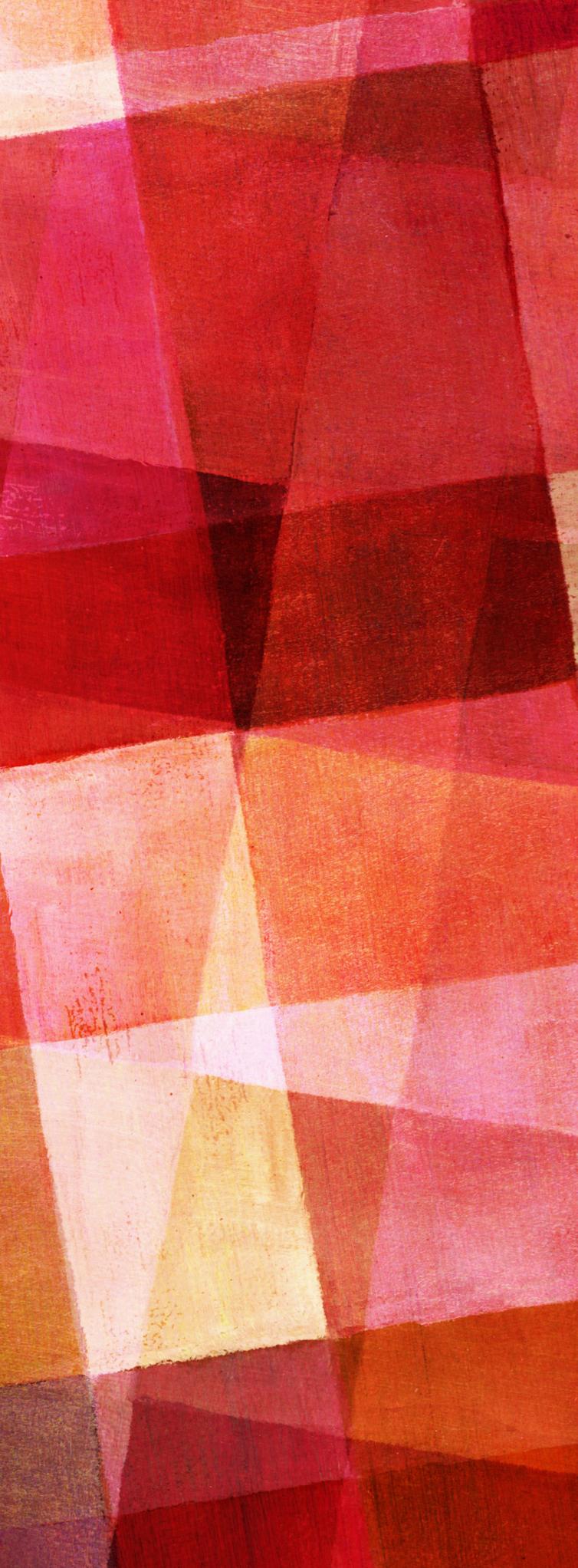


AFFIRMING COUNSELING PRACTICES IN SUPPORT OF STUDENTS OF COLOR USING ACT AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Latoya S. Thomas, LMHC

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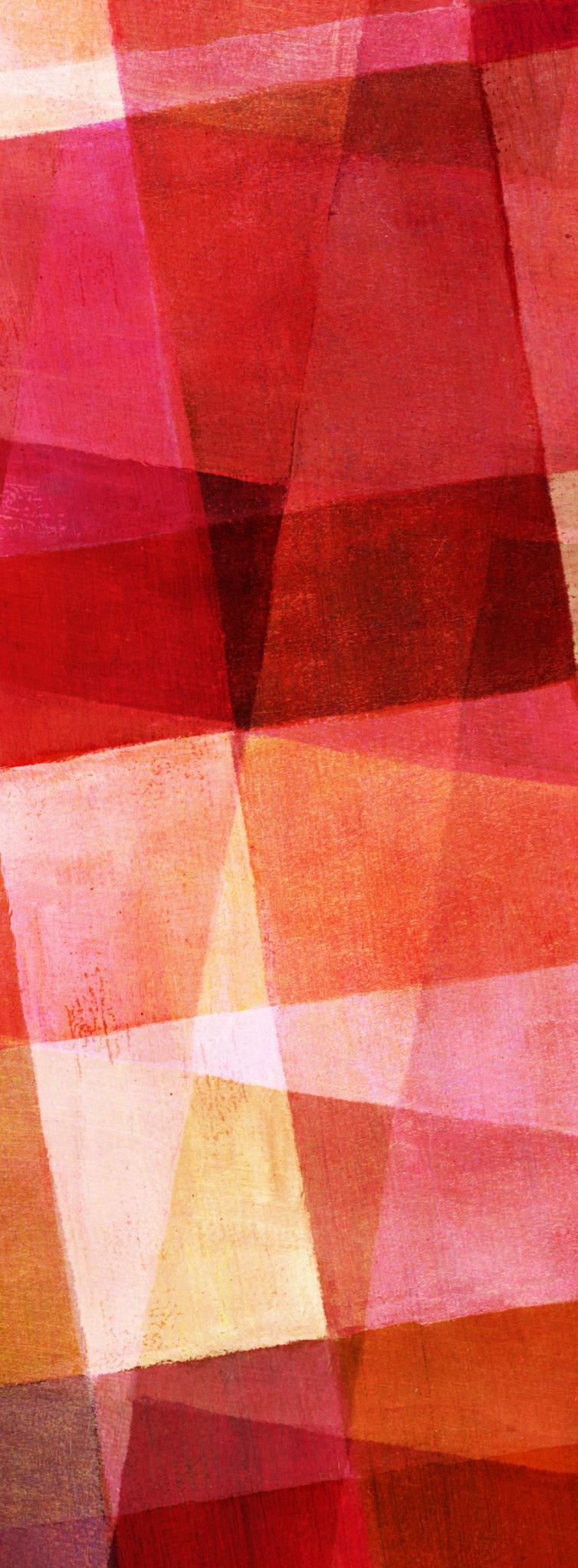


WHO ARE STUDENTS OF COLOR?

- ▶ Students of color (traditional college aged) from a variety of backgrounds and experiences.
- ▶ They are
 - ▶ Racial and ethnically diverse
 - ▶ Immigrants
 - ▶ Physically disabled
 - ▶ Socio-economically diverse
 - ▶ Queer
 - ▶ Non-binary and gender non-comforming
 - ▶ Neurodiverse
 - ▶ Possess intersectional identities

“Throwing a generic list of coping skills at someone experiencing oppression based trauma is like telling someone who’s having a panic attack to just “chill out.” It doesn't work like that.”

-Jamie Castillo, LCSW



WHAT IS CRITICAL RACE THEORY(CRT)?

...

- Views race as socially constructed, not biological, and that race, as a socially constructed concept, functions as a means to maintain the interests of the white population that constructed it.
- Recognizes that racial inequality emerges from the social, economic, and legal differences
- Whiteness holds power in our society and perpetuates differences between “races” to maintain elite white interest in labor markets, politics and other areas of society
- Racial stratification of our society means that experiences and opportunities vary based on proximity to whiteness.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS BASED ON CRT

Racism and white supremacy are stressors people of color are constantly exposed to in our society

Often, students of color, of all intersections, are doing emotional labor beyond their coursework, to manage the experiences of racial oppression

Everyone can internalize white supremacy and hold harmful beliefs about people of color

Consider how choices may be impacted by the forces of white supremacy. Simply, some of us possess privileges we did not earn and may have limitations placed on us by systemic barriers

Interrogate the system, not just the individual's response to issues as they arise

Ignoring racism and other forms of oppression will not make them go away and doing so inflicts harm on POC

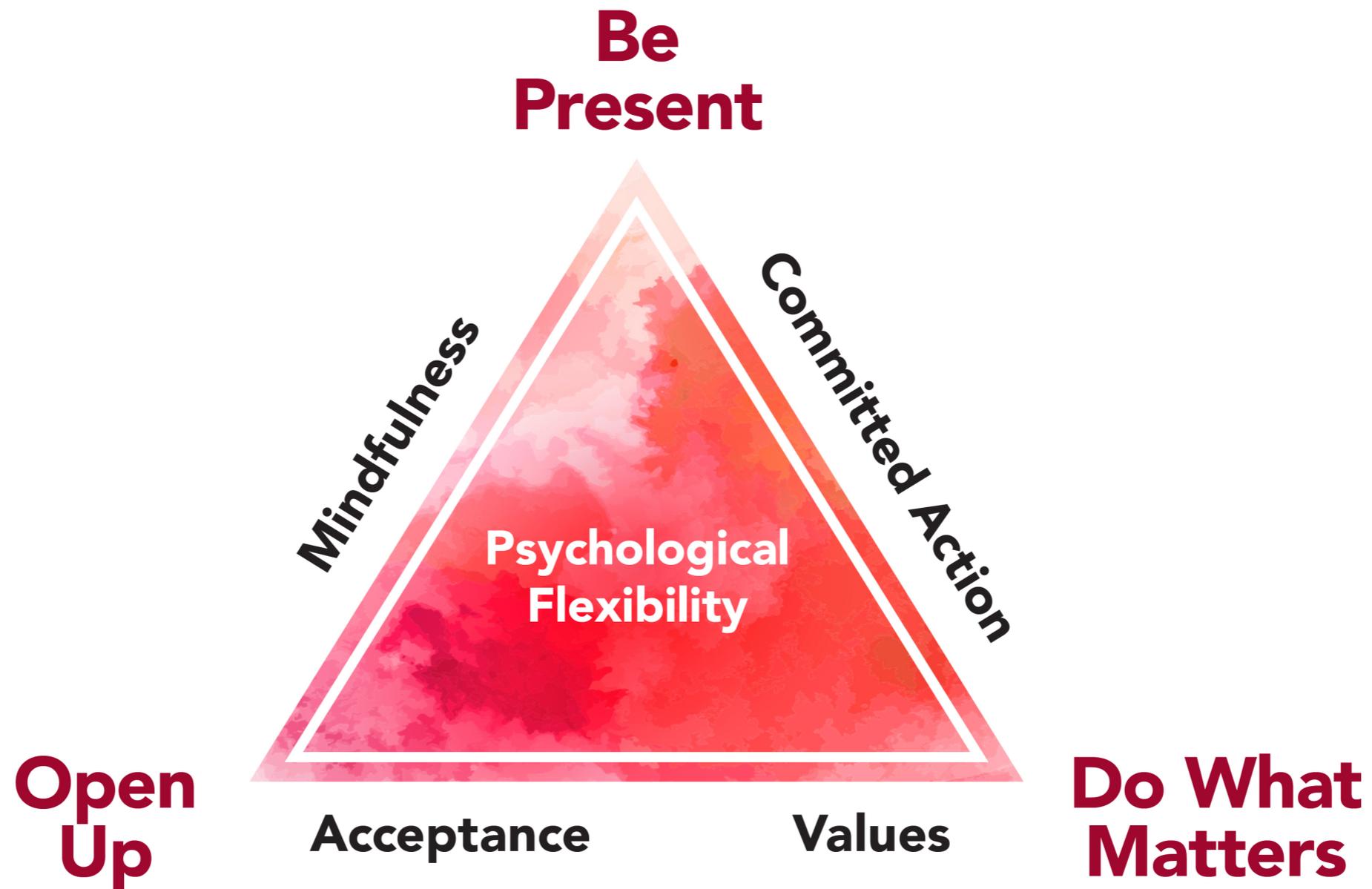
IMPACT OF RACIAL OPPRESSION

- Resentment
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Self doubt
- Isolation
- Anger
- Fear
- Paranoia
- Muscle tension
- Sleep issues
- Internalized negative thoughts about people of color

EXAMPLES OF WHITE SUPREMACY AT SCHOOLS

- Curriculum that centers white theorists/teachings
 - Ethnic and Racial Studies courses are electives and not required
- Dress codes that punish non-white beauty standards ie. policies that ban Afrocentric hairstyles or head coverings
- Students may not have the benefit of doing “mediocre” work
 - “I have to work twice as hard to get half of what white students get.”
- Equality vs. Equity
- Lack of representation of people of color in positions of power at institutions

ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY

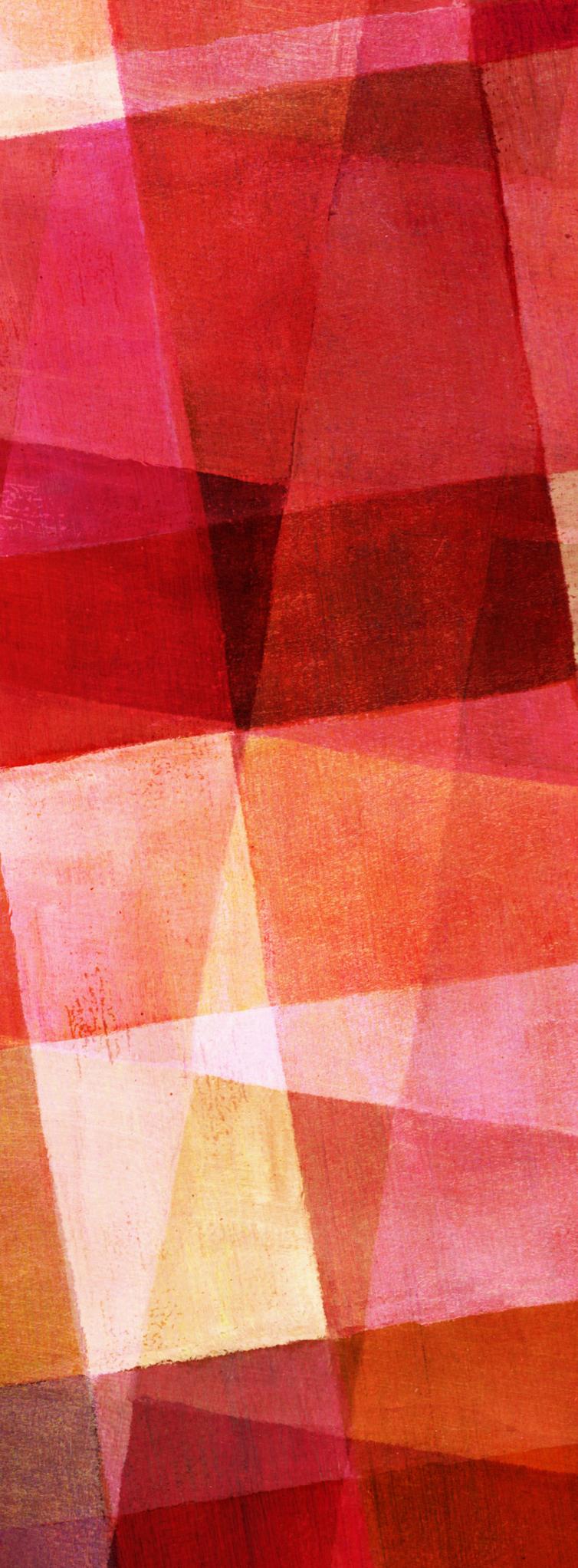


The ACT Triflex

Adapted from *ACT Made Simple*
By Russ Harris

ACT AND CRT WITH STUDENTS OF COLOR

- ▶ **ACT has the perspective that clients are not sick or broken**
 - Clients may be experiencing suffering and they may need support in their healing journey to live a meaningful life, as they define it, despite the challenges that arise as a person of color in a racially oppressive society
- ▶ **ACT makes room for pain, suffering and intense difficult emotions without trying to invalidate them or get rid of them**
- ▶ **The client is an expert on their experience while the therapist provides support to help them live a rich meaningful life, as defined by the client which allows space to address power differentials (empowerment model)**
- ▶ **Focus on values to create a rich meaningful life without the expectation to eradicate all challenges or invalidate them**



THE INTAKE PROCESS WITH STUDENTS OF COLOR

Use a collaborative approach, clients should be reminded that they can set boundaries with their therapist/provider

Beware of fixation on a single story while being mindful of systemic issues

Be aware of your assumptions, biases and privileges in the therapy dynamic

What are the client's expectations of me as a provider?

Clients are not "broken" they may be "stuck" or in need of healing.

How has the individual managed challenges in the past? Explore their resilience?

What are the client's values?

What aspects of their culture do they love?

Ask the person how they identify (race, gender, class, nationality etc.)

What has and continues to happen to their people?

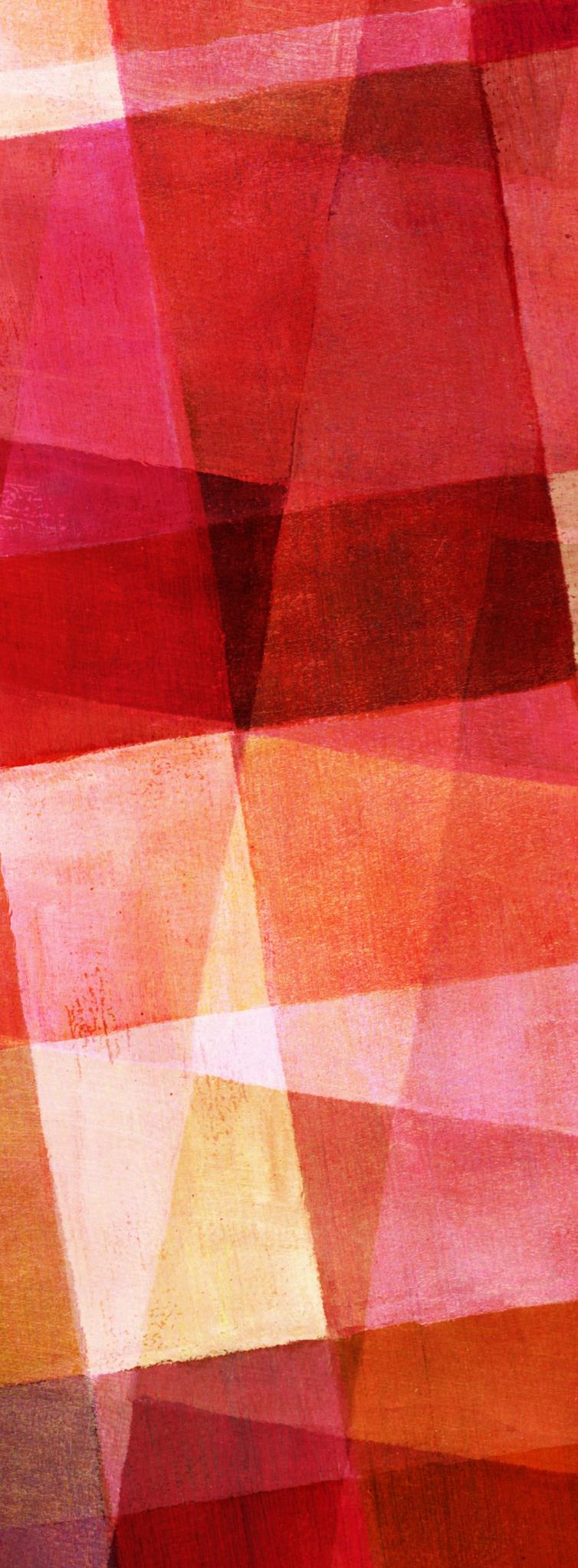
How does the client envision things would change in their life if they were not struggling with the stated problems?

What are the client and clinician's limitations in managing the issue/problem?

Who is their support system?

Who is this person beyond their struggles?

How are the person's choices informed by racism and other forms of oppression in society?



VALUES

- ▶ Values are the the activities are guiding qualities and principles about who we want to be in the world and what activities give our life meaning.
- ▶ Values are not goals, they may be the underlying principles that guide goal oriented behavior and choices
- ▶ Values may be influenced by family and society
- ▶ Values reflect what we want vs. what we “should” want
- ▶ Values clarification allow clients to align their behaviors and choices with the kind of life they would find more worthwhile
- ▶ Values clarification is a part of the intake and an ongoing exercise in therapy
- ▶ Values clarification may increase critical thinking and decision making skills
- ▶ Values may change over time
- ▶ It is important to note racial stratification impacts what choices are accessible

Values Clarification

Your values are the beliefs that define what is most important to you. They guide each of your choices in life. For example, someone who values family might try to spend extra time at home, while someone who values success in their career may do just the opposite. Understanding your values will help you recognize areas of your life need more attention, and what to prioritize in the future.

Select the 10 most important items from the following list. Rank them from 1-10 with "1" being the most important item.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Love | <input type="checkbox"/> Honesty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wealth | <input type="checkbox"/> Humor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Morals | <input type="checkbox"/> Reason |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Success | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge | <input type="checkbox"/> Achievement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Power | <input type="checkbox"/> Beauty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Spirituality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Free Time | <input type="checkbox"/> Respect |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adventure | <input type="checkbox"/> Peace |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Variety | <input type="checkbox"/> Stability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calmness | <input type="checkbox"/> Wisdom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Freedom | <input type="checkbox"/> Fairness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fun | <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recognition | <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nature | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Popularity | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Values Card Sort

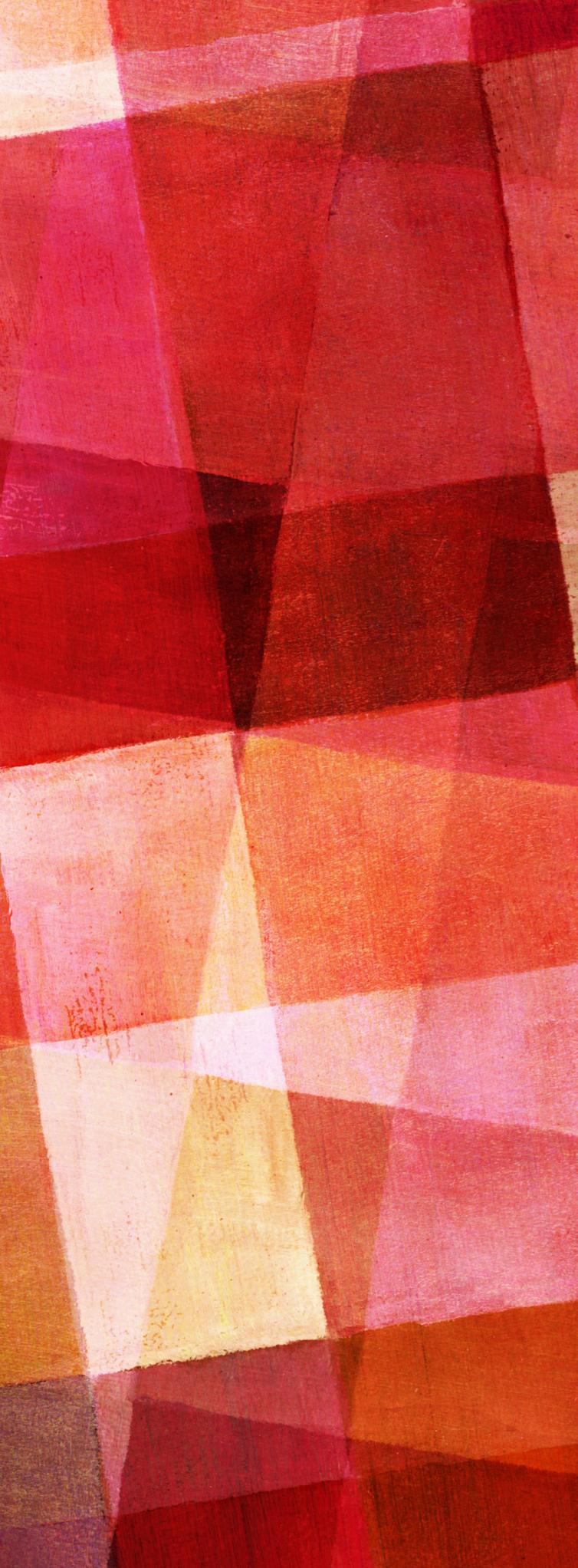
**PERSONAL VALUES
Card Sort**
W.R. Miller, J. C'de Baca, D.B. Matthews, P.L.
Wilbourne
University of New Mexico, 2001

INDUSTRY
CHANGE
PLEASURE
SELF-ACCEPTANCE
to accept myself as I am

68
9/01
9/01

VERY IMPORTANT TO ME

NOT IMPORTANT TO ME

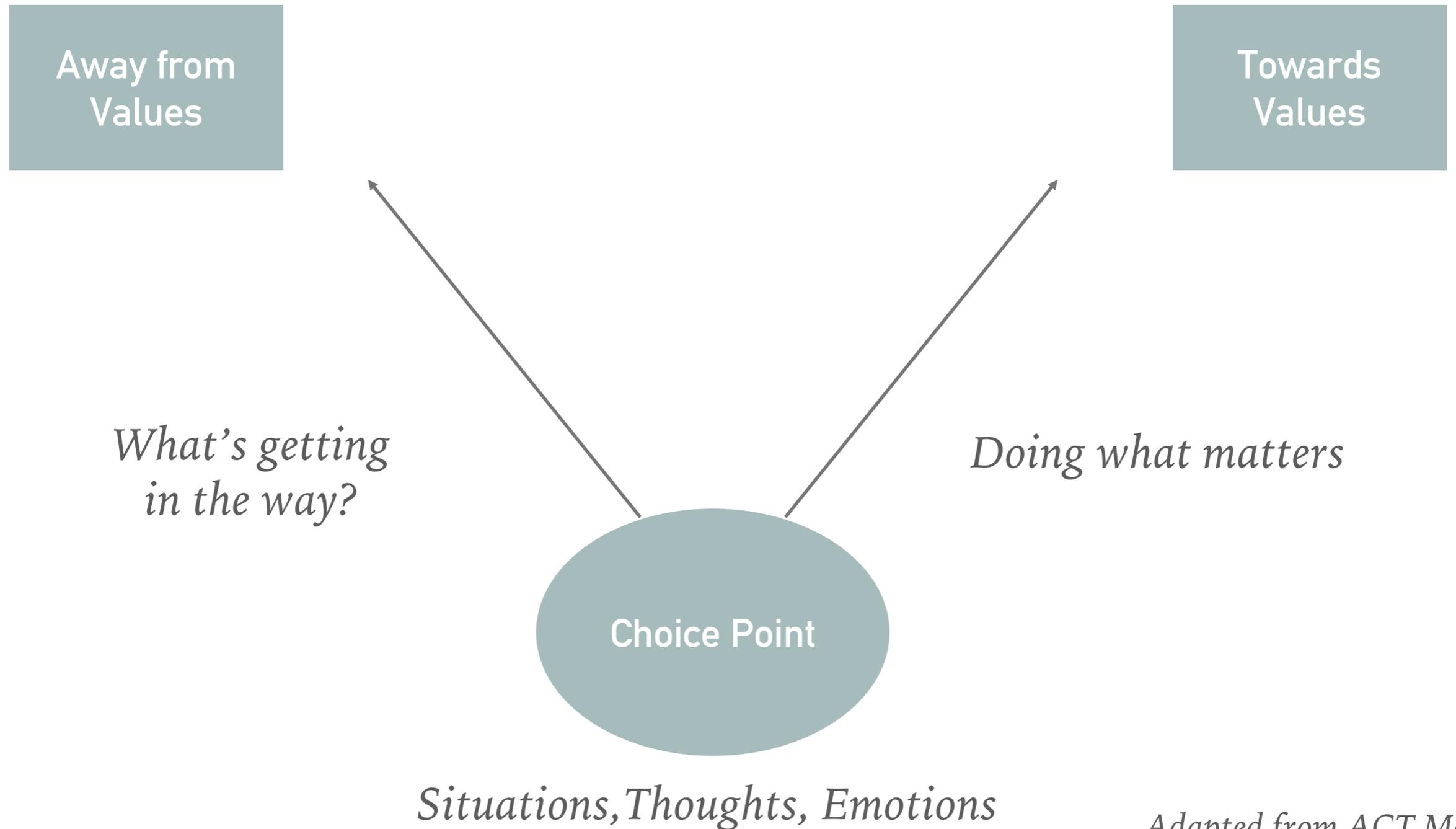


APPLICATION OF VALUES REFLECTION

- ▶ Help students identify majors and areas of study that align with values
- ▶ Enhance interpersonal relationships
- ▶ Increase critical thinking skills
- ▶ Help students prioritize recreational activities
- ▶ Guides engagement with goal oriented activities

CHOICE POINT ACTIVITY FOR EMPOWERED DECISION-MAKING

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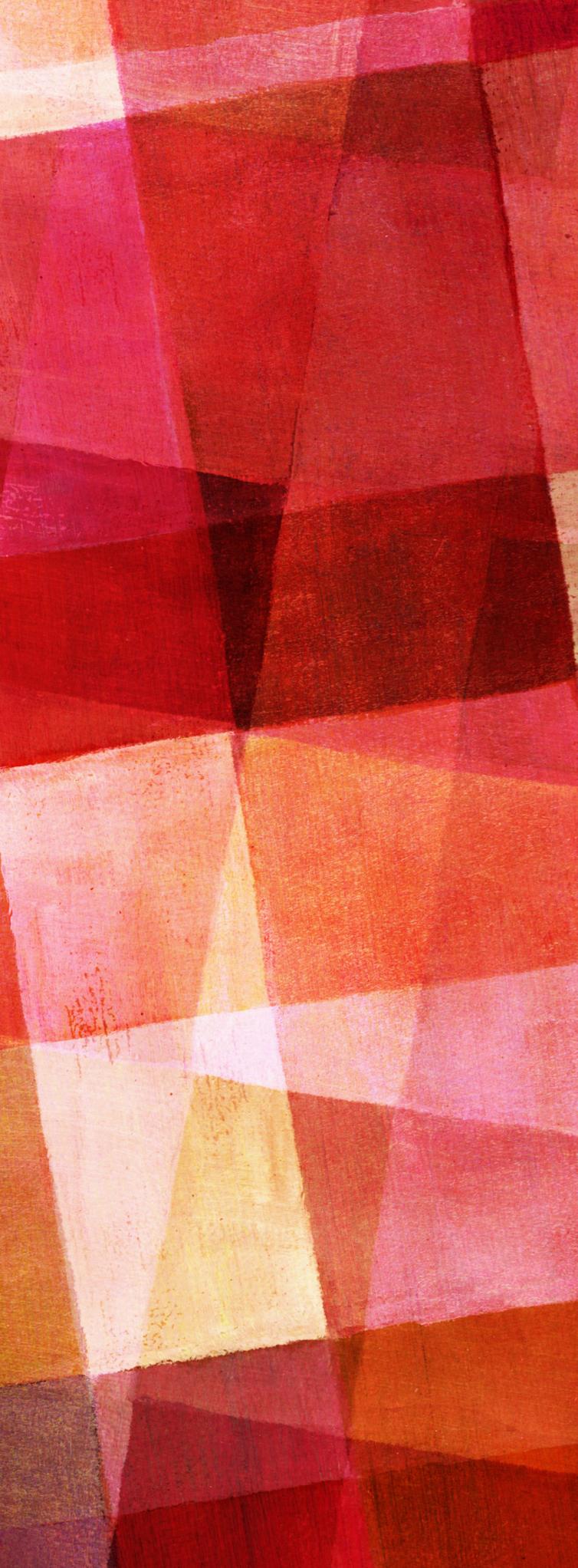
Adapted from ACT Made Simple by Russ Harris

MINDFULNESS

- ▶ Increases
 - awareness and self monitoring skills (tension and stress in the body and thought patterns)
 - acceptance of difficult experiences while not being invalidating or minimizing the impact
 - self compassion
 - engagement in the present moment when feeling overwhelmed by the past and future
 - ▶ Allows connection to anger/rage and pain without immediately attempting to eliminate them
 - ▶ Increases the awareness and connection to joy and pleasure while in the moment
 - ▶ Affirming community
 - ▶ Allows space to observe thoughts and feeling and reduces impulsive behavior to avoid them and helps makes choices that may be more in line with values
- acceptance, not approval, of the current state
 - access to coping strategies
 - focus on academic tasks

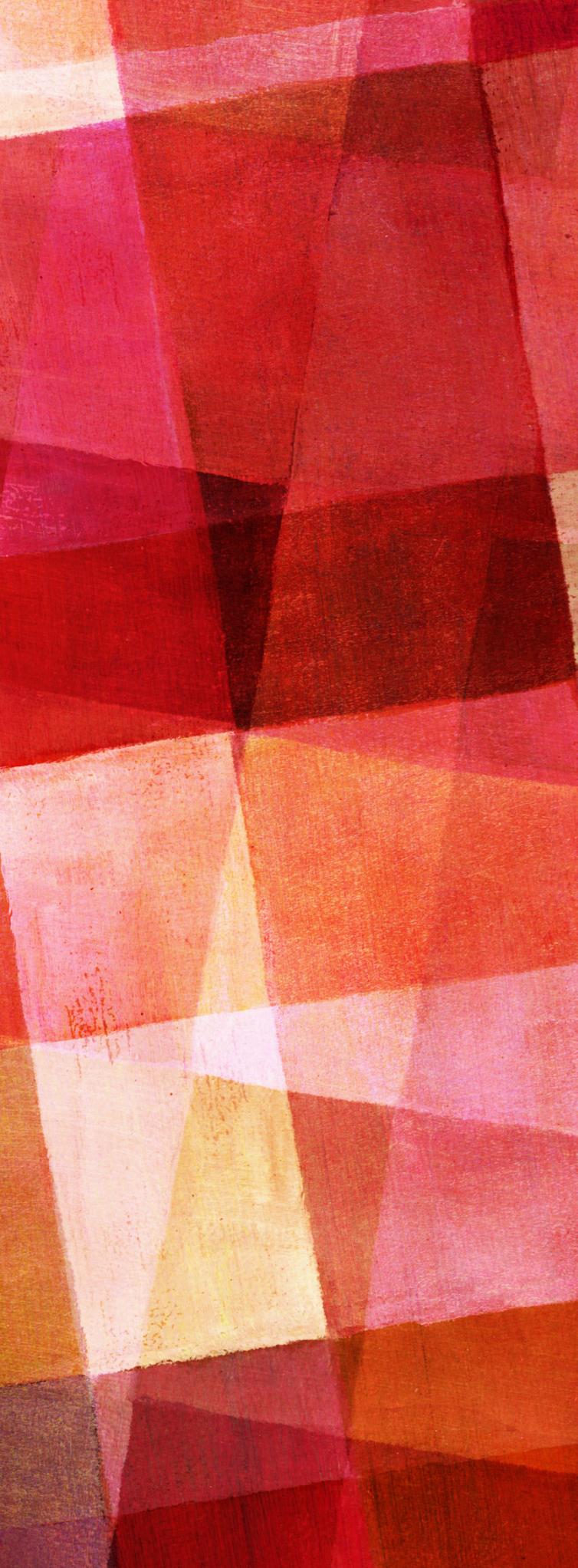
MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES

- Mindfulness of breath
- Black Lives Matter Meditation by Dr. Candice Nicole
- Self Compassion Break by Dr. Kristen Neff
- Mindful Body Scan
- Calm and Headspace and Liberate Apps



THE IMPORTANCE OF REST

- ▶ Rest allows us to connect to our humanity
- ▶ Rest allows us to integrate the information we receive and experiences we have had throughout the day
- ▶ Rest does not need to be earned
- ▶ Prioritizing rest may be difficult given that we are trained to equate productivity with worth



COMMITTED ACTION

- ▶ What are you willing and able to make in order to live your most meaningful life?
- ▶ How are you adapting to changes as they arise?
- ▶ What are some of the patterns of behavior/thinking that keep you stuck?
- ▶ Which therapeutic skills are you applying outside of session?
- ▶ What practical steps need to be taken to live more in line with values?

CASE STUDY

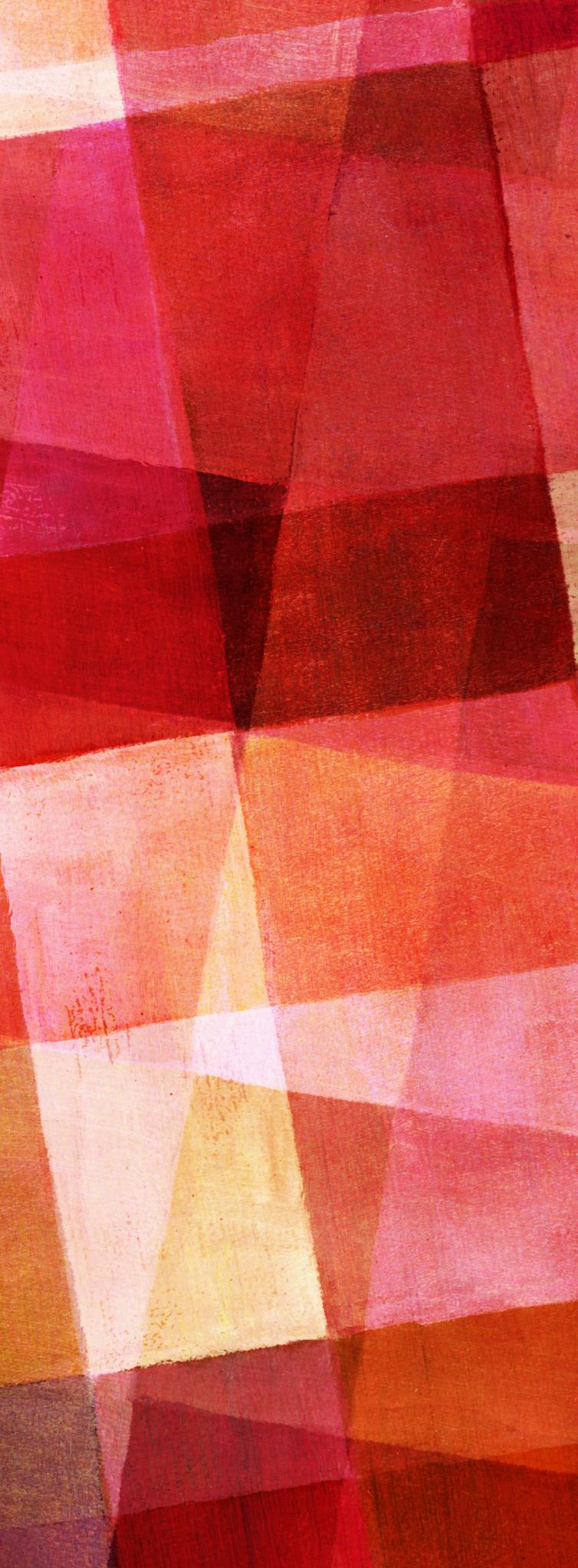
Alex is a 19 year old college student that recently began college in the Boston area, from another state. They have decided to attend therapy for the first time because of unexpected difficulties since starting college.

Alex noted that while they chose to attend this college after visiting twice, they have been struggling with feeling connect to peers. They have been learning more about racial justice issues in one of their classes and find it to be draining to attend each week and discuss the reading. Alex feels there is an unspoken expectation that they represent to experiences of people of color each time the class discusses racial equities. Alex has found it difficult to focus and assignments have been taking twice as long as they expected.

Alex is finding it difficult get out of bed for their morning classes and they feel tired most of the time. When Alex calls home to speak with their parents, they report to their parents that everything is “fine” because they feel like they should be grateful the opportunity to attend college. Alex knows their immigrant parents work hard to be able to pay for their education and does not want to worry them. They decide to study chemistry but due to difficulty focusing, they wonder if they made the right choice. Alex attends class but finds it difficult to

connect with the content because they find themself comparing their experience in high school classes with their experience in college. They keep telling themselves that they just need to work harder.

Alex has been spending a lot of time, outside of class, talking with friends from their hometown dance crew. Alex misses friends they knew for years who easily understand each other. Alex has two roommates in their triple dorm room. Alex’s roommates seem to be getting along with each other well, but they are finding it difficult to connect with them for multiple reasons.



HELPFUL RESOURCES

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Black Lives Matter Meditation By Dr. Candice Nicole on Sound Cloud
Liberate - A Meditation App for the Black and African Diaspora

Podcasts:

Therapy for Black Girl

Code Switch

The Dating Culture

Speaking of Racism

The Melanated Social Work Podcast

MigrAsians

Social Media/Instagram:

Inclusive Therapist

Decolonizing Mental Health

Therapy for Latinx

Black and Embodied

The Fat Sex Therapist

The_Queer_Counselor

Books:

ACT Made Simple by Russ Harris

The Self Compassion Workbook by Kristen Neff

White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo

Eloquent Rage by Brittney Cooper

Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle by Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski

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