves behaviorally. At times, you discover this reaction through our bodies. Gestures, feelings of pressure, and muscle tightening tune us into the existence of such reactions. For example, when you hear that someone has been treated unfairly, you often experience a pressure to take some sort of action, such as calling someone or writing a letter. In such situations, it is important to identify the reaction and then assess how the reaction might influence the helping relationship.

Awareness of our reactions can help us prevent mistakes. If you feel impatient to speak or to take action on behalf of the client, this is your reaction, not a request from the client to act on his or her behalf. Awareness of the reaction allows us to identify the pressure as our desire to help. Because this is your impulse, it is up to you to control the response so you can refocus on the client situation to see what the client needs.

Processing Systems

The processing systems involve the thoughts and feelings we have regarding a situation. Awareness of the processing system involves two areas of focus: what we are thinking and

what we are feeling. The thinking elements include interpretations, attributions, values, assumptions, and beliefs. The feeling elements include the immediate emotional responses to the client situation (e.g., sadness, helplessness, disgust, hopelessness) and our experience of the client during the session.

Awareness of our thinking and feeling is vital because these become the interpretive frames for understanding the client situation. Often our interpretive guides thread back to socialization messages and thinking habits. As we approach situations, these guides filter and organize our understanding of the situation. This understanding, in turn, dictates how we respond. Several systems of thinking influence the interpretation of situations. Some systems include:

- *Values*. Your socialization provided you with values that set your code for living. Some values are tightly held while others are flexible. Although these are your values for living, they may not be the values that inform your client's decisions. Tightly held values place you at risk of imposing your codes of living on your clients. It is important to understand your values so they do not interfere with your understanding of client situations.

- *Meaning systems*. You have developed systems of assigning meaning to statements, words, events, and situations. These systems often are based on past experiences in similar situations. It is important to be aware of how you attribute meaning and responsibility to events so you can allow your clients to find their own meaning.

- *Expectation systems*. Your socialization experiences provide you with systems for predicting what might and/or should occur within different situations. These systems include expectations based on roles (family roles, social positions, etc.), events (emergencies, disappointments, dates, etc.), and demographics (racial, sexual orientation, religious, economic, gender, age groups, etc.). These socialization-based expectations are based on past information, which often is drawn on for interpreting new situations. It is important to understand your past systems of expectations so they do not control your expectations in client situations.

Without an awareness of how beliefs and models of understanding influence your reactions, you cannot truly understand clients. Consequently your responses to clients will vary in usefulness. For example, if you believe that arguing is ''bad'' and should be avoided, when members of a client system begin to argue, you might intervene to decrease the arguing. Although this might be consistent with your beliefs about family life, it may not help achieve the family's goals. However, if you are aware of your personal injunctions about arguing, you will be able to control the impulse to stop the arguing and work with the family to bring an argument to fruition.

Concurrent with developing an awareness of patterns of thinking and interpreting situations, practitioners need to be very aware of their feelings. Feelings are automatic responses to situations that can easily communicate your reactions through nonverbal communication. When clients see your reaction, they may interpret it as disapproval. Clients consequently may begin to edit their disclosures to spare your feelings or avoid certain topics because they believe you cannot handle the content area.

The Cultural Context of Socialization

Your socialization experiences occur within a cultural context that sets the norms for your family. Although families within every culture diverge from each other, there is a tendency for families within each culture to have overlapping patterns that influence child guidance, disciplinary practices, family roles, and parental responses to children (Bross, 1982; Ragg, 2006). To help understand your cultural influences, it is helpful first to understand how cultural elements likely influenced your parents. To organize this discussion, cultural influences will be discussed in terms of four parental functions: discipline, guidance, accessibility, and nurturing.

Parents tend to perform specific functions as part of socialization. Notice in Figure 1.2 that accessibility and nurturing functions help children integrate feelings of being lovable. As

Figure 1.2

Cultural Influences on Socialization
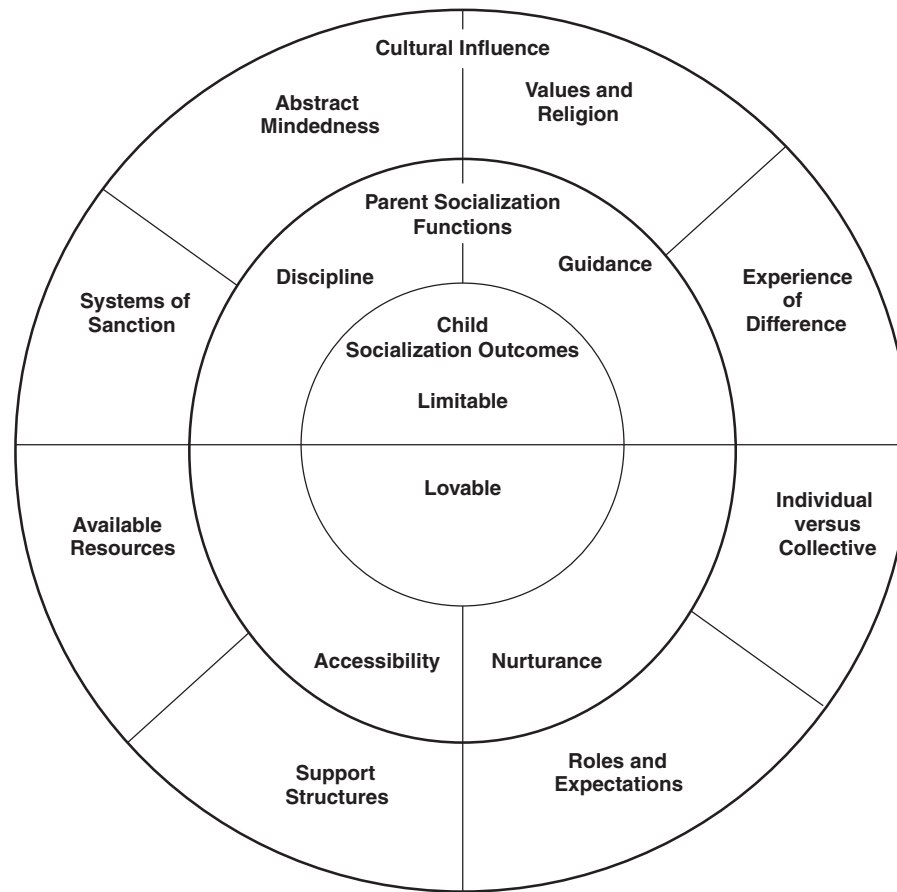
a parent attends to their child, the child develops feelings of self-worth and emotional well-being. The parental functions of guidance and discipline promote limiting behavior. These socialization functions help children understand the world and behave in a manner that will promote social success.

Cultural elements that influence parental discipline include abstract mindedness and systems of sanctioning. The term ''abstract mindedness'' refers to the level of concreteness in the culture. Some cultures are very concrete and operate with very clear rules, expectations, and punishments. Other cultures are very abstract and use stories and myths as part of the socialization. Closely associated with abstract mindedness, cultural norms set standards for the punishment of children. Some cultures use corporal punishment, such as spanking or other physical disciplines; other cultures, such as the dominant North American culture, endorse other methods, such as time out or loss of privileges.

The cultural elements that influence parental guidance include the experience of difference and cultural values. The phrase ''experience of difference'' refers to the relationship between the cultural group and the dominant culture. Some cultures feel superior to the dominant culture while others feel judged and left out. Regardless of the group's position vis-à-vis the dominant culture, parents must help children understand the differences. In many aspects, these discussions involve helping children understand the cultural values. There is great diversity in cultural values including religious influences, materialism, work ethics, artistic expression, connections to nature, and other domains that make the cultural groups distinct. There are also varying levels of privilege and influence.

Parental accessibility varies greatly across cultures based on the cultural orientation to resources and the collectivist nature of the culture. The orientation to resources again is related partly to the cultural group's position vis-à-vis the dominant group. Some cultural groups have restricted access to higher-paying jobs and monetary resources. Such groups must work in low-status and low-income positions. Often members of such cultures must work more than one job, which restricts parental availability for socializing children. Other cultures may seek to accumulate resources, which can also limit parental availability. In

collective cultures, resources are shared more than in individualistic cultures. In these collective cultures, members share in socializing children.

Nurturing children is influenced by the support structures and role expectations inherent in the culture. Some cultures have rigid expectations about nurturing functions. In some cultural groups, these functions are relegated primarily to a specific gender group. It is common for a cultural group to have expectations regarding the amount or quality of nurturing. Within a culture there are also support systems to help develop the nurturing functions. For example, some cultures promote nonfamily day care by funding child care services while other cultures promote kinship approaches to child care. Such systems and expectations influence the structure of socialization.

These cultural elements combine to set a tone for family socialization. The messages and beliefs form our cultural default settings and often are unrecognized until we are confronted by cultural differences. Although racial and ethnic groups may make it easy to identify some cultural differences, not all differences are immediately evident. Cultural groups such as gays, lesbians, and conservative religious groups are often invisible until they self-identify as being different. Consequently, it is useful to build an awareness of our cultural influences prior to working with client groups that may evoke our cultural biases and presuppositions.

### Exercise 1.1: Exploring Cultural Influences

This exercise explores your cultural influences using the cultural dimensions just described. All people have cultural influences. If you are a member of the dominant culture, you may be unaware of the influences because they often are embedded in the structure of society. Cultural influences include your status in society, your race, religion, and ancestry. For example, if you are Caucasian and were born in the United States, your culture is probably the dominant culture. However, if you are Asian American and were born in the United States, you will have had very different life experiences. Spend some time thinking about your life experiences, ancestry, and cultural background and identify your cultural group.

Use the next set of questions to reflect on different cultural influences. For each cultural element, think about the questions and then enter some of your observations in the cultural chart (see Figure 1.3).

1. *Abstract mindedness*. In your culture, how much do people rely on principles, symbols, and the like to convey cultural values? Can you tell a person's status by belongings or are other symbols used? How rigid and concrete are the cultural rules? Is your culture very tolerant of gray areas? Are there clear rules that people must follow? How can you tell someone is successful? Do people communicate by telling stories, or is communication more direct?

2. *Experience of difference*. How often do people in your culture talk about cross-cultural differences? Can you identify people from your culture? How do cultural members make sense of racism or cultural oppression? How do parents explain differences to the children? How are economic disparities explained? How are people in your culture different from others? How have people in your life made sense of the differences? Do people talk about the differences, or is this kind of discussion avoided or brushed aside as a topic of conversation? How are the resource differences between different cultures explained? How do differences influence your response to situations?

3. *Values and religion*. What institutions are most influential (e.g., schools, church, government)? What do people do to promote the institutions? How have the important values and institutions influenced your responses to situations?

4. *Individualistic versus collective*. Is your culture more socialist or capitalist? Are common rights or individual rights more protected? Do people have obligations to the larger group (e.g., public service)? Does the tax structure benefit individuals or the public good?

5. *Roles and expectations*. What roles are most important in your culture? What family roles are most respected? What are the expectations for the different family roles? How valued are nonfamily roles that socialize children? What is the ideal family structure in your culture?

Figure 1.3

Cultural Chart
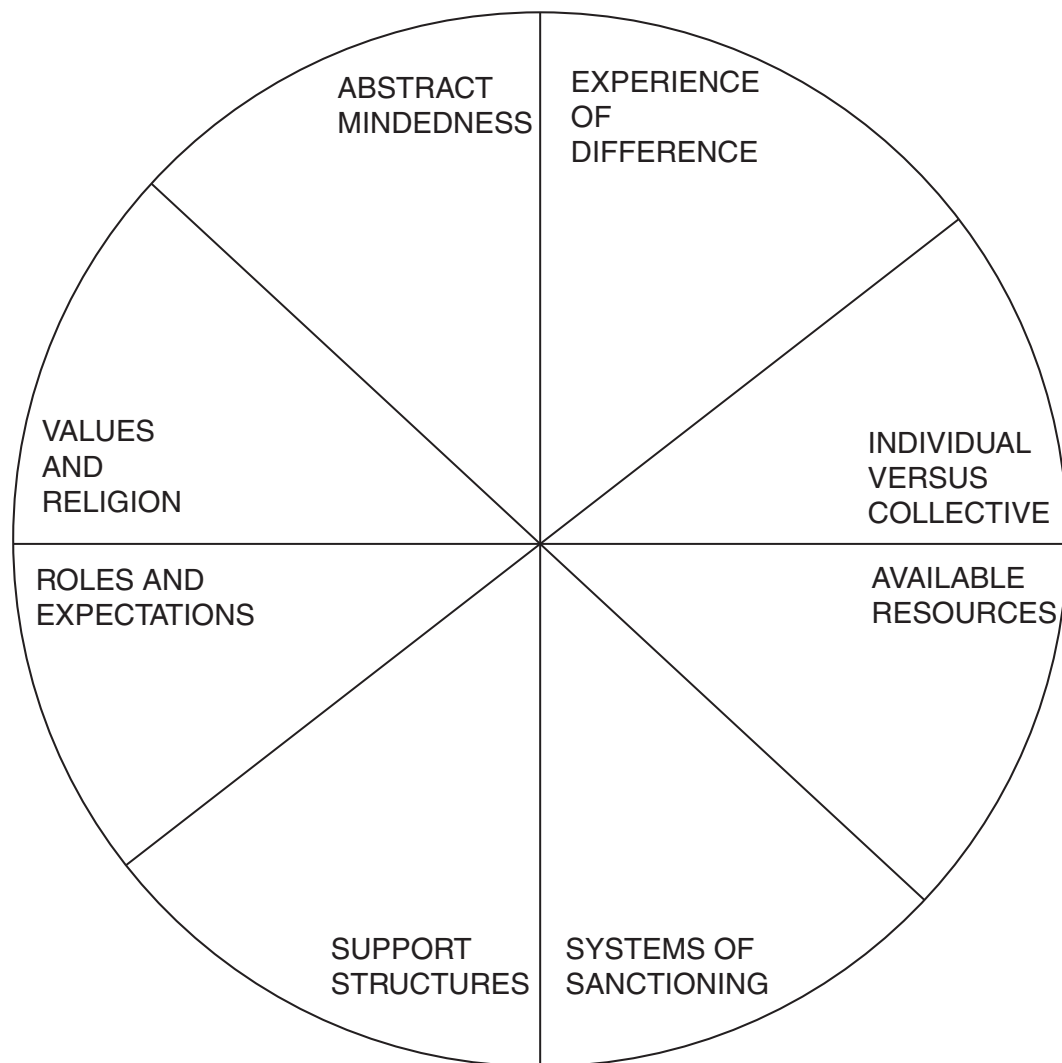
6. *Available resources*. Do most people in your cultural group have enough resources to achieve their goals? How important are possessions in your culture? How much energy do people invest in acquiring resources? Do people share resources freely within the culture or withhold?

7. *Support structures*. Whom do people typically approach for support? What sources of support do people avoid approaching (e.g., social practitioners)? What sources of support bring stigma? Is it okay to need support, or is that a sign of failure?

8. *Systems of sanctioning*. How are children punished in your culture? Is physical punishment okay? How do people hold each other accountable? Do people use lawyers or deal with each other to work out problems? What are the most severe social punishments? How are people rewarded?

After you have reflected on all of these questions, review the cultural chart to identify some of the strongest cultural influences. Try to identify some areas where cross-cultural conflicts may emerge, and develop an initial plan for identifying problems in the helping relationship.

Knowing Your Socialized Background

As you develop your awareness of how you react to different situations, it is useful to explore the influences that underlie your response systems. Most of the events that influence your models of understanding come from socialization experiences and the cognitive constructions you use to make sense out of life. To understand how your family helped to socialize you within the cultural systems, you need to understand family influences. Doing this often involves exploring how you have responded to and made sense of critical events and family history. Such exploration greatly increases your self-awareness.

The next section provides an opportunity to explore your own life so you can begin to identify themes and patterns to monitor in your professional work. The exploration in this book is very brief and serves only as a beginning for your ongoing development. As you proceed with your professional career, it will be important to continue this work as new areas for understanding will emerge frequently in response to new client situations.

In guiding you through the brief self-exploration, exercises are used to help you highlight patterns of thinking, feeling, acting, and interacting. As you use each of the tools, make note of your own experience of exploration. This experience likely will be somewhat similar to your clients' experience during the assessment phase of intervention.

The first exploration begins with family life. In your most formative years, your life experience is dependent on family and neighborhood. As you age, you integrate broader ranges of experience, but much of your response is still inherited from our families. To build self-awareness, you must concurrently develop understanding of how you have adapted to your family-based experiences. Consequently, the self-exploration begins with a genogram.

Family Genograms

A genogram is the first tool that you will use to make sense of your family experiences. The genogram was developed by Murray Bowen and has been broadly used in family-based practice (Marlin, 1989; McGoldrick, Gerson, & Shellenberger, 1999). Many books outline the use of genograms in practice. The next exercise will not provide a full exploration on how to use the genogram but will introduce you to the basics. In performing this exercise, first follow the instructions for constructing the basic genogram. After you have drawn your genogram, read the instructions for the family dynamics and reflect on how they influenced your socialization.

In the family genogram, circles represent females and squares represent males with their current age noted within the circle or square. Generational differences are indicated by vertical position with the parents (or even grandparents) on the top and offspring on lower lines. The lowest line in the genogram is the youngest generation in the family system you are assessing. Typically, the eldest sibling is drawn on the left with younger siblings ordered according to birth order drawn to the right. The current family is always in the middle of the genogram with a dotted line around the family members who live together.

Figure 1.4

Family Genogram
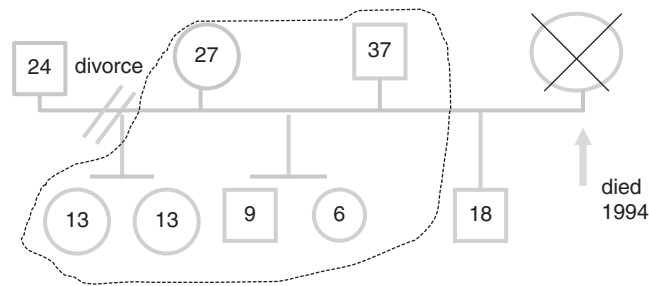
Multiple marriages or relationships are possible to draw. To depict such relationships, draw lines between the adult and first partner. Then break the line and connect the next partner. Although this may sound complicated, the principles of drawing a genogram are fairly simple once you see how it is done. In the genogram depicted in Figure 1.4, you can see that both the current father and mother had prior marriages. One mother died (shown by an X) and the other mother had been divorced (shown by the slash breaking the line between the parent figures). The father in the current family had a son, who is now 18, with the female parent who died. The mother in the current family had, with her first husband, twin girls who are 13. These girls are living in the current family, as shown by their inclusion in the dotted line. Children born from the current relationship (ages 9 and 6) are drawn with a line descending from the union line (the line connecting the two parents).

Figure 1.4 shows a two-generational genogram depicting parents and children. Often practitioners want to assess families using three-generational genograms, such as the one shown in Figure 1.5. Using the same principles, the three-generational genogram places the eldest family members on the top and the youngest on the bottom. The first (eldest) generation is represented by a third-generational line above the parents. This presents a bit of a challenge because the parents forming the current family system are also members of a sibling line. Typically, the children of the first generation who marry to form the next generation are indicated by drawing them lower than the other siblings. A line can then be used to form the parent level of the next generation.

There can be many challenges when working with genograms. For example, if a person is adopted or unsure of his or her parents, or if a person is born from an incestuous relationship, it is hard to map the family. Similarly, some cultural groups have experienced significant traumas, such as the use of boarding schools, lynching, ethnic cleansing, and disasters that will impact the genogram. In such situations, it is possible to place a question mark (**?**) in the genogram and make notes to identify the background information. If clients appear distraught when mapping the family background, it is best to stop the exercise and explore their reactions.

Figure 1.5

Three-Generational Genogram

close

cut off

distant/tenuous
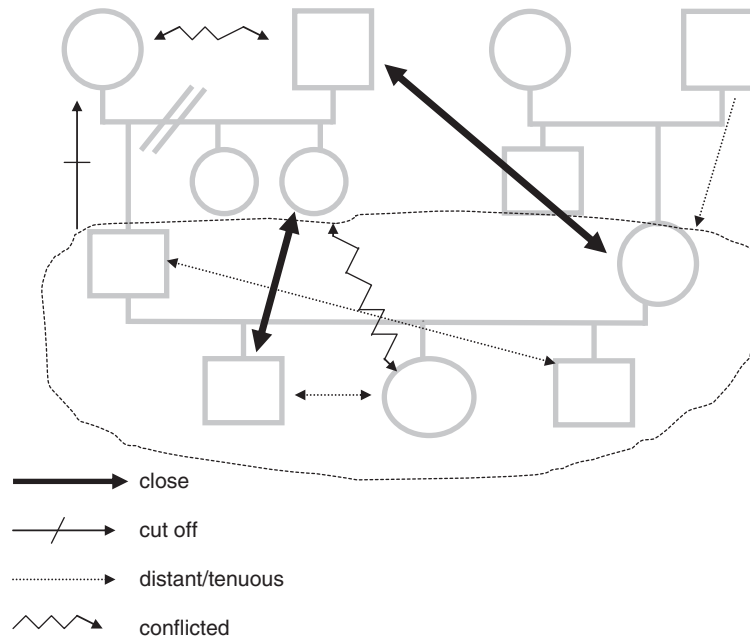
conflicted

The relationships among the family members also can be depicted on the genogram using different types of lines, as shown in Figure 1.5. Typical relationship types included on a genogram are conflicted, close, distant or tenuous, and cut-off relationships (no longer talk to each other). Although many more types of relationships exist, these four are enough for the purposes of this example. If you want to include more, add more types of lines to the legend and use them in the genogram.

When using lines to show types of relationships, the direction of energy in the relationship is shown with arrowheads. If the feeling is mutual in the relationship, usually there are arrowheads on both ends of the line. If the feeling flows in only one direction, there is only one arrowhead (which points to the family member who receives the emotion). For example, if Person A was always angry with Person B but the feeling was not reciprocal, the arrowhead would point from Person A to Person B.

In Figure 1.5, the daughter in the current family has conflicts with an aunt on the father's side of the family. This same aunt has a very close relationship with the brother. The brother and sister have a distant or tenuous relationship. The father has a cut-off relationship with his mother in which the emotional energy comes from him. The father's mother is divorced from his father and in a conflicted relationship with him. The mother has a very close relationship with her husband's father, but her father is not close to her. The father seems to have a distant relationship with the youngest brother.

Exercise 1.2: Exploring Your Genogram

It is clear that a genogram contains a wealth of family information. It depicts who is in the family and how they get along with each other. To make sense out of your family, draw a genogram in the space provided below. When drawing the genogram, use the three-generational model (see Figure 1.4).

If you know both of your parents, begin with your father (or previous father figures) way over to the left and mother (or mother figures) way over to the right. Then draw in their parents and siblings if possible. If you are unclear about certain relationships, use question marks where squares and circles would be placed. Make brief notes beside the question marks to document the information gaps. Finally, draw in your brothers and sisters.

After drawing the genogram, read the next lists of questions and reflect on your genogram and family socialization experiences. You may want to make notes on the genogram to capture some of this information or just reflect mentally to ensure privacy. Make sure you address all questions and think about how these aspects of your family influence your action and processing systems.

1. *Tolerance for difference.* As a professional helper, you will be working with diverse groups. Family socialization provides frameworks for understanding and responding to different types of diversity. In your family socialization, some differences will be valued while others may be negatively judged. It is important to understand how your family's approach to differences influenced your responses. Reflect on the next questions to understand how different people in your background influenced your approach to differences.

- *Economic differences.* How did your family make sense of different economic groups? How were rich people valued? What were people's attitudes about poverty? What did family members say caused economic differences? Did your family have friends from different economic groups?

- *Values differences.* What were the major values in your family? How did they deal with people who had different values? Were people able to disagree with each other in the family? What did family members scoff at when the news was on the television? How did you family members feel about politicians? Did they endorse a political party?

- *Religious differences.* How important was religion or spirituality in your family? Did family members subscribe to organized religion? How flexible were family members when it came to religion and spiritual issues? Were family members allowed to question religious teachings? Were family members allowed to believe in religion? Were there other sources of spiritual fulfillment, such as spending time in nature?

- *Racial differences.* How were different racial groups discussed in your family? Were values attached to different racial groups? Did you play with people from different racial groups as a child? What were your experiences like with different racial groups?

- *Cultural differences.* How important was cultural background in your family? What cultural activities were part of your family's traditions? How did your family explain the differences between your culture and other cultural groups? Were there any expectations that you adhere to cultural norms?

- *Privilege differences.* Did you primarily live in one community, or did your family move frequently? If you moved often, was this to improve the family situation? How much choice did your family have about moving? Was your family able to influence community structures and institutions, or were you on the receiving end of other people's influence? What kind of connections did your family have in the community? How active was your family in the community? How was your family viewed by others in the community?

- *Sexual orientation differences.* Who was gay or lesbian in your family? How did family members talk about gay, lesbian, or other sexual populations? How did members of your family distinguish between sexual deviancy and sexual minorities? What meanings were attached to sexual minority groups? How would your family respond if you or one of your siblings told them you were gay/lesbian?

  Based on how your family responded to these types of diversity, identify areas of intolerance with the people in your genogram. Jot notes beside these people indicating the types of intolerance. Now consider your relationship with these people, and reflect on how messages of intolerance might affect you when you have to work with diverse clients. Make a mental note of any areas where you will need to focus attention as you develop your openness to diverse client groups.

2. *Support seeking.* You are entering a profession where other people will be approaching you for support. Sometimes the methods clients will use to gain support are disguised and easy to miss if you have a predetermined belief regarding how people should ask for support. At other times, you may find that you have emotional reactions to a client's method of soliciting support from you. Both of these potential reactions come from the historical models of support seeking you have developed through your family experience.

Consequently, it is important to understand how people in your family achieved support. Consider your genogram and reflect on the next sets of questions.

- *Kinds of support.* Was it all right for people to need emotional support in your family? How did others respond to crying or isolating due to unhappiness? When you needed money or rides, how did your family members respond? Were family members good sources of information, or did you need to ask others? Could you trust your family members to give unbiased feedback, or were they judgmental? Did family members listen well, or did they just tell you what you should do?
- *Identified support people.* Do people in your family support each other, or do you need to go outside of the family for support? Does the support tend to come from one or two sources? Are there any features of these people (e.g., gender, age, birth order) that might explain what the support system is based on? What do others do to activate these people to provide support?
- *Identified people receiving support.* Do some people in your family receive more support? What is it about these people (or the people not receiving support) that might explain this pattern? How does receiving support influence status in the family?
- *Rules for whether people are worthy of support.* In your family, do the people providing support place conditions on people such as expectations for how they should think or behave in order to receive support? What are the themes of these conditions that might operate as rules or standards?
- *Patterns of activating support.* How do people in your family activate the support-giving responses in others? Is it okay to ask others directly for help, or do family members need to use indirect methods, such as being visibly helpless or increasing tension in the family (e.g., pouting or tantrums)?
- *Persistent unsolicited support.* Are there any family members who provide support even when others do not appear to want support? Are there patterns that might identify the rewards that the individual gets from this support giving? What is the impact of this support on others?

  Based on the patterns of support giving in the family, identify some themes that might influence how you respond to clients. Perhaps there are experiences or modeling in your family that could cause you to be too abrupt when others seek support. There may be influences in some families that can cause a member to be too free with providing support. Identify possible problems that you will need to prevent when clients approach you expecting support.

  3. *Influencing others.* All people in a family seek to influence others to ensure that their needs are met. The strategies developed by family members to shape the responses of others often form a pattern or trend when a member wishes to influence people. Given that a component of your professional job will involve influencing the behaviors of others, it is important to be aware of the types of influence strategies that might be common to you. Look at the various members in your family genogram and try to determine the methods used by each to influence others. Some of the common influence strategies might include:

- *Logical argument.* Identify people in the family who believe that a person needs to be rational and logical and that these traits should guide behavior. How influential are these members of the family? Is this the primary source of influence?
- *Wearing down resistance.* There may be some people in the family who try to get their way via repeated requests, whining, pouting, or other ''wear-down'' strategies. Identify these people on your genogram. How influential are they in the family? Are they the ones who get their way? How do you feel about the use of this strategy? Do you ever use this strategy?
- *Escalating tension.* Some people influence others by making them uncomfortable by expressing anger. Often people in a family use this type of strategy to control others. Sometimes people increase the volume of their voice, assume a condescending or angry tone, or become completely silent. Identify people in your family who use tension. Also identify how others respond to them. How have you used tension to get your own way? How do you react when others use tension? Are there certain types of tension that you use more often? Are there certain types of tension that cause you to give in to others?

- *Induction of guilt*. Similar to tension, some family members may use guilt to influence the behavior of other people. Identify those in the family who use guilt as a strategy of influence. Identify the people who are most susceptible to giving in when others use guilt. Think about how you use guilt in your relationships. Think also about how you respond when others use guilt to influence you. Do you give in? Does it make you feel things other than guilt?

- *Loss of approval*. Similar to guilt, some family members may use disappointment or disapproval to influence other people. In some families, loss of approval appears like a loss of love, while in others disapproval is more of a dirty look. How are approval and loss of approval expressed in your family? Identify the people who use this strategy. How do you respond when people express disapproval about what you are doing? How do you use disapproval to influence others?

- *Coercive sanctions*. In some families, coercion is used to gain compliance. At one extreme, this involves becoming violent or threatening harm. Spanking is one form of this strategy, but in more extreme cases, people may punch, kick, choke, throw things, grab, or push. If this has occurred in your family, identify the people who use this type of strategy. When this type of strategy is used, how do you react? How do you feel about the use of coercion? When you see people using this strategy, what do you want to do? In some families, there are more subtle coercive systems, such as being sent to bed, losing privileges, or grounding. How are these strategies used in your family? How have you used different types of coercion in your life? What kinds of issues bring out a desire to use this type of strategy?

In reviewing the strategies of influence used in your life, identify types of client behavior that may evoke a strong response from you. Also identify reactions in yourself associated with the different types of strategies. How will you know when you are reacting to something? Spend some time developing a plan for monitoring and controlling your strategies of influence and reactions to people who may attempt to influence you.

From Socialization to Professional Development

Socialization experiences provide a starting point for your professional career. Somehow in all of those influences you discover that a helping profession is a good direction for your future. For some people, the decision is based on a foundation of caring that emerged from the socialization. Other people may react to experiences and events and choose a helping profession to help vulnerable people either prevent or recover from similar situations. Regardless, most helping professionals have a desire to make the world a better place; this desire threads back to life experiences leading us toward our professional pathway.

Toward a Professional Self

As you begin your professional education, you begin a second identity as a professional. Many of the questions in the last exercise attempt to begin a foundation for the developing professional identity. Although your professional identity builds on your foundation of caring, it is a qualitatively different identity from a personal identity. In your personal life, you are able to maintain values and beliefs that emerge from socialization experiences. This is who you are as a person. As your education progresses, you discover who you are as a helping professional. Although there is some overlap between the two identities, your patterns of responding to people will gain focus and purpose as a professional identity emerges.

Developing a professional identity is sometimes a struggle. As a good son or daughter, you are loyal to your families. As a good citizen, you extend loyalty to institutions such as schools, churches, and other community bodies that influence your development. Now you must add a new loyalty: your professional affiliation. A critical part of self-awareness is ensuring that your loyalty is correctly aligned at any given time. There will be times where clients subscribe to values or activities that seem to violate your family or institutional

loyalties. At these times, you must avoid imposing personal or family values. Rather, you must respond from a professional position.

Developing our professional self is a lifelong process. Every day you learn new insights and skills as you gradually increase our mastery as a professional. This developmental process involves applying our skills in practice situations, gathering feedback, and continually adjusting your responses to increase mastery (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993). As you progress, your professional self develops expertise that is valued by your clients and profession. To begin this process, it is important to take realistic stock of your skills, beliefs, values, and competencies that provide a foundation for the ''professional self.''

Considerations for Digital Communicators

For those who live large portions of life on the Internet and communicate mostly using Facebook and texting, there may be some unique challenges as you develop self-awareness. These challenges emerge from digitally connected people because you are likely to have an expansive understanding of the world. Inherent in living a connected life, digital communicators have an enormous awareness of events occurring within social networks and the world. You learn about situations in real time, seldom relying on the news media to provide you with information that is already stale. Digital communicators are the ultimate consumers of information.

In your quest for information, you develop skills to access information quickly. As you surf from site to site, you make lateral cognitive moves often stimulated by interest or divergent thoughts that enter your mind. You can immediately explore multiple sources of information with a world of infinite information literally at your fingertips. As a result, your mind becomes quite adept at pursuing facts and fantasies, each existing in a unique universe and linked to multiple parallel worlds. The constant flow of information and entertainment keeps your mind moving at an amazing pace, constantly seeking and exploring.

Concurrent with accessing information, digital communicators maintain large social networks. Social networking, while a critical link to the world, is sometimes an intrusive demand. Twitter, Facebook, and other services that automatically update followers intrude into electronic worlds, each time drawing attention and resulting in a decision to welcome or resist the distraction. Texting promotes similar decisions. Each decision requires you either to respond or to ignore, as the communication enters your awareness.

Distraction Versus Focus

Although digital communicators are excellent at multitasking, developing self-awareness may be frustrating because it is a slow and focused search. This contrasts with the skill sets associated with surfing the Web and managing social networking intrusions. The surfing patterns and social networks develop skills to quickly access information, make decisions, and respond. This skill set may frustrate digital communicators when developing self-awareness.

Self-awareness development is not a fast process because the information is not easy to find. Often the important information seems invisible. Often you must spend inordinate amounts of time reflecting on a situation to learn the subtle influences in your life. This intense, singular focus can seem very slow and tedious for digital communicators. There are very few easily retrievable nuggets of information. To be successful, digital communicators must welcome internally focused exploration as they would a challenging Web search.

Outward Versus Inward

The second challenge for digital communicators is the direction of the search. Digitally connected people are highly skilled at seeking out sources of information on the Internet. Most know different search strategies that can eliminate useless information and increase the likelihood of a successful search. These skills all begin at the keyboard and extend outward into cyberspace. As such, your best-honed skills are outward in focus.

Developing self-awareness is an inward journey. Strategies for an inward search are unique because they require openness rather than active penetration of space. Often self-awareness emerges when you notice patterns in your life and then explore those patterns.

Pattern emergence is a reflective experience that is qualitatively passive and calm. To develop awareness, it may be necessary to relax and reflect inward rather than trying to pursue information actively.

Fragmentation Versus Coherence

A final challenge emerges from the nature of digital information. As you receive digital information through updates or searches, you gather multiple unique elements of information. Many of the information elements remain unique and do not require any integration into a whole. As you multitask, you manage several digital conversations while working on a term paper and watching television. Such management requires skills at keeping each set of tasks distinct from the others.

The tasks used to fragment life into unique manageable packages can interfere with self-awareness. As you explore your experiences and methods of coping, the task is to unify and build a coherent understanding of your values, thinking, and affective processing. The development of self-awareness requires you to explore seemingly unrelated life events and associated responses to find common threads and meaning in the divergent experiences. The skills associated with developing coherence diverge from the habits developed for managing the multiple digital inputs. For this reason, developing self-awareness may feel awkward and frustrating.

Exercise 1.3: Understanding Your Socialized Foundation

In the genogram and cultural exercises, you explored some socialization influences. In this exercise, you will explore your patterns of thinking and responding. This is a summary of the personal you. Take great care in exploring who you are today because this is the foundation that will support your professional self. As you proceed with this exercise, you will respond mentally to several sets of questions. Make sure that you answer every question in your mind. Take time to reflect on each area of questioning. As you respond to the questions, you should have some thoughts and insights; jot down these insights on paper. Use these thoughts to identify areas of your personal self that you want to shape, build on, or control as you start developing your professional self.

1. *Context.* First, let's explore the social context of your life. Read the next sets of questions and mentally answer each as your reflect on how they apply to your life.

- *Neighborhood.* You were raised in a neighborhood and community. This setting provided you with a comfort zone. What features in your neighborhood promoted comfort or fear? What areas of the neighborhood did you learn to avoid? What areas of the neighborhood were sources of comfort? Where did you go to have fun in the neighborhood? How was your neighborhood viewed by others in the community? Compare these features to the types of neighborhood that your clients may come from. Would those neighborhoods be similar to yours? If the neighborhoods are different, how are you going to increase your comfort entering neighborhoods that are different from yours?

- *Culture.* You were raised in a cultural context. Some of you are members of the dominant culture, and others were raised in a minority cultural context. What privileges has your culture provided you? How did your racial or cultural group fare in relation to the privileges provided to other groups? How do those differences influence your perceptions of your culture? How do these differences influence your perceptions of other cultural groups? Think about your culture and race and how these elements of your life fit into the larger society. Are there any other cultural groups that are confusing to you at this time? Are there any groups that seem too entitled? How might these observations present challenges as you start developing your professional self? What values of right and wrong has your culture/background instilled in you? Do these values fit with the larger society values such as work ethic, democracy, competition, and equal opportunity? How might you respond to clients from different cultures, races, or backgrounds?

- *Institutions*. Think about the role that societal institutions had in your life. What influence did school, church, police, neighborhood organizations, social welfare institutions, and economic institutions have in forming your personal identity? Are relationships good with some institutions and not with others? Which are helpful and which are hurtful? How might past experience influence your reactions when you have to interact with these institutions and organizations as a professional? How might these experiences influence how you respond to clients who are having difficulty with social institutions?

2. *Behavior.* This section explores your current codes of behavior. With your genogram and life history in mind, consider the next sets of questions about your action tendencies. As you mentally answer these questions, you will have insights into your patterns of behavior and ways that you manage your actions. Make notes to capture your insights as you proceed.

- *Talents*. What special talents have you developed throughout your life? Do these talents help you see things differently from other people? How do these talents affect how you express yourself with others? How do the talents influence your motivation and drive? How can these talents enhance your abilities as a professional helper?

- *Life experiences*. What experiences have you sought out that helped form your character? What kind of activities did you tend to participate in? How did these activities enlighten you about other people? Did any of the activities expose you to people you might not have met otherwise? How might these experiences help you as a professional helper?

- *Social direction*. What are the things you do that make society a better place? If nobody knew you were doing good deeds, would they be worth doing? What are the expectations you use to organize your educational and work life? What happens if these expectations cannot be achieved? What happens if other people interfere with your plans?

- *Codes for living*. Should people be clean and tidy? What does it mean when people do not take good care of themselves? How important is punctuality? Are the standards for behavior in a family different from how people should act in public? How important is following up on your promises? Should all rules be followed, or is it okay to break some? Under what conditions is it okay to break rules?

- *Public and private behavior*. How is your public behavior different from your private behavior? What are some things you have done you will never tell your parents? What are some things you have done you will never tell another soul? How would your life change if someone found out and went public? How would it feel if a societal institution entered your life and started asking you and your family about these types of behaviors?

- *Injunctions*. How do you keep control of your behavior? Is your self-control something that happens inside you, or do you need others to be watching? Is controlling your behavior important to you? Under what conditions would you become violent? Under what conditions is it okay to take a life? Under what conditions would you consider breaking the law? What sexual behaviors are doable for you? What sexual behaviors are okay for others, but you probably would not do them? How do you distinguish between sexual minorities and sexual deviance?

3. *Interaction.* You developed several interactive habits that control your patterns of relating to other people. Reflect on your systems of interaction that emerged from your early family experiences. As you mentally answer the next sets of questions, take notes when you have insights into your interpersonal patterns.

- *Listening habits*. When you listen to others, do you tend to go into your head when you have a thought, or do you continue listening? Do you find that you lose track of what others are saying when you are listening? When you listen too much, do you get bored? Do you prefer listening or talking? Do you talk more than you listen? Are you a person who gives advice to others?

- *Relating to others*. Do you prefer people who are a lot like you? How do you react when others are different from you? Can you trust others to do what they say, or do you have to check up on them? Can you trust others to respect you, or do you have to analyze

what people might mean by what they say (or do not say)? Do you feel others judge you harshly or want to bring you down? Are there differences between groups of people you like and those you do not like?

- *Interpersonal situations*. Are some situations harder to handle than others? When people ignore you, how do you react? How do you respond when you do something embarrassing and people laugh at you? When people confront you publicly, can that cause problems? Sometimes you believe you are right, but others still want to take another direction; is that ever a problem for you?

- *Problem solving*. Given your family experience, how do you approach problem solving? Is there a right and wrong way to raise problems? Are problems between people something that authority figures arbitrate, or do people work things out at their own level? Do you have a tendency to diminish tension when problems are being discussed, or can people battle it out? What is the role of authority figures when other people have problems? Is tension a good thing, or should it be avoided? When others disagree with you, what happens inside you? What feelings are evoked when you prefer one solution to a problem but people select a different solution?

4. *Emotion.* You have had an opportunity to consider many elements in your genogram. Emotional management is something that is heavily influenced by family experiences. Think about your family messages and rules about emotions as you reflect on the next set of questions.

- *Emotional expression*. Are emotions something to be controlled or expressed? What is the right way to express emotion? Should you hold in emotion? Do you tend to ignore or express emotions? Is there such a thing as being too emotional? How would you know if you were too emotional? Is it bad to be emotionally expressive? Is it bad to hold in emotions? Are there right ways to express negative emotions? Should you hide your feelings when upset? How about when you are happy?

- *Emotional value*. Are certain emotions okay and others not? What makes a good emotion good? What emotions should you avoid? What makes these emotions negative? What emotions should you hide from others? Are there occasions when you can share negative emotions?

- *Emotional awareness*. When you experience feelings, do you know exactly what you are experiencing, or do some feelings seem confusing? When you cry during a movie or show, what feeling themes tend to be present? What feelings tend to motivate you to take action? What thoughts tend to go through your head when you are sad, angry, happy, powerless, or ashamed? How do the thoughts amplify or diminish the feelings?

5. *Thinking.* Many of your feelings, actions, and interactions are influenced by your beliefs (Ellis, 1996; Meichenbaum, 1997). You all have different levels of beliefs. Some beliefs are ideological and influence your sense of right and wrong, while other beliefs are of no real consequence in how you live your life. As you answer the next set of questions, reflect on your beliefs that help guide your life. Again, take notes about any insights that emerge during the exercise.

- *Self-conceptions*. Many people feel that they have many flaws. Do these thoughts ever emerge for you? Do you feel that you should be perfect? How pervasive is this belief? What would happen if you are less than perfect? Do you often feel that you must defend yourself or prove something to others? When you judge your own actions, whose eyes or perceptions do you use to observe yourself? Are these people who are friendly or critical? Do you find you need other people to keep saying good things about you? If people criticize you, does it cause you to feel bad or forget your good points? How does your race factor into your identity? What is unique about your ethnic background? How does race and ethnic background influence your self-worth?

- *Family roles*. Are there family roles that are more important than others? Should these roles have special privileges? Do these roles benefit one gender over another? Can two people of the same sex fulfill these roles? Is your answer to the last question based on logic or loyalty? How should children be raised? Whose job is it to raise children

properly? What is society's role in helping this to happen? How do these beliefs fit with those from other cultures? How might these beliefs create problems when working with different client groups?

- *Ideologies*. What ideologies tend to influence your codes for living? What is the role of organized religion in your life? Do you follow religious teachings like inflexible rules or more like guidelines? How do feminist beliefs influence your life? What about socialist beliefs? How do these beliefs fit into today's society? How does your ideology help you identify good from bad? Have you noticed that many ideologies are polarized into good/bad categories? Is it good for society to think in polarized terms? How does this style of thinking fit for you?

6. *Motivational orientation.* You are all motivated by different affective orientations. These orientations set patterns in our lives and influence our relationships with others. Reflect on the next sets of questions to identify patterns in your strivings. After mentally answering the questions, consider how your natural motivations might influence how you operate as a helping professional.

- *Some people strive to be the best*. Do you find your values are superior to others? How are your grades compared to those of your classmates? Does it matter if others do better than you? How hard do you work to be attractive? Do you hate it when others see you looking bad? Do you often compare yourself to others? Are you a leader? Do you often assume control when working on group projects?

- *Some people strive to be safe*. Do you worry that others might do things to mess up your plans? Does it bother you if others are angry with you? Do you try to keep everyone happy? How important are rules and procedures? Does it bother you when others do not follow rules? When you need to confront someone, do you bring others with you for support? Do you count on friends to help protect you from others?

- *Some people strive to be close to others*. How much energy do you put into maintaining old friendships? When your friends do not reach out to you, do you continue to put the effort into relationships? Do you tend to do more than your share on group projects? Do you often give in for the good of the group, even if your ideas seem better? When others are not doing their share, do you still do your best?

- *Some people strive to master challenges*. Do you seek out challenges? Are you the kind of person who experiments with new approaches? Do others accuse you of trying to reinvent the wheel? Will you accept failure as long as you learn from your attempts? Do you keep trying even when others tell you that it is not worth it? Are you happy when you start on a new project? Do you keep seeking out new areas to learn?

Now take a few minutes to review the notes you took during the exercise. You should at this point have a sense of the strengths and challenges that emerge from your socialization and life experiences. Treat your socialization as a professional starting point by first circling the insights and thoughts that will help you relate to clients and populations that are different from you. These circled areas will become your foundation for building your professional identity.

The second task is to underline any thoughts or insights that might interfere with serving clients. As you underline, understand that these areas are not bad or negative; these are simply elements of your socialization that you want to keep in your personal rather than your professional life. You will be building new frameworks for thinking and methods of responding that will round out your professional self. At this point, you need to start separating personal traits that can translate into professional competencies from personal traits that might interfere.

When you have finished the underlining, look at your pages and begin planning how you might limit the influence of the underlined areas as you build your professional self. Identify the elements that you might need to control or even eliminate and formulate a plan for each. Develop similar plans for the areas that might be helpful in your profession. Identify the beginning competencies so you can start to shape them into professional skills. Remember that professional development is a lifelong process; these plans will be actualized throughout your career.

Figure 1.6

**Lifelong-Learning
Sequence**
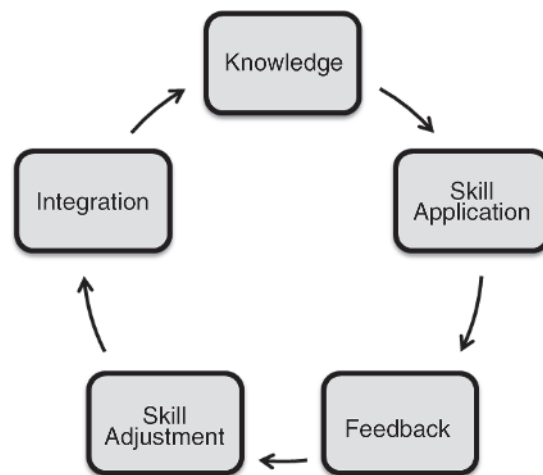
Toward a Lifelong Learning Approach

Based on your current set of competencies, you are now embarking on a career-long journey of professional development. You have now identified values, beliefs, and skills that you can build on to become a competent professional. You have also identified sets of values, beliefs, and skills that you want to retain in the personal rather than the professional realm. This initial separation between your personal and professional selves signifies the beginning of your professional development.

As you continue to develop your professional self, you will discover a pattern of learning and skill development. This pattern is evident in most professions where skills are an element of success. The pattern, depicted in Figure 1.6, involves continual cycles of skill application, feedback, adjustment, and integration with new knowledge. You will continue to learn from this cycle throughout your career.

Although you have some experiences and learning at this point, your professional self will continue to develop as your competencies grow. The first step in this ongoing development is knowledge. You must have knowledge that can be applied in practice (Lane, Mathews, Sallas, Prattini, & Sun, 2008). Knowledge development requires you to understand theories, research findings, and professional principles that inform your practice. You have been acquiring this information through your prerequisite classes and now can integrate your knowledge with your current skill foundation by applying your learning to practice situations.

After applying your knowledge, it is very important to gather feedback and evidence to help you refine your skills (Ericsson et al., 1993). Such evidence includes client outcomes, client feedback, supervisory feedback, and other observation systems that can help you identify effective skill elements. Even in the absence of external data sources, such as supervisors, you will become a skilled observer and will begin to reflect on your interventions to discover skills that are working well and skills that require adjustment.

As you gather information, you will continually adjust and refine your skills, each time learning more about how to use yourself with professional precision. If you practice with self-awareness and openness, the repeated cycles will hone your skills and competencies for working within the helping relationship. Eventually, skills that begin awkwardly develop into competencies and interactive habits that will become second nature.

Critical Chapter Themes

1. It is important for helping professionals to be very aware of themselves. Such awareness provides (a) a source of personal power; (b) awareness of differences; (c) insight into one's reactions; and (d) a source of emotional connection.

2. Self-awareness includes four response systems to be fully aware of how you respond to situations: action, interaction, thinking, and feeling.

3. Our responses are heavily influenced by our family socialization and personal history. Models of understanding, interpreting, avoiding, and behaving evolve as you adapt to early family and community situations. You must understand these adaptations to be fully self-aware.

4. A genogram can help us understand our socialization influences regarding support seeking, tolerance of difference, and influencing others. These are critical areas of awareness for a helping professional. The genogram also provides a tool for assessing client family patterns.

5. Our life experiences and socialization provide a starting point for developing as professionals. You shape this development using self-awareness to control patterns that might interfere with the helping relationship and building on traits that can enhance your work.

6. Competencies continually build on foundation skills by applying skills, gathering feedback, adjusting, and then integrating outcomes with new knowledge. This is the foundation of lifelong professional development.

Online Resources

Psychological games including self-awareness: http://wilderdom.com/games/

Resources with a multicultural focus: www.edchange.org/multicultural/index.html

Recommended Reading

Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T., & Tesch-Romer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. *Psychological Review, 100*(3), 363–406.

Galindo, I., Boomer, E., & Reagan, D. (1989). *A family genogram workbook*. Richmond, VA: Educational Consultants, www.galindoconsultants.com.

Rothman, J. C. (1999). *Self-awareness workbook for social practitioners*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.