Cultural Considerations in Interviews With Children

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The Other Side of the Tracks
- Archibald S. Holbrook
- The kids from the other side of the tracks
- The case of Benito Martinez family
- The Japanese teen
- Somali female
- The Mexican 15 yr old
- Vietnamese boy (Coining)

Outcomes
Participants will:
- Understand how culture affects communication
- Accept responsibility to understand culture as it relates to child victims and their families
- Increase awareness about their own culture and appreciate how their values, assumptions and beliefs influence the ability to communicate across cultures
- Understand key considerations in the use of language interpreters during an interview

Overview
- Demographics
- HC and LC Cultures
- HC and LC Communication
- Contrasts and Comparisons
- Cultural Considerations and the C.I.G.
- Video Clips
- Interpreters

Population Projections: 2050
- White: 52.8% (69.1% now)
- Black/African/American: 13.6% (12.1% now)
- Hispanic/Latino: 24.5% (12.5% now)
- Asian: 8.2% (3.6% now)
- American Indian: 0.9% (0.7% now)
ICEBERG EXERCISE

List all the ways children are different –

**Obvious differences:** above the water line

**Differences not apparent at first sight:** below the water line

Getting at What’s Under the Surface

_ask Questions_

- In what community does child live?
- Is the child an immigrant or first (or later) generation US-born?
- What were circumstances of immigration (political asylum, los desaparecidos)?
- Child’s level of acculturation?
- Child’s level of biculturalism?
- How are the children raised (values, beliefs)?

Edward T. Hall Research

- High context cultures
  - Asia, Africa, Middle East, & Latin America
- Low context cultures
  - Western and Northern Europe and U.S.A.
- High context communication
- Low context communication

Contrasting Beliefs, Values and Practices

Anglo-European
- _Low Context_
- Environmental control
- Change
- Time dominates
- Human equality
- Self-help
- Competition
- Informality

Other Cultures
- _High Context_
- Fate
- Tradition
- Human interactions
- Hierarchy/rank/status
- Birthright inheritance
- Cooperation
- Formality

Summary:

- Cultures, and people, tend toward one end or the other of these continua
- In general, mainstream American culture tends toward the “low-context” right side of each continuum
- In general, many diverse cultures tend toward the “high-context” left side of each continuum
- Often people incorrectly assume others are at the same place they are
Group v. the Individual

“Always remember that individuals differ. While learning about a specific culture can help us design interventions, we should never use the information as stereotypes or exact recipes for how to [conduct interviews and interact with people from different cultures.] Rather, information about specific cultures alerts us to some of the unique issues that may be important for people from that group.”

Lisa Fontes, 2000

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Cultural Value Set

**Communication**

High context → Low context

*Context of words more important* → *Words most context important*
*Indirect* → *Direct*
*Relies more on non-verbal messages* → *Precise*
*Formal* → *More informal*

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**High Context Communicators**

- Less emphasis on literal meaning of words spoken
- Less emphasis on verbal interaction
- Non-verbal cues are important
- Understanding through shared experiences, history, and implicit messages
- More formal, rely more on hierarchies, more deeply rooted in the past

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**Low Context Communicators**

- More informal
- More comfortable with change
- Focus on precise, direct, logical, verbal communication
- Impatient when others don’t get to the point quickly
- Gestures likely to be missed or misunderstood

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**Specific Interview Concerns: Pacing**

- **Pauses:** Silence an integral part of communication for Native Americans and others
- **IMPLICATION:** Be careful about interpreting pauses between phrases, sentences and questions negatively; may lose information if new question comes too soon

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**Specific Interview Concerns: Your Interpretations?**

- Child lowers head & doesn’t look you in eyes
  - Sign of lying?
  - May be sign of respect
- Child can’t get to point in narrative
  - Can’t follow directions?
  - Not too bright?
  - Evasive?
  - Loosely linked series of topics in no particular order may be acceptable form of story-telling about events
### Cultural Considerations

#### Before the forensic interview
- Identify cultures in the community you work
- Build links to the community
- Develop diverse staff
- Forms and paperwork in other languages
- Be firmly grounded in dynamics of abuse (e.g., CSAAS)
- Abuse and bigotry
- Educate yourself
- Build rapport with family

#### During the forensic interview
- Before the interview
  - Identify cultures in the community you work
  - Build links to the community
  - Develop diverse staff
  - Forms and paperwork in other languages
  - Be firmly grounded in dynamics of abuse (e.g., CSAAS)
  - Abuse and bigotry
  - Educate yourself
  - Build rapport with family

### Barriers to Rapport Building

#### Mideastern Cultures
- Wear shoes when family is not
- Sit w/back to an elder who is present
- Cross legs or feet
- Refuse food or drink
- Interview females if you are a male

#### African-Americans
- Address adults by their first name
- Say you’re too touchy about race
- Make demographic stereotypes
- Tell ethnic jokes about any group
- Engage in exclusionary conversation

#### Latinos/Hispanics
- Speak to wife
- Decline food or beverage
- Get right down to business
- Be impatient
- Use a harsh or authoritarian tone
- Relax or slouch when sitting
- Tease or make jokes
- Laugh at cultural artifacts

#### Asians
- Engage in sustained eye contact
- Touch heads of children
- Point w/your finger
- Winking
- Show bottoms of your feet
- Engage in demonstrative behavior
- Make compliments about objects
- Refuse food and drink
When Culture Is Claimed as a Defense

1. Is it a bona fide, legitimate cultural or religious practice?
2. Is it harmful to the child?
3. Is it clearly prohibited by law?

Traditional Healing Practices

Cupping

Cultural Sensitivity During the Interview

1. Permission to correct
2. Rapport building
3. Narrative Practice/Episodic memory
Child Interview Guide

2. Rapport Building
   - Continue to build rapport as you ask the child to recall a culturally relevant event (elicit episodic memory)

Rapport Building Continued:
- Introductions (Multilingual)
  - Greetings, thank you, goodbye
  - “Hola”, “Gracias,” “Adios”
- Cultural Specific Knowledge Under the Iceberg.
  - Culture, history, family roles, traditions

Cultural Continua

Family Constellation

Extended family → Small unit families & kinship networks w/little reliance on extended family

**Specific Interview Concerns: Kinship Terms**
- Child may call family friend “aunt,” “uncle,” “cousin,” etc.
- Examples - Use of “Uncle”
  - Laotian – friendly older male; Japanese – older man; many Indian tribes – friendly younger male
  - “Grandfather/Grandmother” can be Japanese terms of respect for much older people
  - “Grandfather” can be a friendly older male for Laotians & Native Americans

**Specific Interview Concerns: Respect for Elders**
- Unquestioning loyalty to & respect for elders valued highly in many cultures, including Hispanic, African-American, Asian, and Native American
- **Implication:** Revealing sensitive, family-related information to a stranger can be even harder for a child from another culture; consider getting a respected elder to give the child permission to tell the truth, to answer questions (L.Fontes).
ESL Speakers
- Use an interpreter when you can
- It takes longer, make time.
- One communicates best in their first language
- Tips for communicating w/ESL families and children

Working with Interpreters
- Stay positive
- Be patient
- Remember it’s hard work!
- It takes more time

Keep in Mind
- A heart without words is better than words without a heart
- People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care