

classical conditioning, e.g., authoritarian parenting style, alcoholism, personality characteristics such as aggressiveness, introversion, etc. Another powerful, negative macro force is unhealthy relationships, e.g., fighting spouses, “friends” who are really pretenders, acquaintances (often mistaken as friends) who distract you from developing quality, long-term friendships. Not recognizing and accepting the influence of different gender roles also exerts an important macro influence on relationships.

The second type of macro force that needs to be considered to better understand client behavior is the important effect of *culture*. The U.S. and traditional China/Russia define opposite poles on continua such as individualism-collectivism, capitalism-communism, etc. These cultural differences are powerful influences on the inherent *values* of each culture, which are subsequently manifested in the *attitudes* and *behaviors* of individuals, couples and families. For example, Buss and a large team of researchers (1990) surveyed 9,474 adults from 33 countries, on 6 continents and 5 islands, to learn how culture might influence a person’s experience in determining who is desirable as a mate. Large cultural influences on mate selection were found, with data being depicted on two dimensions: 1) horizontal axis – whether the culture had traditional values (e.g., China, India) or Western-industrial (modern) values (e.g., Netherlands, Great Britain); and 2) vertical axis – the relative importance of education, intelligence and social refinement (e.g., Columbia, Spain) versus a pleasing disposition (e.g., Indonesia, Estonia) in choosing a mate. Buss and colleagues concluded that mate selection varies dramatically between cultures, and that socialization within a culture is the key factor influencing what qualities come to be considered attractive in the opposite sex.

It is also very important to recognize that clients come to therapy possessing a variety of positive qualities (i.e., positive forces pushing them towards greater mental health and happiness). First, from a biological point of view, someone who has good health, eats a balanced diet, and exercises regularly may exhibit greater motivation for change than a person in poor health who eats poorly and does not exercise. Second, psychological factors are powerful influences on mental health. For example, a psychologically-minded person who has good habits of assertiveness (e.g., readily expresses his/her feelings and needs in an empathic way; MacLean, 1998) is likely to show more potential for growth than a passive, aggressive, or, worse, passive-aggressive individual. Similarly, an adult with a secure attachment style will be comfortable with trust and intimacy, and will often experience higher levels of commitment and relationship satisfaction – very important qualities that promote mental health. Religious and/or spiritual psychological experiences are also strengthening for many people (e.g., belief in God, 12-Step programs). Given the common factors research suggesting that individual characteristics are the number one factor in therapeutic change (accounting for 40 percent of the outcome variance; Lambert, 1992), it is clearly very important that these positive biological and psychological micro influences be identified in assessment. Once recognized, they can then be used by the client and therapist to help counteract the negative forces that have propelled the client into an unhappy state of mind.

Similarly, there are many positive macro forces that help individuals achieve and maintain greater quality of life. Third, important social influences such as emotional (and financial) support from family and friends can be invaluable at times of crisis. Developing greater insight into the differing values of both genders can smooth interactions in opposite-sex relationships, and generate more understanding and acceptance between the sexes (e.g., Gray, 1993; Tannen, 1990). The fourth key influence on humans is culture. Since culture is directly related to the development of values in its respective citi-

zens, and since *values strongly influence attitudes and thus behavior*, it is inevitable that some cultural values will be more conducive to higher levels of mental health at certain times. For example, the American work ethic is an important influence in helping to create financial security to meet basic physical needs. On the other hand, too much individualism and an imbalanced lifestyle of “doing” over “being” can harm interpersonal relationships and result in lower levels of individual and relational happiness. In sum, a good initial assessment will literally measure or, at a minimum, develop conscious awareness of these positive influences on a client’s mental health. The therapist can then work together with the client to utilize these strengths to develop positive change and growth.

Consistent with the bio-psycho-social-cultural model of human nature, it is the belief of this writer that an adequate assessment must explore, or at least be sensitive to, all of these facets of human functioning. At the individual level, this means examining biological factors such as family history, physical health problems, and pain. Psychologically, it is important to gather information on the thoughts-feelings-behavior and spiritual/religious aspects of individual functioning. At the relational level, an assessment of the quality and quantity of a person’s social relationships needs to be carried out. This would include relationships with family members, friends vs. acquaintances, romantic partners, employers, and so forth. The type and frequency of possible negative interactional patterns (e.g., pursue-withdraw) should also be assessed in these relationships. Culture also exerts an important influence on individual and relationship functioning and this needs to be acknowledged in both assessment and treatment. Figures indicate that 50 percent of first marriages in the United States will end in separation or divorce within 20 years, with this figure reaching 67 percent for women who marry under 18 years of age (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001). It is not at all surprising that Americans are often preoccupied with individualism and networking, *and* that the U.S. consistently has the highest or one of the highest divorce rates in the world (Kail & Cavanagh, 2004; Kail, 2001). The often overlooked force of culture on marital relations is further evident in the findings of a very large U.S. national sample (8,383 married couples; Lavee & Olson, 1993). Results revealed that a mere nine percent of American couples were found to be genuinely happily married (“vitalized” couples), whereas the other 91 percent were experiencing reduced happiness and/or were at various levels of marital dissolution. The ramifications of not acknowledging the powerful influence culture exerts on human behavior is stated most clearly by Segall, Lonner, and Berry (1998, p. 1108): “To keep culture peripheral, or, worse, to avoid it altogether lest it challenge one’s own view of reality is myopic and a disservice to psychological inquiry.”

A valuable contribution to understanding human nature has been given to us by Stephen Covey in his books, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1990) and *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* (1997). In his original, remarkably insightful work, Covey argues that in order to achieve effectiveness and thus a high quality of life, people must approach life through an *inside-out approach*: that is, strong personalities are the necessary ingredient for forming strong relationships. Warren (1992) captures this same idea in his observation that “a great marriage requires two healthy people, and the time to get healthy is *before* you get married” (emphasis in original; p. 63). Although acknowledging the relationship between physical health and marital quality, Warren makes it clear that he is not referring to physical (e.g., nutrition and exercise) or even spiritual health, but to the extremely important emotional and mental health of the two people considering marriage. Here again, the important concept of balance is evident: psychological healthiness at the individual level is necessary for relational healthiness to be possible at