

**CHAPTER 3**  
**RESOURCE MATERIALS**



# Developing Cultural Competence

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# Cultural Competence Continuum

This continuum can help you pinpoint where you are (or your agency is) in the development process of cross-cultural work. The levels of cultural competency are destructiveness, incapacity, blindness, pre-competency, basic competency, and advanced competency.

Below is a description of some of the characteristics of the cultural competence continuum.

## 1. Destructiveness

- Blatant Racism
- Genocide
- Agency does not hire ethnic minorities

## 2. Incapacity

- Agency is inaccessible to people of color
- Agency avoids working with ethnic minorities

## 3. Blindness

- Agency is blind to differences
- Agency believes everyone is really the same

## 4. Pre-Competency

- Agency tries to help educate employees, but has no real knowledge
- Agency often ends up with conflicts with no understanding of what occurred

## 5. Basic Competency

- Agency is aware of and accepts differences
- Employees are aware of their own cultural values
- Agency understands the dynamics of difference
- Agency promotes cultural knowledge
- Agency has the ability to adapt practice skills to fit cultural context

## 6. Advanced Competency

- Agency values and promotes differences
- Employees value their own cultural values
- Agency values the dynamics of difference
- Agency values and promotes cultural knowledge
- Agency has strong practice skills in fitting the cultural context

Cultural Competence Continuum developed by Terry Cross, executive director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association.



# Aspects of Cultural Competence

## PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

1. Personal qualities that reflect genuine empathy, warmth, and flexibility.
2. An acceptance of differences between people.
3. A willingness to work with people from different groups.
4. Recognition and articulation of one's personal values, stereotypes, and biases.
5. Personal commitment to end racism.
8. Recognition of power relationships within the community, agency, or institution, and how these relationships impact clients.

Adapted from the National CASA Leadership Institute Handbook, 2003.

## KNOWLEDGE

1. Knowledge of the culture (history, traditions, values, family systems, artistic expressions) of people different from oneself.
2. Knowledge of the impact of class and ethnicity on behavior, attitudes, and values.
3. Knowledge of the role of language, speech patterns, and communication styles in distinct communities.
4. Knowledge of the impact many social service agencies have on people of color.
5. Knowledge of the impact the court system has on communities of color and/or the perception of the court system by communities of color.
6. Knowledge of the resources (agencies, persons, informal helping networks, research) that can be utilized on behalf of clients and communities different from one's own.
7. Recognition of the ways that professional values may conflict with or accommodate the needs of clients.



# Understanding Asian Family Values & How to Incorporate Them into Culturally Competent Practice

By *Walter Philips*

Cultural awareness is the ability to provide services effectively to people of all cultures, races, ethnic backgrounds, and religions in a way that recognizes, values, affirms, and respects the worth of individuals and protects and preserves their dignity. But to respond respectfully and effectively to people of different cultural backgrounds, service providers must first understand the widely differing cultures of the people they serve.

Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing cultural groups in the United States. The Asian population is diverse, covering a range of ethnicities, cultures, and languages. Asian Americans vary in terms of immigration and refugee experiences, acculturation levels, and socioeconomic levels.

Despite this great diversity, practitioners working with children and families should be aware of some of the common values among Asian Americans and take them into consideration when working with Asian families. These values stem from principles in three main Eastern philosophies: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.

## BUDDHISM

Buddhism provides a spiritual structure for many Asians. Buddhists view time as circular rather than linear. Many Asians believe in the concepts of reincarnation and karma. Simply stated, karma refers to the notion that what happens to you in this life is due to your behaviors and actions in your past life, and your behaviors and actions in this life will dictate what will happen to you in the next.

Because of this belief, many Asians will endure their pain and suffering in this life in acceptance of their fate. Often, this may leave a person little motivation to change. Successfully using the concept that one's actions impact one's next life may help practitioners to create motivation for change in someone who previously had none.

## CONFUCIANISM

A major principle of Confucianism is filial piety. This notion defines specific rules of conduct in social relationships and places great importance on the family. Several key concepts follow from the principle of filial piety:

- Family roles are highly structured, hierarchical, male-dominated, and paternally oriented.
- The welfare and integrity of the family are of great importance. The individual is expected to submerge or repress emotions, desires, behaviors, and individual goals to further the family welfare and to maintain its reputation. The individual is obligated to save face so as to not bring shame onto the family. The incentive, therefore, is to keep problems within the family.
- Interdependency is valued and stems from the strong sense of obligation to the family. This concept influences relationships among family members. The family provides support and assistance for each individual member; in turn, individual members provide support and assistance for the entire family. These relationships, interactions, and obligations are lifelong and the goal of individual members is not necessarily autonomy and independence. This concept is critical to understanding Asian families, and service providers should avoid applying Western labels such as “codependency” and “enmeshment” when observing normal family functioning dictated by cultural values and beliefs.

## TAOISM

Taoism defines one's relationship with nature. According to this philosophy, maintaining harmony and balance with nature is important to one's spiritual well-being. The goal of many of the traditional healing practices, such as herbal medicine, acupuncture, coining, and cupping, is to



restore this delicate balance. In Asian families, this concept extends to maintaining harmony in social relationships. Because of this, practitioners may observe that:

- Families and individual family members may seek to avoid conflict and confrontation with others.
- An individual may appear passive, indifferent, or indecisive. The person may fear that taking the initiative could lead to disagreement or conflict.
- The individual may be overtly compliant and agreeable when, in fact, he/she disagrees with the other person.

## RESPONDING WITH CULTURAL AWARENESS

These principles supply a framework for understanding many of the Asian families with whom child welfare practitioners may work. Remember that these are generalizations; not all Asian Americans hold these values, and most Asians do not consciously follow these principles. Rather, they have become ingrained in broader family values and practices that have formed over centuries.

Service providers should integrate these concepts into their work with Asian Americans. The following suggestions will help child welfare practitioners begin providing culturally competent services for Asian American families.

When assessing Asian American families, practitioners should gather information regarding specific families' ethnic backgrounds, languages, immigration and refugee experiences, acculturation levels, and community support systems.

- Develop trust by establishing and adhering to rules of social conduct and proper social interaction.
- Attempt to maintain and, if appropriate, reestablish traditional family structures according to cultural norms. Respect the family hierarchy.
- Use extended family members for support systems; lines between nuclear families and extended families are not as rigid in Asian families as they are in Western culture.
- Allow families and their individual members opportunities to save face whenever possible.
- Avoid creating situations that may lead to conflict and confrontation. Rather, use indirect methods

of communication, when appropriate, to make a point.

- Because Asians prefer to keep problems within the family, maintaining confidentiality is critical. Families must be assured that their problems will not become public knowledge.
- Service providers must be active and offer tangible interventions for Asian Americans. Passivity in the worker may be viewed as lack of expertise and authority. Many Asian American families are seeking concrete, tangible solutions to their problems and are uncomfortable with process- and insight-oriented strategies.

This article cannot provide all the knowledge and skills necessary to be culturally competent with Asian Americans. Hopefully, however, it will supply some beginning strategies in working with Asian American families and children. Remember that Asian Americans comprise a diverse group of people who should be assessed individually when developing appropriate intervention strategies. Cultural awareness starts with sensitivity and appreciation for diversity and integrates acquired knowledge of cultures with practice skills and techniques. Begin integrating some of these concepts regarding Asian values into your service delivery.

By Walter Philips, National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption, Spaulding for Children, Southfield, MI.  
From *Cultural Competence in Child Welfare, Curriculum Trainer's Guide* (pages 2-33 through 2-41), Karen Y. Noel and Linda Whitfield, Southfield, Michigan: Spaulding for Children, 1995.



# Beyond Culture: Communicating with Asian American Children & Families

By Gary Huang

In recent decades, migration waves have brought to the United States large numbers of Asians and Pacific Islanders (APIs). Well over two-fifths of all nonamnesty persons admitted in the U.S. in 1991 were API (Barkan, 1992). The trend of increasing API immigration is clear: the API portion in the U.S. total immigration steadily grew from 1972's 28.7 percent to 1985's 44.2 percent (Barkan, 1992). Consequently, API student enrollment has been increasing drastically. In 1979, 217,000 enrolled 8–15 year old APIs were identified as language minorities; by 1989, the number had reached 547,000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1992). With their drastically different cultural backgrounds, API children's schooling poses a challenge to educators and the society.

Cross-cultural communication is a fundamental issue in education for APIs, since they have distinct communication norms that are significantly different from those of native born Americans and other immigrants. Problems in communication between education professionals and APIs, if not thoughtfully dealt with, may evolve into conflicts between APIs and the education institution. Polarized school performance, psychosocial maladjustment, and gang activity among Asians are indications of such conflicts (Trueba, Cheng, & Ima, 1993).

To explore the complexities of communication with API children and their families, this digest describes the overt and covert dimensions of the various API cultures, and discusses APIs' socioeconomic background and life experiences that affect their communication behavior. The goal is to help practitioners improve communication with APIs and, thus, more effectively educate API children.

## THE API COMMUNITY

There are three general ethnicities within the API community: (1) Pacific Islanders, mostly Hawaiians, Samoans, and Guamanians; (2) Southeast Asians, largely comprised of Indochinese from Vietnam,

Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos, and Burmese and Filipinos; and (3) East Asians, including Chinese, Japanese, and Korean (Trueba, Cheng, & Ima, 1993). Not only do these three large groups differ in sociocultural traits, but subgroups within each group often differ as well (see, for example, Trueba et al., 1993; Cheng, 1989; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988).

It is important not to generalize an understanding of one group to another. For example, the Vietnamese and Hmong, though both Indochinese, differ in their basic cultural patterns. The Vietnamese, many with a Chinese ancestry, have a sophisticated literate culture and strong abilities to adapt to the market society; the Hmong have no written language, nor skills that are easily applicable to American labor needs. Educators must identify such differences to devise appropriate communication strategies for teaching and counseling APIs.

## API CULTURES & COMMUNICATION

Psychological anthropology differentiates culture into overt and covert dimensions (Hall, 1977); both are crucial in determining communication behavior. The overt or open culture refers to clearly identifiable cultural components such as religion, formal language, and values and norms explicated in philosophy or folklore. Covert or hidden culture, on the other hand, is defined by the unconscious behavioral and perceptual patterns resulting from daily social learning.

## OVERT CULTURE

Values and norms embedded in language, religion, philosophy, custom, and social organization forms, such as family, are important variables affecting APIs' behavior. Historically, under the influence of Chinese Confucianism, East Asians developed complex literate cultures and cohesive family organizations. The history of Southeast Asians reflects both the Chinese tradition



and Indian Buddhism. Of the Pacific Islander groups, each has a history of struggle for cultural preservation against colonial oppression, and holds a unique and rich tribal cultural heritage (Trueba et al., 1993).

### **Belief System**

Cultural contrasts are, of course, sharpest between APIs and American mainstream society. APIs think about social institutions such as school quite differently from American educators. APIs see teachers as professionals with authority over their children's schooling; they believe that parents are not supposed to interfere with school processes. Some APIs, therefore, regard teachers who seek parent involvement as incompetent (National School Public Relations Association, 1993). Educators then must explain, patiently, that parent involvement is a tradition in American education.

Sometimes, the contrast of belief systems is profound. Without knowledge about the culture of APIs, school personnel cannot resolve problems. A telling example is the school's response to the killing of five Cambodian children by a gunman in Stockton, California, in 1989 (for a detailed account, see Trueba et al., 1993). After the tragedy, the greatest fear of the Cambodian community was not of the recurrence of killing, as school personnel supposed and painstakingly tried to assuage, but the haunting spirits of the dead. In their native religion, people cannot resume normal routines until the spirits of the dead are comforted and settled down. Therefore, the Cambodians refused to send their children back to school until the school officials, as advised by a Cambodian consultant, performed a folk religious ritual to release the spiritual burden of the community.

Even the seeming compatibility in values and beliefs between some APIs and mainstream Americans can hide serious obstacles to effective schooling and emotional well-being for Asian children. Like middle-class Americans, East Asians, particularly Chinese, highly value formal education. They often consider their children's schooling directly related to the family's integrity: high achievement brings honor and prestige to the family, failure brings shame (Shen & Mo, 1990; Lee, 1989). The intense pressure upon children to succeed often generates intergenerational conflicts and psychological difficulties for children. Many API children suffer from test anxiety, social isolation, and impaired self-esteem because of their mediocre school performance

(Shen & Mo, 1990). Another source of family tension is the communication barrier between predominantly Asian language speaking parents and predominantly English speaking children (Power, 1990). Educators should, therefore, be sensitive to aspects of Asian cultures that provoke student stress and conflict and help students deal with their negative feelings.

Asians' entrenched belief that psychological distress is a manifestation of organic disorders (Kleinman & Good, 1985) significantly affects their children's psychosocial well-being. Parents have difficulty accepting concepts such as learning disabilities and depression. In their idioms, a person who, using the vocabulary of Western psychology, is "depressed" is either physically sick or simply lacking motivation. Psychological distress and psychiatric disorders are often seen as shameful to both the individual and the family (Kleinman & Good, 1985). To help parents understand their children's problems, therefore, educators have to be very thoughtful in their explanations of the reasons for their problems. They need to make it clear that psychosocial problems are not a source of shame, and, regardless of different cultural expressions of the problem, cooperation between the family and the professionals can solve them.

### **Language**

Language differences, with obvious implications for schooling, are striking between APIs and American mainstream society. In California, Southeast Asians have the highest rate of limited English proficiency students among all API groups; the rate is even higher than that of the Hispanic population (Ima & Rumbaut, 1989). This is probably the case nationwide. A unique barrier to schooling for some Southeast Asians (rural Laotians, Hmongs, and Montagnards from Vietnam) is their lack of exposure to any writing system prior to immigration (Trueba et al., 1993). The language barrier may be compounded by other psychological or physical problems such as learning disabilities and hearing impairment. It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish language differences (characteristics of learning English as influenced by the native language) from speech disorders (language difficulties resulting from mental or physical disorders). Particular attention is needed to identify hearing impairment—a disability that seems highly prevalent among Southeast Asian immigrants (Yoshinaga-Itano, 1990).



## HIDDEN CULTURE

Whereas overt culture consists of established behavioral patterns that can be explicitly identified and studied, and, hence, are relatively easy to understand, covert culture is much more subtle, but regulates one's daily life unconsciously. Learning how to talk and walk, how to move one's body and make facial expressions, and most of all, how to think and feel, is so deeply ingrained in humans that they are rarely aware of these processes. Certain long-established institutions (e.g., school) and daily behaviors are taken for granted, as if there are no alternative ways to live. In fact, however, all social institutions are artificial and many behaviors are learned. Every culture has its unique, deep-rooted dimensions that become entrenched in the human brain (Hall, 1977).

### *Time*

Unconscious culture also involves the conception of time. Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders have a polychronic time (P-time) framework, in contrast to Western monochronic time (Hall, 1977). P-time allows different social interactions to happen at the same time. M-time demands a linear scheduling of events. Teachers may be irritated when API parents come late for an appointment without an apology, or offended when APIs are inattentive to what they have to say. Because Asians perceive time as a simultaneous process, they are not aware of the linear scheduling of teachers' time. Similarly, some APIs, such as the Hmong, believe time per se can solve problems better than human intervention. They reason that one should not push hard in haste, but, rather, let events run their own course (Trueba et al., 1993). An understanding of such a different notion of time may help teachers facilitate interaction among parents and staff.

### *Communication*

Another covert cultural dimension is described as high-context versus low-context communication (Hall, 1977). High-context communication does not require clear, explicit verbal articulation. It relies on presumptions shared by people, nonverbal signals (e.g., body movement), and the very situation in which the interaction occurs. Low-context communication, on the other hand, involves intensively elaborate expressions that do not need much situational interpretation. While it is doubtful that the communication norms of any society, or even individual, are totally high- or low-context,

API cultures are more high-contextual, and Anglo American society is more low-contextual.

Like other low-context cultures (Hall, 1977), APIs, particularly East Asian Americans, are typically polite and even submissive in social encounters, but when a dispute persists, they may suddenly become very hostile without providing warning signals. This happens because of the unconscious cultural conflict between low-context and high-context cultures. APIs, used to their high-context communication and, thus, constantly "tuned" to the moods of the other conversants during interaction, expect the others to be similarly sensitive. Westerners, who only pay attention to what is explicitly said, however, often ignore nonverbal cues. In an attempt to reach closure, and hearing no verbal disagreement and not noticing the nonverbal Asians' hesitancy, American professionals may move quickly toward resolution of the matter at hand. Then, when the Asian Americans finally explode in anger because they can no longer tolerate the conflict and are upset that their nonverbal messages were not received, the Westerners are surprised.

In conversations, Asians unconsciously favor verbal hesitancy and ambiguity to avoid giving offense (Kim, 1985), and they refrain from making spontaneous or critical remarks. Their body language is characterized by repeated head-nodding and lack of eye contact (Matsuda, 1989). The Japanese are notoriously unwilling to use the word "no" even when they actually disagree with others (Wierzbicka, 1991). This is also generally the case for other Asian groups, such as the Vietnamese (Coker, 1988). When Asians try to translate their norm of sending indirect messages during a discussion into English, a language they have difficulty mastering, their efforts are often misunderstood or ignored.

Misinterpretation of APIs' verbal and nonverbal expressions occurs because neither APIs nor teachers are aware of the mismatched hidden dimension in communication. Too often, a discussion proceeds as if everyone is in accord until finally the API is asked—and refuses—to demonstrate approval by signing an agreement (Matsuda, 1989). APIs expect teachers to understand their concerns, confusion, and hesitance, whereas teachers take APIs' head-nodding, smiles, and verbal assent as clear indication of consent. Particularly enigmatic to teachers is some APIs' smiles (Coker, 1988), which express confusion and embarrassment far more often than pleasure. When dealing with API children in particular, it is important to observe them patiently and carefully, and to



take into account the specific situation in which the interaction takes place, in order to understand the meaning of their smiles (Coker, 1988).

## **API BACKGROUND & LIFE EXPERIENCE**

Socioeconomic status and immigration history, often related to cultural differences, jointly affect APIs' communication and schooling. Moreover, APIs' socioeconomic background is as complex as their cultural background. Immigrants from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are more likely to have a middle-class background. Southeast Asian refugees, on the other hand, were mostly rural villagers or the urban poor before they migrated, although APIs from the same region may differ in socioeconomic background. A middle-class family background often fosters intellectual flexibility and self-direction. APIs with such a background have less difficulty interacting with teachers. In contrast, fatalist beliefs and rigidity in thinking are more common among poor APIs and those with rural origins. These APIs face tough problems in communicating with school personnel. The joint effect of cultural differences and social background may polarize APIs' school performance, with some excelling, others failing (Trueba et al., 1993).

In addition, Asian Americans born in the U.S. differ from Asian immigrants in their communication with mainstream educators (National School Public Relations Association, 1993), with the latter having more problems. Among immigrants, those who had traumatic experiences in war or refugee camps have more difficulties in communication (Ima & Rumbaut, 1989). Such life experiences can profoundly influence children's reaction to the new environment.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS**

### ***Personal Reflection***

To understand other cultures, it is necessary to "transcend the limits of individual cultures" (Hall, 1977, p. 2). To communicate effectively with API children, educators have to analyze their own cultural unconscious to bring out the unseen differences; they should critically examine their own values, beliefs, learning styles, and communication behavior (Cheng, 1989). By examining the peculiarities of their own behavior, educators can better appreciate that any foreign or "exotic" communication patterns, just like their own, are learned, reasonable ways of interacting.

### ***Partnerships with Community Organizations in the U.S.***

Grassroots organizations of APIs provide strong support to families and children. For instance, in Southern California, Asian Americans have extensive networks through churches and ethnic organizations (Trueba et al., 1993). School personnel should take advantage of these community organizations to access and help facilitate communication with families and parents.

### ***General Communication***

Care is the key to understanding. Immigrants who utter flat imperatives often are seen as rude or dumb by native English speakers; in fact, APIs simply do not command the elaborate indirectness of English (Wierzbicka, 1991). Only through careful interaction with children and their families, and close collaboration among teachers, special educators, and health professionals, will it be possible to accurately identify problems and work together to solve them.

The following suggestions for education professionals, drawn from a set of guidelines for speech pathologists (Matsuda, 1989), may help avoid a communication breakdown with APIs:

- Establish the professional's role and assume authority.
- Reach consensus by compromising.
- Address immediate needs and give concrete advice.
- Respect API cultural beliefs and incorporate them into teaching.
- Be patient, and consider periods of silence opportunities for reflection on what has been said.
- Provide clear and full information, such as what will be provided by, and is expected from, each participant in the discussion.
- Be attentive to nonverbal cues.

### ***Information Gathering***

Comprehensive information about students' background is indispensable, including native language, cultural environment, educational history, school experience, health conditions, and family and other social support systems (Cheng, 1989). Because of many APIs' experience with authoritarian systems and a tendency to avoid self-disclosure, they are wary of officials and may withhold information from school



personnel. Care and patience are, again, necessary for obtaining information.

Tips for communicating with APIs include individual rather than group meetings, oral communication rather than written memos, and “phone trees” among parents themselves (National School Public Relations Association, 1993).

### **Parent Involvement**

For many API groups the family has a dual function: social support and social control (Trueba et al., 1993). Among immigrant families, however, these functions sometimes conflict and create tensions. Tradition demands that the young obey the elderly, but in daily life, English-literate teenaged APIs often serve crucial roles such as the English interpreters and participants in family decision-making. Both children and parents have to struggle with this role conflict. Thus, parent involvement in children’s schooling should be cultivated in a way that not only enhances schooling, but also reduces tension in the family. One way to bring parents into the school, to help them understand how teaching and learning take place in the U.S., and to bridge the generation gaps within families, is to offer a family literacy project that helps parents and children alike become proficient in the English language. An increasing number of federal and state programs are funding family literacy projects, and the California Department of Education is hosting a conference where project coordinators can share information in early 1994 (“Family Literacy,” 1993).

### **Overcoming Stereotypes of APIs**

Most API students are not academically gifted. The “whiz kids” stereotype, often applied to East Asian children, may put unnecessary pressure on students, resulting in emotional distress and school failure (Shen & Mo, 1990). The stereotype of docile API children may also hurt them. Some teachers do feel uncomfortable when they meet assertive Asian students, because their “out of character” manner contradicts the stereotype. Teachers should work to transcend such stereotypes and treat each student on an individual basis.

### **Accurate Evaluation of Children**

As discussed earlier, API children may be misdiagnosed as having behavioral or physical disorders because of their communication difficulties. Conversely, precisely because of communication difficulties, APIs’ behavioral and health problems

may be concealed from teachers. Here, language differences, cultural knowledge, learning or behavioral disorders, and physical health problems may be related to one another. To disentangle the individual problems that often have underlying connections, educators need in-depth cultural understanding, meticulous information gathering, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

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# Examples of Folk Medicine in Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos)

By Thu-Van Nguyen

KNOWN AS	TREATMENT FOR	MATERIALS	HOW TREATMENT IS DONE
<b>Practice: "Scratching the wind," "rubbing out the wind," "coining," or "expelling the wind"</b>			
<i>Cao gio</i> (V) <i>Khoot Lom</i> (L) <i>Kosh Kchoi</i> (C)	Headache, colds, pain, muscle ache, nausea and vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A coin or boat spoon</li> <li>Menthol balm</li> <li>Wintergreen or other oils</li> </ul>	The back, stomach, or inner arms are rubbed vigorously with the edge of a coin in a downward stroke.
<b>Practice: "Fingering" or "pinching"</b>			
<i>Giut, Bat gio</i> (V) <i>Chap kchoi</i> (C)	Expel the "bad wind," headache, pain, dizziness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Index finger</li> <li>Tiger balm</li> </ul>	The skin on the forehead, neck, or arms is pinched between the thumb and index finger to the point of producing an abrasion.
<b>Practice: Cutting</b>			
<i>Cat le</i> (V) Not popular in Laos and Cambodia	Pain, muscle ache	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pins, needles, or pieces of broken crystal</li> <li>Cotton ball</li> <li>90% alcohol solution or Vietnamese folk liquor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The skin of the sore spots or focal points that are related to the illness is pierced with the sterilized needles.</li> <li>The bad blood is squeezed to relieve the malady.</li> <li>This is usually done by a skilled practitioner.</li> </ul>
<b>Practice: Burning</b>			
<i>Ouch</i> (C)	Abdominal pain	Incense	The abdominal area is quickly touched with incense.
<b>Practice: "Cupping," vacuum sucking cup</b>			
<i>Giac hoi</i> (V) <i>Keo dood loom</i> (L) <i>Boun Kchoi</i> (C)	Muscle pain of the chest and back; general discomfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vacuum cups/ "venthouses" (inherited from the French)</li> <li>90% alcohol solution and cotton ball</li> <li>Forceps and matches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Soak the cotton ball wrapped around the tip of the forceps in alcohol and light the cotton ball with match.</li> <li>Run the burning cotton ball all over the inside of the cup quickly and press the cup firmly upon the afflicted areas creating a vacuum or suction. The cup will stick to the skin for a few seconds until the exhausted air pressure is restored. The cup will leave a red-purple circle burn and bruised mark when removed.</li> <li>The severity of the illness can be determined by the severity of the mark left on the skin.</li> </ul>
<b>Practice: Medicated tape or adhesive plaster</b>			
<i>Thuoc dan salonpas</i> (V)	Headache and muscle pain	Ready-made tape	Apply to the forehead or neck.
<b>Practice: Stimulating and vigorous massage</b>			
<i>Dam bop</i> (V) <i>Kourk</i> (C)	Body ache and stiffness	Fist	Use fist and strength to pound on the aching areas.

Vietnam (V), Cambodia (C), Laos (L)

Courtesy of the Cross Cultural Health Care Program, Seattle, Washington.



# The Arab World & Arab Americans

## A CULTURE OF MANY LANDS

### Where Do Arabs Come From?

*“Deep is your longing for the land of your memories and the dwelling place of your greater desires.”  
— Gibran Khalil*

The Arab World is comprised of 21 Arab countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Qatar, The United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

## PEOPLE, CULTURE, RELIGION

### Who Are Arabs?

*“We are the seeds of the tenacious plant, and it is in our ripeness and our fullness of heart that we are given to the wind and are scattered.”— Gibran Khalil*

The name “Arabs” originally referred to the people residing in the Arabian Peninsula, but today “Arabs” refers to all populations who speak Arabic as their native tongue, share the Arab culture, and believe in Arab unity and nationalism.

Arabs may have dark skin, dark hair, and brown or black eyes. They may have fair skin with blond hair and blue or green eyes.

Arabs invented algebra, demonstrated the circulation of the blood, developed the astrolabe, and were the first to use a magnetic compass for navigation. They gave the world breakthroughs in medicine, economy, mathematics, and mechanics.

Arabs surpassed in architecture. Their most original architectural innovation was the “hypostyle mosque”: a building in which the roof is held up by rows of columns.

Arabs gave the world “arabesque,” the highly stylized image, and fine textiles such as “damask” from “Damascus” in Syria, and “muslin” from “Mosul” in Iraq.

### What Do Arabs Believe In?

*“Who can separate his faith from his actions, or his belief from his occupation?” — Gibran Khalil*

Arabs belong to different religions: Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and others. More than 85% of all Arabs in the world are Sunni Muslims, 10% are Shi’ite Muslims (mostly in Yemen, Iraq, and Bahrain), while 5% are Christians (located in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt).

### What Language Do Arabs Speak?

*“When you meet your friend on the roadside or in the market place let the spirit in you move your lips and direct your tongue.” — Gibran Khalil*

The Arabic language is at the heart of the Arab identity. It is one of the great unifying and unique characteristics of the Arabs. It is the language of Islam and has a long literary tradition, one that dates back before the days of the prophet Mohammed in the seventh century. It is a language of thought and intellect.

Arabic is the first language of over 195 million people, and at least another 35 million speak it as a second language. *Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)* is the official language throughout the Arab world, and in its written form it is relatively consistent across national boundaries. In addition, Arabic has many dialects. Arabs from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Jordan speak the *Levantine dialect*. Arabs from Egypt and North Africa speak the *Egyptian* and *North African dialect*, and Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula speak the *Khaliji dialect*.

The Arabic language has 28 characters. Arabic letters are connected like script and are written from right to left.

European languages such as Italian, Spanish and English contain many words of Arabic origin. For example, in English, the words *admiral, algebra, alcohol, alcove, almanac, coffee, cotton, magazine, mosque, sultan, syrup, and tariff* all come from Arabic.



## **What Are Arab Traditions, Culture, and Values?**

*“It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.”  
— Gibran Khalil*

Not all Arabs are alike, but there are some general values many of them share. Honor, reputation, respect, hospitality, generosity, courage, loyalty, solidarity, knowledge, conformity, benevolence, faith . . . these are some of the traits which are highly valued by Arabs. The Arab culture emphasizes the family, and the elderly have a high status. There is a strong sense of “paternalism.” Women are revered and often protected, not because they are weak or inferior, but because the unity of the family is dependent on their happiness.

The Arab culture is “collectivistic,” emphasizing goals, needs, and views of the group over those of the individual. In the Arab culture, the “We” identity has precedence over the “I” identity. Individuals are expected to fit into the group, but at the same time are expected to try to stand out in the group.

Arabs love music, art, literature, and poetry. In fact, literature and poetry are crucial to understanding the Arab persona.

Arabs love good food. In particular, the Lebanese culinary influence is seen, both in modern Middle Eastern cuisine and throughout the world. Lebanese cooking provides the basis for the exotic cuisine known internationally today as Arabic.

Hospitality in the Arab world is one of a kind and is openly expressed in the tradition of serving freshly brewed coffee or mint tea to every guest.

The Arab culture is a culture of “the human feeling,” greatly associated with the conscience and the human soul. It promotes love and devotion, and supports equality among people. Traditions are noticeable in the Arab’s daily life and practices, originating in a culture deeply rooted in its history. It is a culture open to other cultures of the East and the West, yet one that carefully maintains its origins.

## **IMMIGRATION HISTORY**

### **Who Are Arab Americans?**

Arab Americans are U.S. citizens and permanent residents who emigrated from the Arab world. There were three great waves of Arab immigration, stemming from different forces.

The First Wave (1878–1924) was driven by economic factors. Arabs came to the U.S. seeking opportunities and pursuing the “American Dream.” Most of the earliest immigrants were Christians from Lebanon and Syria. Political economist Charles Issawi sees Arab immigration to the New World as being inspired by “tensions accompanying economic and social transformation; the imposition of conscription; the spread of foreign education; the improvement of transportation; and the massacres of 1860” (Issawi, *The Economic History*, p. 269). After the end of WWI, there was little for these immigrants to go back to. If they emigrated first in a spirit of adventure, they remained because they could not go back. Reluctantly, they made The New World their home.

The Second Wave of Arab immigration (1948–1966) was prompted by the tragedy of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the demise of Palestine. Most of the immigrants during this wave were Palestinians. On May 15, 1948, Palestinians became refugees in their own land. In November 1947, the UN General Assembly voted for a partitioned state in Palestine: one part Jewish, one part Arab. Many Arabs were exiles who had lost their land, a land that was not to be regained and would forever be changed. Many arrived in the United States to stay on. Perhaps one of the strangest ironies in immigration history is the fact that these refugees immigrated to the country that most supported the forces that evicted them. Unlike the first wave who were 90% Christians, the second wave Arab immigrants were 60% Muslim.

The Third Wave (1967–1985) was three times larger than the Second. Arabs were fleeing not only intensified Israeli aggression but also intra-Arab conflicts, leaving societies overwhelmed with violence. The Lebanese comprised the second-largest group of Arab immigrants, with the tragedy of the civil war and the violent Israeli invasion of 1982 bringing 43,141 new Lebanese immigrants to America. Iraqis, Syrians, Yemenis, and Egyptian Copts also joined the Third Wave.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, today, there are 3 million Americans of Arab origin and their numbers are growing. 66 percent of Arab Americans live in 10 states (California, Michigan, New York, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia). 33 percent live in California, Michigan, and New York. The cities with the largest Arab American populations are: Los Angeles, Detroit, New York, Chicago, and Washington, DC.



Arab Americans are an important part of the rich American multicultural essence. Like other Americans, they are involved in all types of work and activities. Famous Arab Americans include former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, Ralph Nader, Senator George Mitchell, former Governor John Sununu, heart surgeon Michael DeBakey, and in the arts and entertainment field, Danny and Marlo Thomas, Casey Kasem, and Salma Hayek.

**Religion**

The majority of Arab Americans are Christian with Christians constituting 63 percent of persons of Arab descent in the U.S. Muslims are the next largest majority, with Judaism, Druze, and other religions existing amongst Arab Americans. Many Arab Americans define themselves by their country of origin and their religion—for example: Lebanese Catholic or Palestinian Muslim—since there are differences between the religions that contribute in defining a person’s experiences and culture.

The earlier Arab Christian immigrants had an easier time assimilating in the Christian dominated society of the U.S. However, since the 1950s, Arab Muslims have constituted the fastest growing sector of Arab Americans. They are often more visible than Christian Arab Americans due to religious practices that direct personal behavior, such as women wearing head coverings, beards for men, praying five times a day, and fasting during the month of Ramadan.

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# Islam & Muslim Americans

## ISLAM: A RELIGION OF UNITY & DIVERSITY

Islam has existed for over 1,400 years, and is one of the world's largest religions, with worshippers numbering nearly 1.6 billion, or 24.5 percent of the human population. Its realm expanded from the heart of desert Arabia southwest to North Africa, northeast to Turkey and China, east to South Asia and South East Asia, and north to Spain and Eastern Europe.

The word "Islam" is derived from the Arabic root *silm*, meaning peace, purity, submission or obedience. Islam means submission to the will of God as well as obedience and commitment to His law; a Muslim, therefore, is an individual who commits himself/herself to live in precisely this manner.

The practice of Islam is comprised of the six articles of faith, the five pillars incumbent upon every Muslim, and complete devotion to Allah in thoughts and deeds.

### Basic Terms in Islam

- **Islam** is an Arabic word for peace and submission to God and the religion practiced by approximately 1.6 billion Muslims around the world.
- **Muslim** is a follower of Islam, who completely accepts and submits to the will and guidance of God and teachings of Prophet Muhammad.
- **PBUH** stands for "peace be upon him" and is an expression that is said when the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.
- **Allah** is the Arabic word for God. It is not a word specific to Islam; Arab Christians as well as Arab Jews also use the word "Allah" when referring to God. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are three monotheistic religions that believe in one God.
- The **Qur'an** or **Koran** is the Islamic holy scripture believed to be God's words as revealed to Muhammad (*pbuh*) through the angel Gabriel. The Qur'an is the basis for Muslim beliefs regarding God, worship, morality, knowledge,

wisdom, the human relationship to God, and relationships among human beings. Muslims do not believe that any human or other creation is the manifestation of God.

- **Muhammad** (*pbuh*) is the messenger of God who received and passed His revelation. He is not the founder of Islam and is in no way divine, but a human being and the "servant of God." Muhammad (*pbuh*) is regarded as the last Prophet in a long line of Prophets including Abraham, Moses, Solomon, David and Jesus. The earlier Prophets began the revelation with Muhammad (*pbuh*) completing it.
- **Mecca** is a holy city located in Saudi Arabia to which Muslims travel to perform their pilgrimage.
- **Hijaab** is a Muslim concept of modesty that includes, but is not limited to, the wearing of a headscarf or head covering by Muslim women. This concept extends both to men and women, and implies a general understanding of modesty, in dress as well as in manner, speech, and intent.
- **Jihad** is the physical, mental or spiritual exertion of oneself in accordance with the will of God.
- **Sunnah** refers to the sayings, practices and living habits of Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*). Muslims are required to follow his example in speech, conduct and deeds, and to use it as a guide in their daily lives.
- **Shari'ah** is the revealed and canonical laws of Islam, which are based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah.
- A **Sheikh** is a scholar of Islam from whom Muslims may seek legal and religious advice.
- An **Imam** is a religious leader who leads a Muslim community in religious, political and other affairs.



## The Six Articles of Faith

Muslims all over the world adhere to a common set of primary beliefs called the six articles of faith. These articles are:

### 1. Belief that there is only one God, Allah, and that He is without partners

Muslims believe there is only one God, Allah, who is the Creator and Sustainer of all that is in the universe; and only He is worthy of worship. In Islam, the belief in the oneness of God is called *Tawhid* and is the foundation of the faith.

### 2. Belief in angels

The second article of faith is the belief in the angels, whom Muslims believe were created by God from pure light for the sole purpose of worshipping Him.

### 3. Belief in all the Prophets sent by Allah

The third article of faith is the belief in not just some but all of the Prophets sent by God.

### 4. Belief in the scriptures revealed by Allah to the Prophets

The fourth article of faith is the belief in the revealed books of God: the *Suhuf* or Scrolls revealed to Abraham; *Zabur* or Psalms revealed to David; *Tawrah* or Torah revealed to Moses; *Injeel* or Gospels revealed to Jesus; and lastly the *Qur'an* revealed to Muhammad (*pbuh*).

### 5. Belief in the Day of Judgment

The fifth article of faith is the belief in the Day of Judgment (also referred to as the Day of Resurrection or Day of Reckoning) in the holy *Qur'an* during which all persons throughout time will be resurrected in order to be shown results of their deeds and thereby judged accordingly.

### 6. Belief in divine destiny

The last article of faith is the belief in destiny and divine decree. Muslims believe that Allah the Sustainer of all life has predetermined the lives and fates of all human beings and nothing is done without His will or knowledge. It should also be noted that this final article of faith does not run counter to the idea of humans possessing a free will to make decisions about their lives.

## Five Pillars of Islam

1. *Tawhid* is the belief in one God or Allah, and an individual wishing to convert to Islam must

take the *Shahaadah* or declaration of faith. This declaration states that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad (*pbuh*) is His messenger.

2. *Salat* means “prayer,” and Muslims perform five daily prayers throughout the day. Muslims are required to perform the first of these five prayers just before sunrise, the second right after midday, the third in the late afternoon, the fourth at sunset just before dark, and the last prayer in the late evening. The five daily prayers are mandatory for every Muslim; however, there are two conditions: first, one must be sane; second, one must be fifteen years of age or older. Muslims view prayers as a source of strength, inner peace and tranquility as well as an opportunity to break away from the stress and strife of life to communicate their innermost thoughts and yearnings to Allah. Although Muslims may pray in a mosque with a larger congregation, they can pray in any clean location while facing Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

3. *Saum* means “fasting.” Millions of Muslims around the world observe a fast from sunrise to sunset each day during the month of Ramadan. Muslims regard Ramadan as a period for reflection, repentance, acts of generosity, charity and selflessness. Additionally, Muslims view this practice as a way of remembering the less privileged of our society, and pangs of hunger and thirst are reminders of the experience of those less fortunate. The end of Ramadan is marked by a three-day holiday, observed by Muslims simultaneously all over the world, called *Eid ul-Fitr* or “The Festival of Fast-Breaking.” Muslims rejoice by giving gifts to one another, spending quality time with friends and family, etc.

4. *Zakat* is a fixed contribution made from a person’s wealth or personal earnings to the poor and needy of the community. A Muslim is required to pay 2.5 percent of his/her remaining wealth (left unused over a period of a year) after the deduction of expenses. The *Zakat* is intended to purify one’s wealth and is set aside specifically for the less fortunate; those employed to collect and distribute *Zakat*; new converts to Islam who have been disowned or disinherited by their non-Muslim family; slaves, so they may secure their freedom; those who are in debt; those struggling in Allah’s cause; and lastly, the wayfarer or the stranded traveler.



5. **Hajj** is the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia performed at least once during the lifetime of a Muslim if he/she is financially able. The end of the pilgrimage to Mecca is marked by the Festival of Sacrifice or *Eid ul-Adha*, which is celebrated by pilgrim and non-pilgrim Muslims across the globe.

## HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY

### *Different Muslim Groups*

After the death of Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) in 632 AD, Muslims pondered the following questions: Who would lead the Muslim community and head the Islamic state, which spanned several countries by that time? Was it possible to bring Arab Muslims and non-Arab Muslims together under one single unified Islamic state? How would this diverse and growing Islamic state be governed? The Muslims elected Abu Bakr, a close companion and father-in-law of the Prophet, as the new leader of the Muslim community, or *Khalifah*.

The Muslims elected Abu Bakr not only because of his ties to the Prophet, but primarily because of his piety and exemplary character, as well as his being an older member of the community, who could command respect and authority. Although Abu Bakr was formally accepted as the new leader, some Muslims resented the decision and even argued that Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law and first cousin, should have been appointed as the ruler of the Islamic state since he was from the Prophet's family. Historically, those who accepted Abu Bakr as their leader became known as *Sunnis* and those who supported Ali became known as *Shi'ites*. Thus the first division among Muslims was due to politics with respect to the role of leadership in the community, not a result of differing beliefs.

### *Sunnis*

- Make up approximately 84–90% of the world's Muslim population
- Are mainly found in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and all Muslim countries in Africa and Eastern Europe
- Adhere to the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) and the first two generations of his followers
- Seek legal and religious advice from a Sheikh who is a scholar of Islam; however, his ruling on any matter is neither final nor binding

- Do not believe in any formal structure or hierarchy of religion where one Muslim is superior to another in rank or position

### *Shi'ites*

- Make up approximately 10% of the world's Muslim population
- Are mainly found in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, and Yemen
- Believe that Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, was his rightful successor
- Believe that the Muslim community should be headed by a designated leader called the *Imam*
- Seek legal and religious advice from an elected Imam, who is believed to receive divine inspiration, and whose decision is final and binding

### *Sufis*

- Most Sufis are Sunni Muslims; however, some Sufis are Shi'ite
- Practice what is considered a more mystical or spiritual trend of Islam with particular attention given to love for God, love for Muhammad (*pbuh*), self-denial and frugal living, along with music and *whirling dervishes* during religious celebrations such as the birth of the Prophet
- Have an elaborate hierarchy of religious persons; a formal structure is always in place
- Seek legal and religious advice from a Sheikh, who is seen as an enlightened figure in the community and whose ruling is binding on individuals seeking the advice

## GENERAL MUSLIM PRACTICES

### *Muslim Diet*

- **Halal meat**—Islamic law prohibits Muslims from eating any kind of meat (beef, mutton, lamb, chicken) upon which the name of Allah has not been pronounced at the time of slaughter. However, Muslims are allowed to eat meat that has been prepared by *people of the Book* (Christian, Jews) even if the name of Allah was not pronounced over it.
- **Pork**—Islamic law also prohibits Muslims from eating any kind of pork or pork products.



- **Alcohol/Drugs**—Islamic law prohibits Muslims from consuming alcohol and any other intoxicants or mind-altering drugs. Muslims are also not allowed to eat any foods which may have been prepared with alcohol.

### ***Dress Code for Muslims***

Modesty not only plays an important role in the dress code for Muslim men and women, but also lies at the heart of all social conduct between the sexes. In Islam, both men and women are required to lower their gaze when in the presence of each other, so as to maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect, graciousness and honor. Both women and men are advised not to make a public show of their beauty. *Hijab* is a concept representative of modesty, which is not only observed by women, but should also be observed by men. *Hijab* does not translate into “head covering”; rather, it implies a general understanding of modesty, such as modest and loose fitting clothing, covering of the head for women, behaving in a respectful manner in society towards the opposite sex, and lowering of the gaze away from that which should not be looked at, such as any obscenities.

Men are required to cover themselves from the navel to the knee when in public. The attire of Muslim men ranges from long white robes, as is typical of Arab societies, to European-styled clothing of trousers and shirts. In Islam, men may not wear jewelry such as gold, silver or earrings and they may also not wear silk or any clothing which is tight, transparent or extravagant. It should be noted that Islam prohibits nudity and any kind of exploitation of the female and male body. The style of the dress code, the manner in which it is worn and the extent to which this dress code is adhered to vary from one culture to another; however, minimal standards are generally upheld.

### ***The Role of Women in Islam***

Although stereotypes of Muslim women portray them as uneducated, oppressed, meek and submissive, the role and function of the Muslim woman in the 52 Muslim countries around the world has varied—from primary caregiver and wife, to teachers and professors, to medical doctors and surgeons, to politicians and ambassadors. In the very beginning, Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet, was a successful trader and financially independent. Oppression of women and other misconceptions about women’s rights in Islam have no religious basis. Long before the rights of women were recognized and respected in other parts of the modern world, Muslim women had the right

to vote, the right to own property, the right to work, the right to retain a maiden name, right to refuse marriage, and the right to a divorce.

In Islam, women are recognized as the backbone of society, entrusted with the responsibility of establishing a firm, functional and fruitful family, which is seen as the foundation of society itself. Countless generations have their mothers and wives to thank for their growth, achievements and success. As in all societies, religious and cultural traditions sometimes intermingle; Islam is no exception.

***In the societies where women have been denied such basic rights as voting, owning property, working, and even driving in some extreme cases, these practices have been due entirely to deeply rooted cultural influences and have no basis in Islam.***

### ***Jihad***

“Jihad” is perhaps the most misinterpreted concept in Islam. Non-Muslims and extremists often define jihad as *holy war*; this is incorrect. The meaning of the word jihad is to *struggle* or *strive* towards something. It is widely agreed upon by the majority of Muslims that there are two kinds of jihad: *major* jihad and *minor* jihad. Major jihad is a struggle against oneself; it emphasizes self-discipline and self-restraint throughout one’s life to abandon all evil and corruption and stand up for what is just and in accordance with Islamic law. Minor jihad relates to the right of every Muslim to take up arms and defend oneself when one’s life, children, property and freedom of religion are threatened.

***The minor jihad, however, has unfortunately been distorted and abused by Muslim extremists and radical Muslim groups particularly for political gain, thereby giving the impression that minor jihad has precedence over the major jihad.***

## **IMMIGRATION HISTORY**

### ***Facts About Muslim Americans***

- 36% of all Muslim Americans were born in the U.S.
- 19% of all Muslim Americans born in the U.S. are converts
- 58% of Muslim Americans are male
- 51% of the Muslim American population is between 30–49 years of age



- 23% of the Muslim American population is between 18–21 years of age
- 58% of Muslim American males are college graduates
- 55% of Muslim Americans have an income over \$50,000
- 22% of Muslim Americans are professionals such as engineers
- 10% of Muslim Americans are in the medical profession
- 26% of Muslim Americans are of South Asian descent
- 26% of Muslim Americans are of Arab descent
- 25% of Muslim Americans are African American

### ***Islam in America***

Muslims began arriving in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries, brought as slaves from predominately Muslim West African nations such as Nigeria, Gambia, Senegal, Cameroon, and Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), among others. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Muslims began to emigrate from countries like Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Morocco, Somalia, and Turkey, primarily for work and educational purposes. Today, Muslims from all over the world, with varying cultural, political and religious practices, live in the United States.

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the U.S. with Muslims numbering between 6.5–7 million.

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# Supporting African American Families: Dispelling Myths, Building on Strengths

By Robert B. Hill

Many observers wrongly believe that the problems of inner-city families are intractable. The news media devotes considerable space documenting the crisis with negative statistics about African American families. By blaming the victims—attributing the crisis to internal deficits or weaknesses such as female-headed families, poor work ethics, and underclass values, rather than to such external constraints as racism, recessions, inflation, the exodus of industries from inner cities, and anti-poor public policies—they focus on identifying problems and not on generating solutions.

African American families have many assets: strong work orientations, flexible family roles, strong kinship bonds, and strong religious orientations. Although these attributes characterize many racial and ethnic groups, they have manifested themselves differently in African American families because of their unique history. Family-support practitioners can work more effectively with families of color by building on these strengths.

## HIGH ASPIRATIONS

Research has found that, although they score lower than Caucasian children on standardized tests, African American children often have higher educational and occupational aspirations than Caucasian children of similar economic status. Unfortunately, many studies have revealed that bright inner-city children in the public schools encounter “misguidance” counselors who lower their aspirations and self-esteem to such an extent that they drop out in record numbers. Inner-city children need educators who can help them attain their high aspirations.

One of the most successful educational initiatives that reinforces the high-achievement orientation of inner-city children and their parents is Head Start. This preschool program emphasizes parental participation and has encouraged higher achievement among thousands of low-income children.

## STRONG WORK ETHIC

Despite popular belief that most African Americans are on welfare, U.S. census data revealed that only about one-fifth of all African American families—and only half of low-income African American families—received public assistance in the 1980s.

Even so, African American groups have developed numerous innovative programs to reduce welfare dependency. Some of the most effective come from resident management corporations of public housing. These groups maintain safe, pleasant, and comfortable living environments more efficiently and cost-effectively than can local housing authorities. As a result of tenant management, vandalism, welfare dependency, school dropout, teenage pregnancy, and unemployment have declined sharply.

One key to the success of public housing is the hiring of former welfare recipients to operate local small businesses. Maintenance, day care, laundry, tailoring, barbering, beauty care, catering, reverse commuting, and thrift shop initiatives abound throughout the nation.

## FLEXIBLE FAMILY ROLES

In African American families, mothers and fathers often assume some of the traditional roles of the other, and the children perform some parental functions for younger siblings. This role adaptability has contributed to the stability and advancement of two-parent African American households.

Role flexibility is most evident in the disproportionate number of African American families headed by women. Traditionally, single-parent families headed by women are depicted as broken or pathological, whereas two-parent families are described as intact or healthy. But such characterizations mistake family structure for family functioning. One-parent families are often more intact or cohesive than two-parent families.



## KINSHIP BONDS

According to conventional wisdom, the extended family has declined sharply in urban areas. Research reveals, however, that the proportion of African American extended families has increased. U.S. census data reveal that, between 1970 and 1980, African American extended family households rose from 23% to 28%. By 1992, according to the University of Wisconsin's National Survey of Households, two out of five African American households were three-generation. Further, African American extended families often reach beyond individual households and may include members who are not related by blood or marriage.

Social welfare policies and family support programs are making better use of kinship networks. Policymakers and child welfare systems must recognize the range of services that kinship networks provide in such areas as day care, support to unwed mothers, informal adoption, and foster care.

Kinship networks often provide short-term childcare, especially for working parents. About two-fifths of working African Americans depend on responsible relatives for day care. Kinship networks also provide support to unwed mothers. Nine out of 10 babies born to African American teenagers live in three-generational households. Studies have found that adolescent mothers who have the support of kin are more likely to avoid welfare dependency, and their children's development is healthier, than teenage mothers who raise their children without assistance from relatives.\*

Informal adoption has been a major support in African American families since antiquity, with children living with grandparents or aunts and uncles for varying lengths of time. During slavery, grandmothers reared thousands of African American children. According to U.S. census data, the number of African American children living with relatives has risen from 1.3 million (13%) in 1970 to 1.6 million (16%) in 1990.

Even though African American families provide extensive informal adoption and foster care services, many child welfare systems have not targeted kinship networks for such services until recently. Of the one million African American children who live in households without either parent present, kin informally adopts 80%; the remaining 20% are in foster care. Yet, because children of color still account for most children in foster care, there is an urgent

need for public policies that encourage relatives to take in children and motivate systems to use kinship networks as major placement resources.

## RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION

Religion plays a strong role in the lives of African Americans. In a 1981 Gallup poll, 67% of African Americans said that religion was "very important" in their lives. A 1980 National Urban League survey found that 76% of African Americans belong to churches and 67% attend church at least monthly.

As the most dominant institution in the African American community, churches provide a range of social services to strengthen families and enhance child development. African Americans with strong religious orientations achieve higher socioeconomic levels than those with little religious commitment. A 1980 study of young males in low-income communities, conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research, concluded that a deep religious commitment was strongly correlated with lower rates of school dropout, delinquency, out-of-wedlock births, and drug abuse.

Clearly, African American families have many unique and powerful assets. By dispelling myths about African American families and building instead on their strengths, family support practitioners have at their disposal major resources to help support African American families.

\* F. Furstenburg Jr., J. Brooks-Gunn, and S. Philip Morgan. (1987). *Adolescent Mothers in Later Life*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

By Robert B. Hill, Ph.D., director of the Institute for Urban Research, Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD. This article is adapted from the Spring 1993 issue of *Family Resource Coalition Report*. ©1997 Family Resource Coalition. This article was published in the Spring 1997 issue of *Children's Voice*, the quarterly magazine of the Child Welfare League of America. For subscription information, contact CWLA Publications, 202-638-2952.



# Programs with a Cultural Fit: Working with Latino Families

By *Elba Montalvo*

One of the major problems in foster care and adoption today is the lack of cultural competence in services to Latino children. Inconceivably, creating cultural bridges to meet the needs of the large numbers of African American and Latino children in foster care is still not common practice in human services.

The Council on Adoptable Children developed the first Hispanic Adoption Program in 1978 in New York. At that time, Latino children, who accounted for one-fourth of the city's foster care population, were systematically placed along color lines in foster care and adoptive homes. Dark-skinned Latino children were placed with African American families, lighter-skinned children with Caucasian families. To stop that practice, a group of Latino professionals in 1982 founded the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families (CHCF), a nonprofit, community-based organization advocating for Latino families.

Implemented in 1979, the Child Welfare Reform Act (CWRA) emphasized prevention over foster care and keeping kids in their communities. CWRA stressed permanency planning—securing permanent homes for children rather than warehousing them in foster care. The idea of placing kids with relatives, however, kinship care, was not common practice; the prevailing assumption was that extended family members were unsuitable caregivers. Despite this, CWRA did improve the foster care system. Children were moved toward permanency more quickly—either returned to parents or moved toward adoption. It also stopped the automatic placement of children in institutions.

Unfortunately, however, services have not changed dramatically for Latino children. Generally, agencies serving Latino children continue to invalidate their culture by omission. Latinos do not feel welcomed by these agencies because nothing about the agencies reflects Latino culture—not the people who work there, not the office decorations. Their services are not designed with the Latino population in mind.

## THE LATINO POPULATION

Many people do not know that there are 21 Spanish-speaking countries—and Brazil is not one of them. Although Latinos speak the same language and share similar values and a heritage from Spain, there are vast differences among national groups. Latinos are not monolithic, and treating all Latinos alike is a mistake. Family-serving agencies must understand the particular characteristics of Latino groups in their areas, such as immigration status, history, religious background (not all are Catholics), ethnic makeup (the mix of indigenous populations and African and European ancestry), and reasons for migration.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, more than 35 million Latinos live in the United States. Latinos make up 12.5 percent of the nation's population. Between 1990 and 2000, the U.S. Latino population increased by more than 50 percent. Spanish is the second most common language in American homes.

Mexicans are the largest Latino group, making up 7.3 percent of the population; Puerto Ricans are the second largest group, making up 1.2 percent of the population; Cubans make up the third largest group, with 0.4 percent of the population. Other Latino groups collectively make up 3.6 percent of the population in the United States. More than three-quarters of Latinos live in the West or the South. Half of all Latinos live in just two states: California and Texas.<sup>1</sup>

## UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES

There is no secret formula for working with Latino families with cultural competence. It takes hard work, commitment, and resources. It takes programs with a cultural fit. When programs are culturally ignorant, prospective adoptive families will leave, and children will either be placed in non-Latino homes or linger in the foster care system. To provide quality services to Latino families, including children placed in adoptive homes, we need to strive for cultural competence.



The first step is self-awareness and acceptance of differences. We must be conscious of mainstream American values, because they affect us on a personal level and are reflected in the attitudes and policies of child welfare agencies. The cultural aspects to consider include such concepts as nonverbal communication, body motion, and use of space. We are not always aware of them, yet they prevent communication with and proper assessment and treatment of clients whose cultures are different from our own. For example, if I were to pucker my lips and look in a certain direction, that is Puerto Rican nonverbal communication for “look at that or at that one.” One can have a whole conversation in Puerto Rican without speaking a word.

Latino families can be lost through trivial misunderstandings. For example, ignoring a prospective adoptive Latino couple while they are sitting in a waiting room could cause them to feel rejected and lead to alienation. Latino families considering adoption need an opportunity to know their adoption specialists and place them within a familial context before proceeding with the business at hand.

Other values shared by most Latino national groups include the importance of the extended family, the interdependence of family members, differentiation of gender roles, unconditional respect for adults, and deference to authority.<sup>2</sup> In mainstream American culture, on the other hand, respect is earned, not based on status.

Latino culture also differs from Anglo culture in its concept of time and time orientation. Latino culture tends to be polychronic and oriented to the present. To understand what polychronic means, consider an extended Latino family gathering, in which numerous interactions and conversations are taking place, often overlapping one another. A North American family, particularly with Anglo roots, might view the multiple simultaneous interactions as confusing and noisy. Anglo culture stresses talking one at a time; interrupting is impolite. In a Latino family, the stress is on the involvement of people and the completion of transactions rather than on adherence to preset schedules. In a present orientation, what is happening at this moment is what is important; only God can control what will happen tomorrow.

In contrast, mainstream American values have a monochronic time orientation, emphasizing schedules, segmentation, and promptness. Not that Latinos don't recognize the importance of being on time but, especially in social situations, “on time” is much more

fluid for Latinos. Anglo culture is also heavily oriented to the future, planning for tomorrow. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Asian cultures are often oriented to the past, emphasizing the importance of ancestry, family history, and traditions.

Latino children are still placed in non-Latino homes where their cultural background is ignored. They grow up believing there is something wrong with their heritage or that it is unimportant because their adoptive parents do not recognize, acknowledge, or celebrate their children's Latino background.

Children are best served when placed in homes that give them continuity. Homes that are culturally similar to the homes of their biological parents can provide a continuity of care that is critical for children's healthy development. For optimal continuity of care, a relative's home is the best alternative. If a relative's home is unavailable or inappropriate, the next best home is that of someone from the child's own culture. For Latinos, this means a home of the same national group—Puerto Rican children in Puerto Rican homes, for example, or Cuban children in Cuban homes. If a home of the same national group is not available, then another Latino home is best.

Only if no Latino home is available should a non-Latino home be considered—and then it should be a home that values and is knowledgeable about the child's Latino culture. When evaluating whether a non-Latino home is appropriate for placing a Latino child, agencies should consider such questions as whether the family has Latino friends who can serve as role models for the child and whether the family lives in or has access to a Latino community. CHCF agrees with other child advocates that providing children the opportunity to live in loving, permanent homes of any race or cultural background is preferable to their growing up without permanent homes. Terry Cross, executive director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, defines individual cultural competence as “the state of being capable of functioning effectively in the context of cultural differences.” For the organization, he defines cultural competence as “a set of congruent practice skills, attitudes, policies, and structures, which come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in the context of cultural differences.”<sup>3</sup>

In adoption agencies, cultural competence includes the successful recruitment of families of color. Whatever venue agencies choose to recruit Latino



families, materials should be conceived and written first in Spanish, then translated into English. Because of differences in communication styles among national groups, agencies must also keep in mind the particular Latino populations with whom they are working. Some Latinos are more formal than others in language and expressive behaviors. For example, South Americans are more formal than Latinos from the Caribbean; there are also language and regional differences.

Additionally, although Spanish is the second most common language in 39 states and the District of Columbia, only 8 states require bilingual investigations. Most states often use children as translators—a practice that can negatively impact family roles. The question is whether agencies are making genuine efforts to embrace people who only speak the Spanish language.

Agencies and social workers that provide services to Latino children and families should consider several issues:

- Build the necessary bridges. Latinos are not asking adoption specialists to change their own values but rather to understand the values of Latinos and to incorporate them into their practices.
- On an organizational level, cultural competence requires agencies to adopt policies and programs, from the reception area to program design, that say, “Bienvenidos Latinos”—Welcome Latinos. Bilingual personnel are critical.
- Collecting data to reflect ethnic breakdown in all categories, programs, and services enables providers to better understand the needs of Latino children and assists in designing programs with a cultural fit.

To create quality programs for Latino children and make services Latino-friendly will take all of us: adoptive parents, social workers, policymakers, administrators, and legislators; Latinos, African Americans, Caucasians, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. It takes all of us to care about each other’s children.

- 1 Statistics in this paragraph were updated by National CASA for the 2007 revision of the curriculum.
- 2 N. Garcia-Preto (1996). “Puerto Rican Families.” In M. McGoldrick, J. Giordano, and J. K. Pearce (Eds.). *Ethnicity and Family Therapy* (pp. 169–171). New York: Guilford Press.
- 3 People of Color Leadership Institute and National Indian Child Welfare Association (1993). *Training Guidebook for Developing Cultural Competence*. Washington, DC: People of Color Leadership Institute, and Portland, OR: National Indian Child Welfare Association.

Elba Montalvo is executive director of the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, New York, NY; chair of the Council of Latino Executives in Child Welfare; and a member of CWLA’s board of directors. This article is adapted from Vol. 8, No. 2, 1994 of *The Roundtable*, the journal of the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption, Spaulding for Children, Southfield, Michigan. This article was published in the Summer 1997 issue of *Children’s Voice*, the quarterly magazine of the Child Welfare League of America. For subscription information, contact CWLA Publications, 202-638-2952.



# Understanding the Relational Worldview in Indian Families

By Terry Cross

*The European and American linear worldview dominates social services to Indian families. These families, however, use a relational worldview in their thinking. Understanding this worldview enhances the Indian child welfare worker's ability to provide services.*

On our globe today there are two predominant worldviews, linear and relational. The linear worldview is rooted in European and mainstream American thought. It is very temporal, and it is firmly rooted in the logic that says cause has to come before effect. In contrast, the relational worldview sees life as harmonious relationships where health is achieved by maintaining balance between the many interrelating factors in one's circle of life. Understanding these worldviews and how they relate to Indian child welfare work can serve to enhance an ICW worker's ability to meet his/her community's needs.

*Worldview* is a term used to describe the collective thought process of a people or culture. Thoughts and ideas are organized into concepts. Concepts are organized into constructs and paradigms. Paradigms linked together build a worldview. This article will summarize both worldviews and show how family functioning can be understood from the relational view.

## LINEAR WORLDVIEW

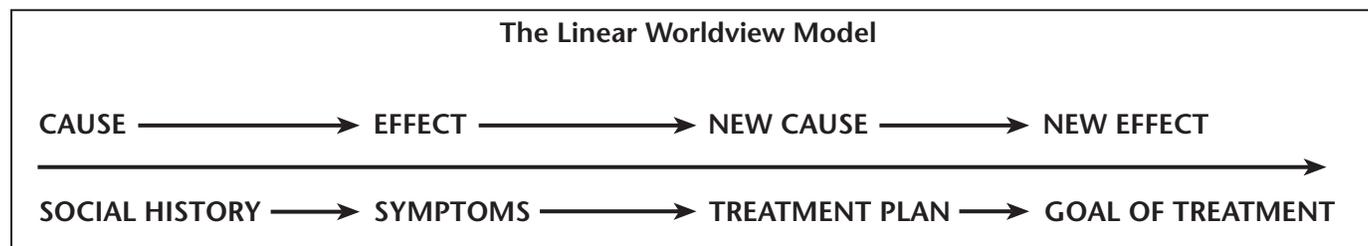
The linear worldview finds its roots in Western European and American thought. It is logical, time oriented and systematic, with cause and effect relationships at its core. To understand the world is to understand the linear cause and effect relationships between events.

In human services, workers are usually taught that if we can understand the causes of a problem, by taking a social history, then we will better know how to help. Interventions are targeted to the cause or symptom and the relationship between the intervention and the symptoms are measured. Yet, the linear view is narrow. It inhibits us from seeing the whole person. It is not good or bad. It simply is, and in the U.S. it is dominant. Indian child welfare workers need to be able to understand this thinking because they will encounter it in the mainstream system. Historically, however, Indian peoples have not used linear cause and effect thinking. Rather, the approach could be called a relational or cyclic view.

## RELATIONAL WORLDVIEW

The relational worldview, sometimes called the cyclical worldview, finds its roots in tribal cultures. It is intuitive, non-time-oriented and fluid. The balance and harmony in relationships between multiple variables including spiritual forces make up the core of the thought system. Every event is in relation to all other events regardless of time, space or physical existence. Health exists only when things are in balance or harmony.

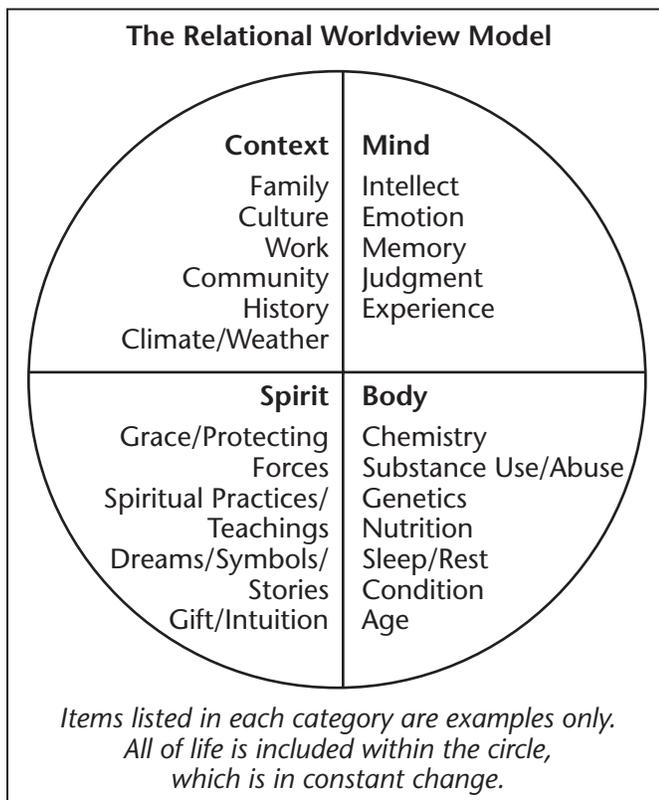
In the relational worldview, helpers and healers are taught to understand problems through the balances and imbalances in the person's relational world. We are taught to see and accept complex (sometimes illogical) interrelationships that can be influenced by entering the world of the client and manipulating the balance contextually, cognitively, emotionally, physically and/or spiritually.



Interventions need not be logically targeted to a particular symptom or cause, but rather are focused on bringing the person back into balance. Nothing in a person's existence can change without all other things being changed as well. Thus, an effective helper is one who gains understanding of the complex interdependent nature of life and learns how to use physical, psychological, contextual and spiritual forces to promote harmony.

## A RELATIONAL MODEL

The relational world model for assessing family problems can be illustrated through a four-quadrant circle. The four quadrants represent four major forces or sets of factors that together must come into balance. They are the context, the mind, the body and the spirit. The mind includes our cognitive processes such as thoughts, memories, knowledge and emotional processes such as feelings, defenses and self-esteem. The body includes all physical aspects such as genetic inheritance, gender and condition as well as sleep, nutrition and substance use. The context includes culture, community, family, peers, work, school and social history. The spiritual area includes both positive and negative learned teachings and practices as well as positive and negative metaphysical or innate forces.



These four quadrants are in constant flux and change. We are not the same person at 4 p.m. that we were at 7 a.m. Our level of sleep is different, our nutrition is different and our context is likely different. Thus, behavior will be different, feeling will be different and what we think about will be different. The system is constantly balancing and rebalancing itself as we change thoughts, feelings, our physical state or our spiritual state. If we are able to stay in balance we are said to be healthy, but sometimes the balance is temporarily lost. We have the capacity as humans to keep our own balance, for the most part, yet our different cultures provide many mechanisms to assist in this process. Spiritual teachings, social skills and norms, dietary rules and family roles are among the myriad of ways we culturally maintain our balance.

Death is an example of an event which threatens harmony. When we lose a loved one we emotionally feel grief; physically we may cry, lose appetite or not sleep well. However, spiritually we have a learned positive response, a ritual, called a funeral. Usually such events are community events, so the context is changed. We bring in relatives, friends and supporters. In that context, we intellectualize about the dead person. We may recall and tell stories about him/her. We may intellectualize about death itself or be reminded of our cultural view of that experience. Physically we touch others, get hugs and handshakes, eat and shed tears.

These experiences are interdependent, playing off each other in multirelational interactions which, if successful, allow us to resolve the grief by maintaining the balance. If we cannot, then in a Western sense we are said to have unresolved grief or, in some tribal cultures, to have a ghost sickness or to be bothered by a spirit. Different worldviews often use different conceptual language to describe the same phenomenon.

## FAMILY ASSESSMENT

When doing an assessment of an Indian family, the worker needs to look not only for linear cause and effect relationships to isolate the causal factors, but also ask, "What are the holistic and complex interrelationships that have disrupted the balance in the family?" "What factors can come into harmony and allow a family to not only survive but grow strong?" The nature of our strengths and challenges becomes evident as we examine families from the relational perspective.



## FIRST QUADRANT: CONTEXT

The context within which Indian families function is one filled with strength-producing or harmonizing resources. Oppression, for all its damage to us, creates an environment where survival skills are developed and sharpened. We learn to have a sixth sense about where we are welcome and where we are not. We teach our children to recognize the subtle clues that may spell danger. We sit with our children at the movies or in front of the TV and interpret, cushioning the assaults of the mainstream media. We learn how to cope with the dynamics of difference and pass our strategies on to our children.

The richness of our histories and heritage provide anchors which hold us to who we are. Our relations, relatives or kin often form systems of care that are interdependent and system reliant. Healthy interdependence is the core of the extended family. It does not foster dependence and does not stifle independence. Rather, it is a system in which everyone contributes in some way without expectation of reciprocity. I give my cousin a ride to the store and while at the store my cousin buys some items for our grandmother. Our grandmother is home watching my brother's children who are planning to wash my car when I return home. No one person is paying back another and yet the support and help keep cycling throughout the family.

The community provides additional influences. From church to social organizations to politics, we are all affected by the events in the world around us. Family resilience is supported by role models, community norms, church structures and the roles of elders and natural helpers or healers.

However, we struggle with negative forces in our environments: poverty, oppression, substance abuse, unemployment, crime, trauma or any of hundreds of negative influences. Together these enter into the balance of who we are and how we cope.

## SECOND QUADRANT: MENTAL

In the mental area, the Indian family is supported intellectually by self-talk and by the stories we hear about how others have managed. Sitting around the kitchen table or on the front steps, we learn strategies for interacting with the world or how to use resources. In passing on our stories of our lives we pass on skills to our children and we parent for resiliency.

We instill the values of relationships, of getting by, of not needing and hard work for little return. Storytelling is perhaps our greatest teaching resource for communicating identity, values and life skills. The stories also let us know who our people are and what they stand for, providing role models and subtle expectations.

Emotionally, we learn a variety of ego defenses which allow us to deal with overwhelming odds. Denial, splitting, disassociation and projection are each useful in their own way as mechanisms for surviving oppression. Functionality can only be understood in context. For example, many of our families know real pain and endure grief almost beyond the comprehension of middle America and yet they give back to their community. Because of oppression, substance abuse or poverty, many have learned not to need, not to feel and not to talk about it, yet they still help out at the church, at school or by giving a sister a break from the kids. These are kindnesses that bring life—sustaining energy which flows from an auntie's approving looks, from a child's laugh or from a pat on the back.

Other emotions rob people of their resources—rage, depression, anxiety, grief and jealousy, among others—and are likely to contribute to a lack of harmony. Our people have experienced generations of loss from which we are only now beginning to recover. This sense of loss and the intergenerational grief that is a part of it are strong elements affecting the balance of our families.

## THIRD QUADRANT: PHYSICAL

While for the individual we think of the physical area as concerning the body, in family it also means the family structure and roles. Kinship expressed in how we relate to our kin, how we act as a system and how we sustain each other will greatly influence the balance in our lives.

The role of fathers is part of the balance, one that can contribute strength to the family system whether the father is present in the home or not. In a recent study of American Indian families which looked at child neglect and the factors which either contributed to or helped prevent it, the role of fathers was found to be central. When the father was involved in the family, child neglect was much less likely to be present. The father did not have to be present in the home for



the positive effect to be felt. He only had to remain a contributing member of the family and to maintain relationships with his children. Noncustodial dads take note: your continuing relationship with your children contributes to positive outcomes. Families are better able to be resilient if they include dads.

One thing that kin often do together is eat. Our special cultural or family foods, our use of foods to mark special occasions and our rituals around eating together are all central to the health of the family.

#### **FOURTH QUADRANT: SPIRITUAL**

Spiritual influences in the family include both positive and negative learned practices. The positive practices are those we learn from various spiritual disciplines or teachers: faith, prayer, meditation, healing ceremonies or even positive thinking. They are the things we learn to do to bring about a positive spiritual outcome or to bring positive spiritual intervention. Negatively learned practices are things like curses or bad medicine. Even things like sin, promotion of chaos and perpetuation of confusion could be considered learned negative spiritual behaviors. These are things that people do to invoke negative spiritual outcomes or negative spiritual intervention.

Here, our teachings and the spiritual institutions play a great role. Usually there are learned positive practices meant to counter the negative practices in ourselves or from someone else. Often, what is considered positive in one person's faith is considered negative in another's, and the lines between the two become blurred by emotion. In Indian communities, the churches and/or traditional spiritual ways play a significant role in shaping the spiritual practices of the family.

In the relational worldview, human behavior is also influenced by spiritual forces beyond our own making. Luck, grace, helping spirits and angelic intervention are a few of the terms used to describe getting just the right help at just the right time. One does not have to believe in or practice any spiritual discipline to believe in or experience the phenomenon. Bad luck, bad spirits, ghosts, the devil and misfortune are a few of the terms used to describe things that bother people no matter what their spiritual practices. These forces are often turned back or controlled through prayer, rituals or ceremonies.

#### **ALL TOGETHER**

In the relational view the causal factors are considered together. It is the interdependence of the relationships with all factors taken at once that gives understanding of the behavior. It is the constant change and interplay between various forces that account for resilience. We can count on the system's natural tendency to seek harmony. We can promote resilience by contributing to the balance. Services need not be targeted to a specific set of symptoms but rather targeted toward restoration of balance. Family support services are an example of adding to the balance.

It is not, then, our extended family or church or survival skills or any other single factor that provides family harmony. It is the complex interplay between all of these factors. Getting in harmony and staying in harmony is the task.

#### **TWO WAYS OF HELPING**

In the Western European linear assessment, we are taught to examine a problem by splitting the factors into independent linear cause and effect relationships. This has value in the development of knowledge of each factor and does tend to give us specific interventions to try. However, such splitting tends to leave us with incomplete knowledge and services which fail to acknowledge the spirit. In the linear view, the person owns or is the problem. In the relational view, the problem is circumstantial and resides in the relationship between factors. The person is not said to have a problem but to be out of harmony. Once harmony is restored the problem is gone. In the linear model we are taught to treat the person, and in the relational model we are taught to treat the balance.

Today, the linear model dominates delivery of family services, yet approximately half of all Indian clients hold a relational worldview. In Indian child welfare we have an opportunity to work within the relational worldview, to work with traditional methods of helping and healing that focus on the restoration of balance and harmony.

The medicine person, elder or spiritual teacher usually works in these ways. They may work in the realm of the mind with advice, counsel or with storytelling and dream work. They may work in the physical with herbs, fasting, sweat lodge or diet. They might work on the spiritual with ceremonies, healing rituals or by teaching. Always, they become part of the context of



the person being helped and add to the balance with their presence and willingness to help.

It is important for Indian child welfare workers to honor their own cultures in any services which intervene, assess and attempt to help Indian families.

Terry Cross is executive director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association.



# Split Feathers: Adult American Indians Who Were Placed in Non-Indian Families as Children

By Carol Locust, Ph.D.

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 was designed specifically to stop the wholesale removal of Indian children from their families, which had contributed to the destruction of the traditional extended family structures and Indian community life for over a century. A follow-up study in 1980 by the Colorado Indian Law Review revealed that the Act only slowed the removal of children but did not stop it as the Act was intended to do. Tribal leaders called upon the Supreme Court to assure enforcement of the ICWA until amendments could be made to the Act to tighten loopholes through which many Indian children are still being snatched. At this writing, the amendments have not been made.

The pilot study conducted by this investigator indicated that every Indian child placed in a non-Indian home for either foster care or adoption is placed at great risk of long-term psychological damage as an adult. There is, however, a lack of sufficient research dedicated specifically to the investigation of this issue. Data supporting the statement of at-risk adult American Indian adoptees come from the Congressional Hearings pursuant to the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978). Essentially, the issue of the adult Indian who was placed in a non-Indian home as a child has not been addressed.

The literature that does exist on adult Indians who have experienced out-of-culture placements as children, including the preliminary study conducted by this investigator on which this article is based, indicates that 19 out of 20 Indian adoptees have psychological problems related to their placement in non-Indian homes. The study determined that *there are unique factors of Indian children being placed in non-Indian homes that create damaging effects in the later lives of the children.*

This study has revealed that:

- Placing American Indian children in foster/adoptive non-Indian homes puts them at great risk for experiencing psychological trauma that

leads to the development of long-term emotional and psychological problems in later life; and

- The cluster of long-term psychological liabilities exhibited by American Indian adults who experienced non-Indian placement as children may be recognized as a syndrome. (Syndrome: a set of symptoms which occur together. From *Dorland's Medical Dictionary*, 24th edition, 1965.)
- The Split Feather Syndrome appears to be related to a reciprocal-possessive form of belongingness unique to survivors of cultures that have faced annihilation.

The Split Feathers themselves have identified the following factors as major contributors to the development of the syndrome, in order of their importance:

1. The loss of Indian identity.
2. The loss of family, culture, heritage, language, spiritual beliefs, tribal affiliation, and tribal ceremonial experiences.
3. The experience of growing up being different.
4. The experience of discrimination from the dominant culture.
5. A cognitive difference in the way Indian children receive, process, integrate and apply new information—in short, a difference in learning style.

Other contributing factors included physical, sexual and mental abuse from adoptive family members; loss of birth brothers and sisters; uncaring or abusive foster/adoptive families; not being told anything or being lied to about their adoption; not being given advanced notice of moves; too many moves; nobody to talk to; loss of personal property.

The following sections will explore the five major factors listed above that contribute to the development of the Split Feather Syndrome.



## 1. THE LOSS OF INDIAN IDENTITY

The loss of American Indian identity appears to be one of the most important factors in the development of the Split Feather Syndrome. The data indicate that the loss of the Indian identity is not the same as the loss of personal identity, although it included the personal aspect. Additionally, however, is the loss of belonging to one's real culture. Almost all of the respondents indicated a defiant, almost fierce pride in being an American Indian. When questioned about what the Indian identity was, the responses repeated most frequently were "I belong to that tribe;" "That is *my* tribe." The individual belonged to the tribe, and the tribe likewise belonged to him or her, a reciprocal possessiveness of cultural identity, which may be found in members of other cultures who have undergone great grieving, such as the survivors of the Holocaust.

The belongingness of tribal identity also seemed to embody the reason for one's being "different," the roots of ancestral pride, the foundations of mystical beliefs and tenets, and, as one respondent wrote, "the drums that thunder in my blood." The Indian identity, in those terms, meant much more than personal or family identity. It became the totality of the person's existence without which he or she was nothing.

## 2. THE LOSS OF FAMILY, CULTURE, HERITAGE, LANGUAGE, SPIRITUAL BELIEFS, TRIBAL AFFILIATION & TRIBAL CEREMONIAL EXPERIENCES

The reciprocal possessiveness of the factors listed above (loss of family, culture, heritage, etc.) indicated that Split Feathers not only felt a loss of these "possessions" because they were his or hers by birthright, but also that the individual was the "possession" of the things identified here. For example, not only did the individuals mourn the loss of their families, but they also mourned their families' loss of them as well. The loss of their biological family, extended family, clan, and tribe was an unending grief for the respondents, a grief that spawned deep-seated resentment and hatred for the adoption system. Their biological relatives belonged to them, and they belonged to their relatives—a belongingness that connected the adoptees with relatives, clan members, and tribal members. They could see in other Indians a reflection of themselves, a fact that satisfied the human need to be like those around them.

The loss of culture, heritage, and language seemed to encompass the total lifestyle that the respondents had missed. One said, "I was supposed to have a naming ceremony when I was two years old, and I didn't get it. I don't have a name. How can I go back to my tribe if I don't have a name?" Another wrote, "Somebody said that we could learn all we needed to learn about our culture and heritage from books and videos from our school. What a laugh! What we got was a watered down, Indian-style-Sesame-Street version of what some white person thought all Indians were like."

All of the Split Feathers said they read books, watched TV shows, and saw movies about Indians when they were children. No matter what the plot of the story, they championed the Indians, even when John Wayne was on the winning side, even, the majority said, when the Indians were portrayed as brutal savages, drunks or dirty thieves. Their feeling toward real life Indians was not any different.

"They told me my parents were alcoholics, and that I was lucky to be out of the home," one respondent said. "But I don't feel that way. Poor Mom, poor Dad, maybe I could have helped some way. I'll never know. I never had the chance to find out. Nobody ever asked me if I wanted to stay or not, they just drove up one day and took me. My mother had this horrible, disbelieving look on her face. I never saw her again."

Despite the negative portrayal of Indian people in the media and in most non-Indian peoples' minds, the respondents were proud to be Indian. Many of them had been told horror stories about their birth families, which always ended with "aren't you glad you came to live with us?" The fact was that most of the stories expounded on the negative aspects—rather than the positive aspects—of the biological families and were twisted versions of the truth or were outright lies. None of the respondents said they were "glad" about their adoptive placement.

Tribal spirituality seemed to transcend the adoptive experience. All of the respondents regarded themselves as being spiritual, either in an organized church, a personal religious way, or in their tribal belief system. Of the 20 respondents, 14 reported having extrasensory experiences from childhood, ranging from knowing about things before they happened, having dreams that came true, knowing what someone else was thinking, and being able to communicate with animals. Seventeen of the respondents said they had actively sought more information about their tribal traditional beliefs,



hoping to find explanations for the mystical experiences in their lives, or to learn more about their own tribal beliefs.

Most of the respondents viewed tribal ceremonial experiences as an integral part of spirituality. While 11 of the 20 had been able to experience at least one tribal ceremony, nine had not had the opportunity. Thirteen of the 20 had attended at least one Indian pow-wow or celebration, while seven had been denied the privilege but expressed optimism about attending one in the future. Four of them had taken part in sweats. One of the 20 said he was allowed to attend Indian celebrations as a child. Re-entry into the culture took place after the Split Feathers had reclaimed their Indian identity. Sixteen of the 20 respondents said that they were ignorant or knew very little about traditional ceremonies that they had missed over the years, although four of them knew about several of their tribal customs and traditions associated with ceremonies. All of them felt they had been robbed of the ceremonies that other tribal children were given but that they had never experienced. All 20 of them said they had several pieces of Indian art, such as jewelry, pottery, basketry or such that held a ceremonial meaning for them. One individual had been given a ceremonial eagle feather.

Tribal affiliation—being enrolled in a tribe—was a serious subject for all 20 of the Split Feathers. Sixteen of them had had their enrollment canceled when they were adopted into non-Indian homes. The names of four had remained on tribal rolls. At the time of this study, six of them had two sets of birth records, one of Indian ancestry bearing their birth names and family names, and another set bearing their adoptive names. The one respondent who had not yet found his Indian identity had been searching archival records for years trying to locate some clue to his tribal affiliation.

“Those pieces of paper—the adoption papers—took away my Indian rights,” another respondent wrote. “Those papers took away my entitlement to my land settlement money, my right to live on tribal land, to vote in tribal elections, to apply for tribal scholarships, my right to be an Indian. My birthright was stolen from me. But they could not take away the fact that I was an Indian. I burned those papers. I hated them.”

### 3. GROWING UP BEING DIFFERENT

In describing what they meant by being “different,” the Split Feathers used such words as dark skin, black hair, dark eyes, and “the Indian look.” Besides

physical differences they also included having different philosophical concepts, even though most of them had been adopted too young to have learned any tribal philosophy. The 14 respondents who said that they had extrasensory experiences felt that this ability made them even more different. The differences made them feel alienated from other people. All of the Split Feathers said that they were extremely self-conscious. Some were painfully shy and withdrawn as children; others became belligerent and aggressive.

Being different also included the concepts that non-Indians had of them, e.g., Indians had certain traits (stoic, brave), behaved certain ways (never showed emotion, spoke very little), had certain knowledge inherent in their blood (when it was going to rain, herbal remedies). These imposed expectations were burdensome to most of the Split Feathers, who felt guilty because they could not fulfill them. One respondent said it made her feel like a “fake” Indian because she could not fit the stereotype of “Indian.” Nine of the 20 respondents said that they felt frustrated and angry because of the unfair expectations placed on them, while the opportunities to be all that was expected of them as “Indians” had been taken away.

Although being different created major psychological problems for the Split Feathers, it was also a source of intense pride. One respondent wrote, “Being different was horrible, like being a freak. At the same time I was proud. Feeling horrible and proud about the same thing splits your brain apart. You hate what it does to you.”

### 4. EXPERIENCING DISCRIMINATION FROM THE DOMINANT CULTURE

All 20 of the respondents in the random sample experienced some degree of discrimination. Words used to describe the cause of discrimination were “being dark,” “being Indian,” and “not being white.” Discrimination came from adults as well as children and occurred within the adoptive families; from relatives and neighbors; and at schools, churches, and social functions. The average age when “knowing I was different” began at three years of age; the average age when discrimination began to be a serious problem for the respondents was 11 years.

Puberty was a traumatic time for all the respondents when they learned that their limited acceptance in the non-Indian world did not include dating white youth. Thirteen of the 20 reported some amount of alienation



from their adoptive families during this period, from hostility to acting out rage and running away. The estrangement increased as the adoptees reached young adulthood. "I asked a girl to dance with me at a junior high party. Her brother dragged me outside and beat me up, told me no dirty Indian was going to get close to his sister," one respondent wrote. Another respondent wrote that as a young girl she never got asked out on dates. Her adopted mother told her to "go find yourself an Indian." That was the first time she realized that she was not being asked out because of her race.

Discrimination was also felt in the work force as well as in the social realm when Split Feathers reached adulthood. Jobs often went to less qualified non-Indians. Promotions were slow in coming, infrequent, or denied. One respondent stated that he felt employers never really trusted him because he looked so "Indian," and that his appearance was against him in obtaining employment. Another wrote, "I had just gone through the alcohol rehab program. I was pleased that I had been sober for three months. In the program I had the opportunity to do a sweat, and I really hung on to that experience, to that little bit of the Indian world. Then I went to the state VR office to get help in finding a job. They told me to cut my hair. My long hair was the only part of me that I could claim as my heritage. I said I wouldn't cut it. They said forget about working, no one would hire me looking like a wild Indian, only if I looked tame."

## **5. COGNITIVE DIFFERENCES IN THE WAY INDIAN CHILDREN RECEIVE, PROCESS, INTEGRATE & APPLY NEW INFORMATION**

Based on the Split Feather testimonies, it would appear that American Indians have a cognitive process different from non-Indians. While all 20 of them said that they felt that they were average or above in intelligence, half of them had spent time in remedial education programs in school. Five respondents had been labeled as learning disabled. Two were classified as "slow learners." All of them had failed at least one grade in school. The reasons for academic problems were given in episodes. "I just couldn't learn like all the other kids. The teacher talked too much, too many words. I learned better through my eyes." "When I was in the fifth grade I got punished in front of the whole class for not remembering the capital city of Wyoming. That's when I decided to learn my own way, not theirs. I worked out my own strategy all by myself. My

adopted family didn't know what I was doing so they couldn't help me. . . . I kept thinking either there's something wrong with my brain or theirs, because our brains don't work the same way when it comes to learning. And since I was the only Indian in the class, I figured out that there was something wrong with my brain. It was frustrating; I hated school. I could learn okay, and I could learn fast outside school, but in my school lessons I had to do it their way, not mine. And I failed."

Reading was the most difficult subject for the Split Feathers. Surprisingly, math was not that difficult. "Numbers are logical," said one respondent. The overall picture of the educational success of the Split Feather group was rather dismal, however. The inability to absorb information in the same manner as the other children engendered failure for them, and failure begat more failure, poor self-esteem, and often either withdrawal or aggression. Frustrations in elementary school led to difficult junior high school years and early dropout rates in high school. Of the 20 respondents, only five completed a high school degree. Of the other 15, one went into the military, three were in correctional facilities, four got married, and the other seven entered the job market with little or varying degrees of success.

Later in their lives, six of them had either taken college courses or attended advanced training for job placement. None of them described themselves as a success, although one respondent said he was "doing all right."

## **THE EFFECTS OF RECLAIMED IDENTITY ON THE SPLIT FEATHERS**

For 19 of the 20 individuals in this preliminary study (one had not yet found his tribe nor his tribal identity), repatriation or reclamation of their tribal identity was described as a rebirth experience. Although fear of not being accepted was a major personal problem, and threats of being disowned came from adoptive parents, all of them said they were glad they had pursued their quests to find out who they were. Descriptors used for the experience were:

"I felt whole for the first time in my life."

"Thank God I finally know who I am!"

"I finally found what I am, what is part of me, what I am part of."



“I found the missing part of me and put it back in place. Now I can really be alive.”

“I found where I really belonged, my place, my home, my true identity.”

When asked how they felt about rejoining a cultural group that was frequently described in degrading terms (drunk Indians, lazy, dirty, stupid), and against which there were many racist, bigoted, and prejudiced people, not one of the Split Feathers said they would change their minds. From their responses, it appeared that social, economic, and cultural labels had no impact whatever on their repatriation decisions. Most of them said they began helping their birth families and relatives as soon as they found out who they were. They received tribal teachings in return, a reciprocal process that satisfied the needs of the whole family.

Eighteen of the 19 respondents who had reclaimed their Indian identity said their personal lives had changed dramatically for the better after the reclamation. A good description of the change, written by one respondent, reads, “The weight of hurting, loneliness, anger, and sorrow I carried all those years was dropped, and my soul could soar.” Another said, “It’s like I was blind, stumbling through life looking for myself, and now—now I can see.”

The respondents used the following statements to indicate the profound change in their psychological health, in order of how often they were repeated:

1. Decrease in depressive feelings
2. Decrease in alcohol and drug abuse
3. Decrease in aggressive behaviors
4. Increase in self-esteem
5. Feelings of love, joy, generosity, sympathy, understanding
6. Feelings of finding a purpose in life
7. Increase in spiritual activities
8. Increase in days worked (working more regularly, finding a job, and getting a better job)

Other changes mentioned were: spending more time with my own family, spending leisure time constructively, making a commitment to carry through with my responsibilities, paying more attention to the needs of other people, learning more about my tribe and my spiritual beliefs, going back to school to get my GED, taking care of myself, looking at the sky instead of the dirt (dreaming dreams again), and smiling a lot more often.

Carol Locust is training director for the Native American Research and Training Center at the University of Arizona College of Medicine. Her work involves counseling and employment issues with people with disabilities. She also works with traditional medicine and ceremonies as a part of current healing practices. Carol is a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Nation. This article originally appeared in *Pathways*, published by the National Indian Child Welfare Association, Inc. January 1999, [www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org). Reprinted with permission.



# Tips for Non-Natives Working with or in Native Communities

*These are some suggestions that may assist you in building positive relationships with Native families and communities. Core values such as honesty, humility, generosity, and respect are essential as well.*

**Keep in mind that you are the “stranger.”** Being “too familiar” right off will only make you seem suspicious.

**Adjust to the pace of the community.** Do not attempt to rush anything unless it’s absolutely necessary; when you realize that small communities are less dependent on the clock, you are likely to neither suffer nor inflict stress about time.

**Be respectful at all times.** Do not assume that you are right or needed, or that you should be in control. Although you will be looked at as a person in an authoritative position, don’t assume control of all situations; wait to be asked for your input.

**Listen.** Be aware of the way people communicate, how they share experiences, laughter and concerns.

**Go slowly—be aware of your actions.** Be cautious about attempts to change Native systems that are already in place. Most people in Native communities establish relationships through many years of contact and familial connections; make an effort to learn these connections and the intricacies involved with each before deciding it needs to be changed.

**Speak calmly and allow time for response.** Even when people appear to be fluent in English, translation can be an important tool to gain rapport and show respect. There are still many Native people who are bilingual, with their Native language being their primary conversational language. Although English is used with fluency when speaking to non-Native people, keep in mind that Native people often have to mentally interpret English into their language and concepts to determine a response, and then interpret it back into English to reply to you. This takes time, and can be frustrating if the provider is trying to rush a response. Native children also often may use their Native words more than English for

concepts or familiar topics; they may not be able to translate this into English. If possible, inquire about the use of Native language before making any assumptions. If you need an interpreter, ask the family or someone working with the family to identify an interpreter that they will be comfortable with.

**Explain your role and services.** Do not assume that everyone understands what you are there for. Tell them how long you expect to be there, where you’ve come from, and what your work has been in the past.

**Be personable.** Be willing to share a bit about your own family. One of the main ways Native people greet someone new is to ask who their family is. Even if you aren’t related to anyone there, people may ask about the kind of family you come from. In subsequent meetings, people may inquire about your family as a way of greeting and showing friendship.

**Avoid professional jargon.** Remember that some people may be unfamiliar with long or profession-specific words. Explain any written forms. Using commonly used, easily recognizable terms will be appreciated. Ask the client or family member to repeat critical information in their own words to be sure they understand, and provide an opportunity for clarification.

**Make yourself available.** Accept that appointments may be difficult to arrange, and even when scheduled may not always be kept. It may take several attempts. Usually in Native families and communities, family needs take priority, or an employer makes demands that prevent a person from taking time off work.

**Spend time in informal social activities with staff and tribal community members.** Talk, listen, be seen, and help out. Many of the public gatherings in Native communities are for people to meet the new people who will be either living there or spending some time there. The more familiar you are to the people the more they will be able to help you as well as let you help them.



**Be flexible.** Realize that when there is a community or cultural expectation, people may not be available, or something could change suddenly to affect availability. This is not about you, usually. If there is a death in the community, people may need to refocus on the needs of that person's family and the ceremony or other events that take place relating to death, mourning, etc. It may also be much the same if it's a particular season when certain types of food are gathered, and the timing of gathering or hunting/harvesting is dependent on natural forces. Realize that this is a way of life for the people and that they will likely put off other things that you might consider important so that they can gather the foods to see their families through the long winter months.

**Develop relationships** with the local staff who can help you learn about culturally appropriate service approaches. Ask for feedback and don't let yourself become isolated. Get to know the people you are working with, especially those who are from the community or have been there a long time. If you have a question about how to deal with certain people, these resource people will usually already know what procedures work best.

**Respect traditional beliefs and practices.** Just as in any indigenous culture, there are certain Native traditional beliefs and practices that are in practice today. You may not understand these ways and may even think that some of them are not appropriate. Remember, in most cases, the people have lived with these ways for hundreds of years. Learn as much as you can about the spiritual beliefs and practices for the areas you are working in. And remember that these are lifetime traditions passed down from parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and in many cases, great-grandparents.

**Remember that spiritual matters may be private.** Do not pry. Watch, express respectful interest, and wait to be told. In some cultures it is not appropriate to allow people who are not from the community to attend or witness certain ceremonies; other cultural events may be open to everyone. It is a good idea to attend when invited, if possible. Also, spending time with and learning from the elders in any culture is always a good idea.

**Learn who is related to whom and how this affects social roles.** Also be aware of the relationship your predecessor (if applicable) had with the community and specific families. Getting the history of the people in the community through co-workers and collaborating service providers is invaluable. If the

reports involve negative comments, keep in mind that there could be a history of bad relations between certain families and/or groups of people.

**Be careful what you say about people, and remember that your attitudes and ability to honor confidentiality will be examined.** If you are new to a community, there is a certain basic trust that you are granted as you begin to work with the people. Native people will usually give you the benefit of the doubt at first. This is why you must understand relationships and social structures as well: Even among co-workers, the person you are speaking with may be related to the person you are discussing. Your ability to keep information confidential will be scrutinized frequently; it is critical that you establish plainly and visibly that *you will not ever release or voice* any confidential information, especially embarrassing information, to the general public. If you have a comfortable attitude about the community, it will be transferred to its members and they will be more willing to come to you for help.

## **WHEN WORKING WITH TRAUMATIZED NATIVE CHILDREN & THEIR NON-OFFENDING FAMILY MEMBERS, I WILL . . .**

Acknowledge that Native peoples are *not* all the same.

Acknowledge that my own heritage and history impacts how I view others.

Respect the historical basis for Native distrust of the non-Native system.

Acknowledge that I may make the child and the family uncomfortable because they are not used to dealing with strangers about intimate and personal issues.

Ask questions and do research to understand the child's specific heritage, including primary and secondary language, special events and celebrations, religious beliefs, extended family network, and community demographics.

Seek input and advice from Native people of that culture to be sure I understand the child's context and recognize all support systems available to the child.

Recognize that cultural protocols, rather than willful disrespect or lack of cooperation, most often guide unspoken behavior. For example, it may be disrespectful for an adult or child to look directly at the person talking to them. ("Eye contact" protocol is *not* universally the same for all Native people, so be



aware of the possibility that lack of eye contact may also indicate fear and distrust.)

Accept that the family and the tribe may have different values and beliefs than I do (such as a definition of family that is much broader than the “nuclear family” concept).

Recognize that some Native parents are disconnected from their heritage, and refrain from drawing conclusions about their commitment to their child based on an apparent lack of involvement with their culture or extended family (if applicable).

Look at the *long-term* social, emotional, spiritual and identity needs of Native children vs. only their short-term needs while involved with “the system.”

Prepared by Diane Payne, children’s justice specialist, and Mona Evan, program assistant, Tribal Law & Policy Institute, 4201 Tudor Center Drive, Suite 225, Anchorage, AK 99508, 907-770-1950, [www.tribal-institute.org](http://www.tribal-institute.org).



# Advocating for the Best Interest of Native Children

By Diane Payne

*It is the policy of this nation to protect the best interest of Indian children . . .*

*States have often failed to recognize the essential tribal relations of Indian people and the cultural and social standards prevailing in Indian communities and families.*

## **AS A CASA/GAL VOLUNTEER ADVOCATING FOR THE BEST INTEREST OF THE NATIVE CHILD, I WILL:**

- Recognize that I have a critical role as an advocate for a Native child.
- Help all parties involved understand the federal mandates under the Indian Child Welfare Act and the additional requirements of those mandates.
- Recognize and support that Native children have a *right and a need* to be connected to their heritage in order to reach their full potential as adults.
- Recognize that Native peoples are not all the same, and seek to understand the child's unique heritage.
- Acknowledge that my own heritage and history impacts how I view others.
- Advocate for the child's citizenship rights within their tribe as well as their day-to-day basic needs.
- Look at the long-term social, emotional, spiritual, and identity needs of the Native child, rather than only their short-term needs while involved in "the system."

## **IN REPRESENTING THE INTERESTS OF A NATIVE CHILD, I WILL:**

- Understand and respect the long-standing historical basis for the bias that many Native people have against social services.

- Recognize that I have a unique opportunity to create a trusting relationship with the child's tribe that will benefit the child.
- Solicit the input of the child's tribe in all decisions—placement, services, visitation, and permanency.

## **AS A CASA/GAL VOLUNTEER, I WILL:**

- Advocate for reunification while encouraging development of relationships with possible tribal placements and extended family members.
- Advocate for cultural activities and opportunities that will help the child develop a healthy self-identity.
- Recognize that while some Native parents are disconnected from their heritage, it is in the child's best interest to be reconnected.
- Accept that the child's tribe has a right to be involved in all proceedings.
- Develop and promote understanding between the tribe and other parties to protect the child's interests.
- Serve as an information link and liaison between the tribal and state worlds.
- Support transfer of jurisdiction to tribal courts.

## **ADVOCATING FOR A NATIVE CHILD MEANS:**

- Seeking to understand and accepting the different values and beliefs of the child's tribe.
- Seeking to understand and promoting application of the child's culture to critical definitions—such as "extended family."
- Ensuring case planning and services take into account cultural needs of the child and family.



**I understand that the Indian Child Welfare Act is based on the special political rights of tribes. The standards in ICWA represent *minimum* federal standards that *must* be followed to protect Native children.**

By Diane Payne, children's justice specialist, Tribal Law and Policy Institute. Adapted from the presentation "ICWA Practice for CASAs," presented at the state CASA conferences in Washington and Alaska.



# White Privilege—Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

By Peggy McIntosh

Through work to bring materials from Women's Studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women's status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials which amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages which men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege which was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in Women's Studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "Having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?"

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of

color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow "them" to be more like "us."

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions which I think in my case attach *somewhat more to skin-color privilege* than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographical location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can see, my African American co-workers, friends and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place, and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.



6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
12. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race.
19. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
23. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
25. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.
26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience which I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these perquisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions which were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turf, and I was among those who could control the turf. *My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make.* I could think of myself as belonging in major ways, and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made inconfident, uncomfortable, and



alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit in turn upon people of color.

For this reason, the word “privilege” now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work to systematically overempower certain groups. Such privilege simply *confers dominance* because of one’s race or sex.

I want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred systemically. Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups.

We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantages which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an *unearned entitlement*. At present, since only a few have it, it is an *unearned advantage* for them. This paper results from a process of coming to see that some of the power which I originally saw as attendant on being a human being in the U.S. consisted in *unearned advantage* and *conferred dominance*.

I have met very few men who are truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance and if so, what we will do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the U.S. think that racism doesn’t affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see “whiteness” as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and dangers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantaging associated with them should not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage which rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex and ethnic identity than on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977 continues to remind us eloquently.

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms which we can see and embedded forms which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the systems won’t be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitudes. [But] a “white” skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that *systems* of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power, and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Though systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and I imagine for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching



men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.

Peggy McIntosh is associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. This essay is excerpted from her working paper, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies," copyright © 1988 by Peggy McIntosh. Available for \$4.00 from address below. The paper includes a longer list of privileges. Permission to excerpt or reprint must be obtained from Peggy McIntosh, Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley, MA 02181; 781-283-2500. Article published in *Peace and Freedom*, July/August 1989.



# Heterosexual Privilege

By Linda Ketner

In 1989, Peggy McIntosh published an article, “White Privilege,” dealing with the unacknowledged privileges of being white. Her view was that among Caucasians, there were many special and unearned assets that accrued because of their skin color—assets that could be counted on each day, but about which white people remained largely oblivious.

Her premise intrigued me and I began thinking about heterosexuals and the many unearned assets and advantages accorded them based on their sexual orientation. Having “passed” for heterosexual for many years before “coming out,” I knew firsthand.

Heterosexual privilege, like white privilege, seems to operate largely unconsciously, with no malice. There are everyday ways in which heterosexual people enjoy unearned privilege without even recognizing their advantages.

Below you’ll find an abbreviated list of some daily effects of heterosexual privilege—advantages that attach somewhat more to sexual orientation than to skin color, class, religion, or geographical location.

## IF I AM A HETEROSEXUAL . . .

1. I can go into a music store and find the language of my sexual orientation represented in the lyrics.
2. Television and movies reflect my relationships in widely diverse and nonstereotypical ways.
3. My children are given texts and information at school that validate my sexual orientation.
4. Society encourages me to marry and celebrates my commitment.
5. As a responsible and loving parent, I won’t lose my children in a custody battle because of my sexual orientation.
6. I can easily buy postcards, books, greeting cards, and magazines featuring relationships like mine.
7. I don’t have to worry about being fired or denied housing because of my sexual orientation.
8. I can be sure that if my spouse is in the hospital and incapacitated, I can visit and will be consulted about any decisions that need to be made.
9. Insurance provided by my employer covers my spouse and children.
10. Hand-holding with my love is seen as acceptable and endearing.
11. I can serve my country in the military without lying or keeping silent about my family.
12. I can keep pictures of my loved one on my desk at work without fear of reprisal.
13. I will receive all of my deceased spouse’s estate, tax-free.
14. I never need to change pronouns when describing the events of my life in order to protect my job, my family, or my friendships.
15. If I’m a teenager, I can enjoy dating, first loves, and all the social approval of learning to love appropriately.
16. If I’m called to work with children or to serve God (in most denominations), I don’t have to violate my integrity and lie in order to keep my job.
17. As a responsible and loving adult, I can adopt without lying about my sexual orientation.
18. I feel welcomed and accepted in my church.
19. I can be certain that my children won’t be harassed because of my sexual orientation.
20. I can count on a community of friends, strangers, and institutions to celebrate my love and my family, mourn my losses, and support my relationships.

Certainly, none of the “privileges” listed for heterosexuals should be denied to the holders. Expectations that neighbors will be decent to you and



that your sexual orientation will not cost you your job, your children, or your life should be the norm in any principled society.

Having spent a great deal of my life fighting for the rights of other groups, in 1994, I “came out” as a lesbian and began advocating for the rights of “my” group. Coming out is an important part of the process of eliminating heterosexual privilege, because typically there is a complicity of silence between gay people and straight friends, coworkers, or family. Some know that we’re gay, but we tacitly agree not to talk about it. As more of us begin to tell the truth of discrimination and let people see inside our lives, hopefully the response will not be sympathy, but new allies in our struggle for social justice and civil rights.

I believe that most heterosexuals would not choose to be entitled, but they are simply unaware of the preferential treatment they receive and the more than one thousand discriminatory laws that are aimed at homosexuals. Bringing the injustices to consciousness is the first step in correcting these violations of core American values. What will you do with such knowledge? What personal acts of courage are you willing to commit in the name of justice?

Linda Ketner is president of Alliance for Full Acceptance, a nonprofit organization of gay and straight South Carolinians working to eliminate prejudice and achieve full civil rights and social justice for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.



# The Relationship of Sexism to Other Forms of Oppression

PEOPLE OF COLOR	OLD PEOPLE & CHILDREN	POOR PEOPLE	LESBIANS & GAYS	JEWISH PEOPLE	WOMEN
<b>Isolation</b>					
Redlining. Lack of police protections and social service response.	High rises become ghettos. Separate medical care.	Housing projects. No access to transportation, childcare.	Forced to stay closeted. Some neighborhoods unsafe.	Excluded from clubs and communities. Quota systems defined which jobs were allowed.	Viewed as needing a man for protection. Women out alone seen as whores.
<b>Emotional Abuse</b>					
Racist language. Called "lazy." Whites deny worth of other cultures, ridicule other languages.	Ignored. Ideas not listened to. Talked about while present as if they aren't in room. Patronized.	Blamed for their poverty. Considered lazy.	Viewed as sexual pervers. Public taunting.	Stereotyped. Anti-Semitic remarks.	Called names. Treated as sex objects. Called dumb.
<b>Economic Abuse</b>					
Last hired. Poor paying jobs. First laid off.	Low priority for government funding. Mail fraud schemes aimed at old people.	Welfare regulations keep people down. Need for money used as pretext to invade their lives.	Discrimination in employment.	Corporate environment is anti-Jewish.	Low paying jobs, paid less than a man for the same job.
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>					
Pornography racist. No protection from rape. Seen as sex machines.	High incidence in care facilities for old and young. Children exploited in pornography, incest.	Less police protection.	Accused of child molestation. Ridiculed as not being "real" men or women.	Male attitudes toward Jewish girls as prime to be used sexually.	Rape, incest, marital rape, pornography.
<b>Privilege of Status</b>					
Access to school and job. Assumption that white culture is only one that exists.	Non-income producing, thus, non-productive, thus, not part of the mainstream.	Middle-class values seen as most valid and important.	Heterosexuality is openly displayed; considered flaunting by gays.	Non-recognition of Jewish holidays; assumption of Christianity.	Subservient to men. Bible used as a tool to keep women in their place.
<b>Threats</b>					
Police brutality.	Threat of violence. Complaints not taken seriously.	Social workers threaten to terminate benefits.	Police harassment.	Swastikas painted on synagogues.	Threats of harm.
<b>Using Children</b>					
Less investigation before termination of parental rights.		Welfare threatens to take children to gain compliance.	Taken away in custody battles.		Economic security bargained away in exchange for custody in divorce.
<b>Intimidation</b>					
Police stops and checks. More arrests.	Elderly fear being out at night. Easy targets.	Court system works differently for those who can't afford attorneys.	Homophobia rarely challenged publicly. AIDS seen as homosexual disease.		Police don't protect women.
<b>Violence</b>					
Genocide, lynching, "Trail of Tears," police brutality.	Spanking. Sexually abusing kids. Mugging elders.	Hospitals won't admit critically ill. Slum buildings burn, killing people.	Gay bashing. Gay killings.	Burn synagogues. Denial of Holocaust. "Night of Broken Glass."	Battering, rape.

Adapted from the manual *In Our Best Interest: A Process for Personal and Social Change*. Available through Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 202 East Superior St., Duluth, MN 55802.



# Sexual Orientation Development

Sexual orientation is one component of a person's identity, which is made up of many other components, such as culture, ethnicity, gender, and personality traits. Sexual orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction that a person feels toward another person. Sexual orientation falls along a continuum. In other words, someone does not have to be exclusively homosexual or heterosexual, but can feel varying degrees of attraction for both genders. Sexual orientation develops across a person's lifetime—different people realize at different points in their lives that they are heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Sexual behavior does not necessarily equate to sexual orientation. Many adolescents—as well as many adults—may identify themselves as homosexual or bisexual without having had any sexual experience. Other young people have had sexual experiences with a person of the same gender, but do not consider themselves to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual. This is particularly relevant during adolescence because it is a time for experimentation—a hallmark of this developmental period.

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents follow a developmental path that is both similar to and quite different from that followed by heterosexual adolescents. All teenagers face certain developmental challenges, such as developing social skills, thinking about career choices, and fitting into a peer group. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth must also cope with prejudiced, discriminatory, and violent behavior and messages in their families, schools, and communities. Such behavior and messages negatively affect the health, mental health, and education of lesbian, gay, and bisexual young people. These students are more likely than heterosexual students to report missing school due to fear, being threatened by other students, and having their property damaged at school.<sup>1</sup> The promotion of “reparative therapy” and “transformational ministry” is likely to exacerbate the risk of harassment, harm, and fear.

For these reasons, the experience of gay, lesbian, and bisexual teenagers is often one of isolation, fear of stigmatization, and lack of peer or familial support. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth have few opportunities for observing positive modeling by adults due to the general cultural bias that makes gay, lesbian, and bisexual people largely invisible. It is this isolation and lack of support that accounts in part for the higher rates of emotional distress,<sup>2</sup> suicide attempts,<sup>3</sup> and risky sexual behavior and substance use<sup>4</sup> that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students report compared to heterosexual students.

Because of their legitimate fear of being harassed or hurt, gay, lesbian, or bisexual youth are less likely to ask for help. Thus, it is important that their environments be as open and accepting as possible, so these young people will feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and concerns. To be able to provide an accepting environment, school personnel need to understand the nature of sexual orientation development and be supportive of healthy development for all youth.

“Coming out” refers to the process of acknowledging one's gay, lesbian, or bisexual attractions and identity to oneself and disclosing them to others. This process is different for every teenager; however, most adolescents disclose their sexual orientation to others in the following order: other gay, lesbian, and bisexual peers, close heterosexual peers, close family members, and finally, parents.<sup>5</sup>

Many people wonder why gay, lesbian, and bisexual teenagers and adults feel the need to “come out,” i.e., disclose their sexual orientation to others. This is actually the expression of a normal tendency to want to share personal information about oneself with important others, and should be treated as such by those around the gay, lesbian, or bisexual adolescent. It is healthy for teenagers to share with friends and families their latest crush or how they spent their weekend. This process, however, is often quite difficult for the gay, lesbian, or bisexual adolescent, because



there is a strong (and well-founded) fear of being rejected by others.

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From the web document "Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation and Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators and School Personnel," [www.apa.org/pi/lgbcfacts.pdf](http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbcfacts.pdf), retrieved March 5, 2007. This paper was under revision at press time. Copyright by the American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.



# GLBTQ Youth

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender\* and questioning (GLBTQ) youth face tremendous difficulties in a society where heterosexuality often seems the only acceptable orientation, homosexuality is regarded as deviant, and variation from cultural concepts of “normal gender” often evokes hostility or violence. Research shows that homophobia and heterosexism greatly contribute to GLBTQ youth’s high rates of attempted and completed suicide, violence victimization, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and HIV-associated risky behaviors. However, some programs offer GLBTQ youth the skills and support they need to develop into healthy adults.

## **AWARENESS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER COMES EARLY.**

- Research suggests that sexual orientation is likely determined during early childhood.<sup>2</sup> Prospective studies indicate that many gay and lesbian youth self-identify at about age 16, and that their first awareness of homosexual attraction occurred at about age nine for males and 10 for females.<sup>2</sup>
- Awareness of the biological differences between boys and girls occurs by age three. Regarding gender identity—a person’s innate sense of maleness or femaleness—transgender people report experiencing conflict over their gender assignment throughout childhood and adolescence.<sup>3</sup>

## **OPEN GLBTQ IDENTITY CAN MEAN FAMILY REJECTION AND MAKE SCHOOL DANGEROUS.**

- After coming out to their family or being discovered, many GLBTQ youth are thrown out of their home, mistreated, or made the focus of their family’s dysfunction.<sup>4</sup>
- In one nationwide survey, over 84 percent of GLBTQ students reported verbal harassment at

school. Over 39 percent of all gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth reported being punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon at school because of their sexual orientation while 55 percent of transgender youth reported physical attacks because of their gender identity or gender expression.<sup>5</sup>

- The consequences of physical and verbal abuse directed at GLBTQ students include truancy, dropping out of school, poor grades, and having to repeat a grade. In one study, 28 percent of gay and bisexual youth dropped out of school due to peer harassment.<sup>4</sup>

## **GLBTQ YOUTH OF COLOR FACE ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES.**

Up to 46 percent of GLBTQ youth of color report experiencing physical violence related to their sexual orientation.<sup>5</sup> Nearly 45 percent of youth in one survey were verbally harassed in school regarding sexual orientation and race/ethnicity.<sup>5</sup>

## **GLBTQ YOUTH LACK POSITIVE ROLE MODELS, USE SUBSTANCES TO HELP COPE.**

Positive community support and role models for GLBTQ adolescents are minimal, and many adults fear discrimination, job loss, and abuse if they openly support GLBTQ youth.<sup>6</sup>

GLBTQ youth often internalize negative societal messages regarding sexual orientation and suffer from self-hatred as well as from social and emotional isolation. They may use substances to manage stigma and shame, to deny same-sex sexual feelings, and/or as a defense against ridicule and violence.<sup>2</sup>

## **GLBTQ YOUTH MAY TAKE SEXUAL RISKS AND/OR ATTEMPT SUICIDE.**

In a recent survey, 33 percent of gay, lesbian, and bisexual high school students reported attempting



suicide in the previous year, compared to eight percent of their heterosexual peers;<sup>7</sup> in another study, gay and bisexual males were nearly four times more likely to attempt suicide than were their straight peers.<sup>8</sup>

In one study of 15- to 22-year-old men who have sex with men, 23 percent reported having had at least five male sex partners in the past six months and 41 percent reported unprotected anal sex. Seventeen percent of men of mixed race/ethnicity and black background were HIV-infected, as were 14 percent of African Americans/blacks, 13 percent of men of mixed race/ethnicity, and seven percent of Hispanics. HIV prevalence among whites and Asian Americans was three percent each.<sup>9</sup> In another study, nearly 17 percent of bisexual women reported unprotected vaginal or anal sex with a man during the last two months.<sup>10</sup>

### SOME POSITIVE TRENDS EXIST.

In one recent poll, more than half of adults supported protecting the civil rights of GLBTQ people.<sup>11</sup> In another survey, 95 percent of youth supported expanding current hate crimes laws to cover gender and sexual orientation.<sup>12</sup>

A recent study of GLBTQ youth who received gay-sensitive HIV prevention education in school showed they engaged in less risky sexual behavior than similar youth who did not receive such instruction.<sup>13</sup>

\* An umbrella term for all who challenge the boundaries of biological sex and culturally determined gender expression; those who choose not to conform to their culture's gender norms, including transsexuals, cross dressers, Two-Spirit people, drag performers, and people who do not identify with their biological sex.<sup>1</sup>

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Excerpted from "GLBTQ Youth: The Facts,"  
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# LGBTQ Youth in the Foster Care System

At any one time there are approximately 260,000 adolescent youth in the foster care system in the United States.<sup>1</sup> While it is impossible to precisely determine the number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) youth in this system, recent studies suggest that these youth make up between 5 and 10 percent of the total foster youth population.<sup>2</sup> The actual percentage may be higher since LGBTQ youth are over-represented in the foster care pool because of discrimination and abuse many of these youth face in their families of origin and in their schools.<sup>3</sup> In a terrible irony, many of these youth—as many as 78% as indicated in a recent study—endure further harassment or abuse after being placed in out-of-home care.<sup>4</sup> As a result, some LGBTQ youth run away from their placements, preferring to live on the street rather than in homophobic or transphobic settings where they are in danger of harassment or violence.

## HOW LGBTQ YOUTH ENTER THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

Because of homophobia and transphobia in their homes, schools, and social settings, LGBTQ youth enter the foster care system at a disproportionate rate.

- Many LGBTQ youth face neglect or abuse from their families of origin because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. A recent study found that over 30% of LGBT youth reported suffering physical violence at the hands of a family member after coming out.<sup>5</sup>
- Because of lack of acceptance and abuse by their families of origin, many LGBTQ youth are removed from their homes or found to be “throwaways” by child protection agencies and placed in the foster care system.<sup>6</sup>
- In addition, many LGBTQ youth—26% according to one study—are forced to leave their families of origin as a result of conflicts with their parents regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>7</sup>
- Some LGBTQ youth enter the system for skipping or dropping out of school—steps some youth take to avoid the pervasive harassment and discrimination they face in school.<sup>8</sup> A recent study found that over 80% of LGBTQ students reported verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation or gender identity while at school and nearly 70% reported feeling unsafe.<sup>9</sup> According to another recent study, 20% percent of LGBTQ youth reported skipping school each month because of fear for their own safety.<sup>10</sup> And another study found that 28% of LGB youth dropped out of school due to peer harassment.<sup>11</sup>
- As a result of lack of acceptance and abuse in the home and at school, a disproportionate number of youth living on the streets are LGBTQ. The National Network of Runaway and Youth Services estimates that between 20–40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ.<sup>12</sup>

## LGBTQ YOUTH EXPERIENCES IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

Once in the foster care system, LGBTQ youth are often neglected and/or discriminated against by facility staff and peers, facilitated by inadequate policies, protections, support services and staff sensitivity.

- Few foster care facilities have policies prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity or provide training for staff on how to create safe and welcoming environments for LGBTQ youth.
- “Coming out as a lesbian in your teens isn’t easy no matter where you are, but in my group home, I was treated differently from other residents. My actions were monitored more closely. I was told not to talk about my personal life . . . I was told that I was confused, and I frequently heard anti-lesbian slurs, which staff members did not attempt to stop.”<sup>13</sup>*
- Many LGBTQ youth in the foster care system experience verbal harassment and physical or



sexual abuse because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In one of the only studies of its kind, 100% of LGBTQ youth in New York City group homes reported that they were verbally harassed while at their group home and 70% reported physical violence due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>14</sup> This abuse is perpetrated not only by youth peers, but also by facility staff and social workers. When the abuse is between peers, it either is condoned by facility staff or goes unchallenged.

*“I had at least two fights a day. The boys used to do stupid things like throw rocks at me or put bleach in my food because I was gay. Once I was thrown down a flight of stairs, and I’ve had my nose broken twice. They even ripped up the only picture of my mother that I had.”<sup>15</sup>*

- One study found that 78% of the LGBTQ youth were removed or ran away from their foster placements as a result of hostility toward their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>16</sup> 56% of LGBTQ youth interviewed in a New York City study of LGBTQ youth in foster care spent time living on the streets because they felt “safer” there than they did living in their group or foster home.<sup>17</sup>

*“I left in the morning for school. When I came back to go to my room, somebody had spray painted the word faggot on the door. . . . The staff didn’t do nothing much but laugh when I told them.” Afraid for his safety, this youth went AWOL and was homeless for a year.<sup>18</sup>*

When LGBTQ youth are harassed or discriminated against, foster care facilities sometimes respond by moving the LGBTQ youth to another—often more restrictive—facility or isolating them rather than addressing the underlying homophobia or transphobia.<sup>19</sup>

- LGBTQ youth are also sometimes segregated or put in isolation based on a myth that LGBTQ youth will “prey” on other youth.

*“After my foster mother found out that I was a lesbian, she told my social worker that she didn’t want me in her house. She was afraid I would try something with her 12-year-old biological daughter.”<sup>20</sup>*

- This segregation not only reinforces the notion that the LGBTQ youth is bad or to blame for harassment directed at them, but can also result

in further denial of access to resources and support.

- Facilities often discipline LGBTQ youth for engaging in age-appropriate conduct that would not be punishable if between two youth of different sexes.

*“A straight person could bring a girl over and take her to his room in the group home and nothing would happen. But if two gay kids got caught, it would be like somebody blew up the house.”<sup>21</sup>*

- LGBTQ youth are sometimes subjected to reparative or conversion therapy (overt attempts to change one’s sexual orientation) by foster care staff and/or social workers.<sup>22</sup>

*“They had a behavior modification kind of program. Like, I could get a day pass or a weekend pass if I spent the afternoon playing football. They knew I was gay and that was the lifestyle I wanted, but they thought maybe they could change me.”<sup>23</sup>*

1. According to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, and the Children’s Bureau on September 30, 2001 there were 542,000 kids in foster care in the United States. The median age for these kids was 10.6 years old. Approximately 49% or 260,475 were over the age of 11. Statistics available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/afcars/report8.htm> (last visited December 2, 2003).
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4. See Urban Justice Center, *Justice for All? A Report on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Youth in the New York Juvenile Justice System* 16 (2001) (hereinafter *Justice for All*) (citing Joint Task Force of New York City’s Child Welfare Administration and the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies, *Improving Services for Gay and Lesbian youth in NYC’s Child Welfare System: A Task Force Report* [1994] [hereinafter *New York Task Force Report*]).
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15. Al Desetta, *In the System and In the Life: A Guide for Teens and Staff to the Gay Experience in Foster Care*, 46–47 (2003) (hereinafter *In the System*).
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18. *In the System*, at 50.
19. See *Youth in the Margins*, at 15; Gerald P. Mallon, *We Don't Exactly Get the Welcome Wagon: The Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Adolescents in Child Welfare Systems* (1998).
20. *In the System*, at 60.
21. *Id.* at 51.
22. See *Youth in the Margins*, at 9.
23. Wendell Ricketts, *Lesbians and Gay Men as Foster Parents* 122 (1991).

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# Gender Variance: A Primer

Transgendered people are perhaps the most stigmatized and misunderstood of the larger sexual minorities (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender). In order to better understand transgendered people, it is useful to make a sharp distinction between two terms that are often used interchangeably. **Sex** is the anatomy and biology that determines whether one is male, female, or intersexed (formerly called *hermaphroditic*). **Gender** is a psychosocial construct most people use to classify a person as male, female, both, or neither.

**Gender Identity** is a person's sense of their own gender, which is communicated to others by their **Gender Expression**. Since most people conform to societal gender norms, they have a Gender Identity congruent with their Gender Expression. However, Gender, like sexuality, is *fluid* and can change over time, in individuals and in human society. For some people, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and sex do not correspond with each other. Those who cannot or choose not to conform to societal gender norms associated with their physical sex are **Gender Variant**.

**Transgender** is an umbrella term used to describe Gender Variant people who have gender identities, expressions or behaviors not traditionally associated with their birth sex. Transgender is preferred over *transvestite* or *transsexual*, older terms which do not accurately describe all transgendered people, and which also have a clinical or stigmatizing connotation. Transgender also can mean anyone who *transcends* the conventional definitions of "man" and "woman." Thus transgender also can include Butch Lesbians, Radical Faeries, Drag Queens, Drag Kings and many other kinds of gender variant people who use a variety of terms to self-identify.

Transgendered people are often categorized by their **Gender Vector**: Male-to-Female (MTF), or Female-to-Male (FTM). Although transsexual women (MTFs) have dominated the public's perception of transsexualism and transgenderism, there may be just as many transsexual men (FTMs) and female-bodied transgendered people. There also are transgendered

people who do not believe in gender at all, seeing many possibilities beyond the male-female binary system for living their lives and expressing themselves.

Transgender is often mistakenly understood to mean **Transsexual**. Transsexual men (FTMs) and transsexual women (MTFs) actually comprise a minority within the transgender community. They feel profoundly unhappy with their bodies and gender norms associated with their birth sex. This unhappiness, combined with feelings of frustration and anger, are all symptoms of **Gender Dysphoria**, a psychological condition commonly associated with transgendered as well as transsexual people. In order to seek relief from their Gender Dysphoria, transsexual men and women go through **Gender Transition**, in order to live full-time in the gender that corresponds with their Gender Identity.

While in transition, most transsexual people take hormones (clinically, this is called **Hormonal Sex Reassignment**) to develop the secondary sexual characteristics that reflect their chosen gender. Some undergo surgical procedures to modify their bodies in different ways. The proper term for the "sex change operation" is **Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)**. Both hormonal and surgical sex reassignment are generally obtained by following a set of guidelines called the **Standards of Care**, promulgated by the **Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA)**, an international group of sexologists, psychotherapists, physicians, attorneys and social scientists. Hormonal and Surgical Sex Reassignment, along with other cosmetic surgical procedures, psychotherapy and speech therapy are all parts of **Transgender Care**, which is typically not covered by health insurance plans. Moreover, the sensitivity and awareness of medical providers are very important concerns for transgendered people when accessing routine health care.

However, it is important to remember that most transgendered people do *not* alter their physical anatomy. Those who live full time in genders not associated with their physical sex and take only



hormones may identify themselves as **Transgenderists** or simply **Transgenderers**. Still others who self-identify as **Stone Butch** or **No-ho/No-op** live full time without hormonal therapy and sex reassignment surgery. The largest single group of transgendered people are **Crossdressers** (formerly called transvestites) who wear opposite-gender clothing. Crossdressers are usually heterosexual men who crossdress privately, but there also are women who crossdress. Many transgendered youth prefer the term **Gender Queer** to describe themselves.

**Intersexed** people (formerly called *hermaphrodites*) are born with chromosomal and/or physiological anomalies, and/or ambiguous genitalia. Many intersexed infants born with ambiguous genitalia are surgically “normalized” at the wishes of their anxious parents, a controversial procedure which later results in loss of sexual response in adulthood. The Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) has called this practice Infant Genital Mutilation. Some intersexed infants have even been sexually reassigned—without their consent—and later in life develop gender identity issues strikingly similar to those of transsexual people. Some undergo SRS as adults, but their medical procedures may be covered by health insurance plans.

It’s easy to become confused about the **Sexual Orientations** of transgendered people. Many refer to their sexual orientations on the basis of their gender identity, without regard to their existing or former (if a postoperative transsexual) anatomy. Others identify themselves as gay or lesbian, because of cultural reasons or affinity needs, while still others refuse to classify their sexual orientation. However, due to **Trans-ignorance**, transgendered people are often misperceived to be gay or lesbian because of their appearance, which is often that of a masculine woman or a feminine man—the cultural gendered stereotypes of lesbians and gay men.

Because this misperception is so pervasive, transgendered people often become victims of homophobia, which many of them call **Transphobia**. How much Transphobia they encounter is a function of **Passing Privilege**—which allows its possessors to pass as non-transgendered. Some but not all transgendered people who seek to live full-time can gain passing privilege, through the medical technologies of Transgender Care. However, it can take years to affect these physiological changes, as well as to adapt to new social roles. Transgender Care also is commonly quite difficult to obtain, due to the lack of willing providers, the lack of health insurance coverage, and its expense. All of these reasons explain why transgendered people are particularly subject to a disproportionate amount of anti-gay violence and discrimination.

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# Tips for Working with Transgendered People

- 1. Outing:** Remember that revealing the transgendered status of any transgendered person without his or her expressed permission is outing that person, and it has the same potential for harm as outing a gay man, lesbian, or bisexual man or woman. Outing is Invasion of Privacy.
- 2. Appearance:** Do not assume that someone who appears to be crossdressed is a “transvestite.” Someone who appears to be crossdressed to you may or may not be living full-time in their presenting gender, or they may intend to do so in the future. The appropriate term for someone who engages in crossdressing on an occasional basis is “crossdresser.”

*Usage Tips:* Instead of the stigmatizing “transvestite,” use “male crossdresser” or “female crossdresser” if it’s clear that they are not living full-time nor intend to do so.
- 3. Living Status:** If a transgendered person is living full-time in a gender not associated with their birth sex (i.e., someone who appears to be a “man living as a woman” or a “woman living as a man”), that person should be referred to at all times with terms appropriate to their presenting gender, regardless of their surgical status or body state (see below).

*Usage Tips:* “Transgendered woman” is appropriate for male-to-female persons.  
“Transgendered man” is appropriate for female-to-male persons.  
“Transgendered person” is appropriate for someone of either above types.  
“Transgendered people” is appropriate for mixed groups (both gender vectors).
- 4. Avoid Aspersions by Using Quotation Marks:** Never put the appropriate pronouns or possessive adjectives of transgendered persons in quotes.
- 5. Pronouns and Possessive Adjectives:** It is extremely offensive to refer to transgendered persons using pronouns and possessive adjectives that refer to their birth sex (i.e., “he” or “his” for male-to-female persons, “she” or “her” for female-to-male persons).

*Usage Tips:* At all times, use pronouns and possessive adjectives appropriate to the gender expression presented by a transgendered person. If you are uncertain, ask what they prefer. Some transgendered persons, especially transgendered youth, prefer the new pronoun “ze” (pronounced “zee”) in lieu of “he”/“she,” and the new possessive adjective “hir” (pronounced “here”) in lieu of “his”/“her.”
- 6. Self-Identification:** Transgendered people are found in all races, classes, cultures and ages, and thus some variance in terminology should be expected. Self-identification is an important personal right, and many transgendered people like to describe themselves very uniquely. Accordingly, when in doubt, just ask an individual transgendered person how they wish to be identified.

*Usage Tips:* If you’re not sure how to address someone, just ask: “Please excuse me, but I’m not sure how I should address you.” Or simply use their first name or last name. It’s sometimes customary for patients or clients in clinical situations to be asked by their last name when it’s time to see their providers.

Adapted from “Basic Tips for Health Care and Social Service Providers for Working with Transgendered People.”  
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# Books for Increasing Cultural Competence

## **BEYOND THE WHITENESS OF WHITENESS: MEMOIR OF A WHITE MOTHER OF BLACK SONS**

**By Jane Lazarre**

*Durham: Duke University Press (1997)*

Jane Lazarre is on the faculty of Writing and Literature at Eugene Lang College, at the New School for Social Research in New York. This background is clearly evident in the quality of her writing in this book. She is a Jewish woman who married an African American man, and together they raised two sons. It is the experience of seeing American society as it relates to her sons and what she learned about white privilege that makes this a very important book. This book is recommended as an important component in increasing one's knowledge about racism and sexism in America.

## **FACES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL: THE PERMANENCE OF RACISM**

**By Derrick Bell**

*New York: Basic Books (1992)*

Derrick Bell is a law professor at Harvard School of Law. He writes about racism using short fiction as his medium. He is able to create discussions about issues of racism in a way that is entertaining and thought-provoking at the same time.

## **THE MULTIRACIAL CHILD RESOURCE BOOK: LIVING COMPLEX IDENTITIES**

**Edited by Maria P. P. Root and Matt Kelley**

*Seattle: MAVIN Foundation (2003)*

This book is a comprehensive resource for anyone working with multiracial youth. Chapters cover a wide range of topics, including demographic information, health issues, identity development, discrimination, transracial and international adoption, and parenting issues.

## **OUR BABIES, OURSELVES: HOW BIOLOGY & CULTURE SHAPE THE WAY WE PARENT**

**By Meredith F. Small**

*New York: Doubleday (1999)*

Anthropologist Meredith Small explores ethnopediatrics, the study of how culture impacts parenting and child development, in order to examine how child-rearing styles across cultures affect the health and survival of infants.

## **RACISM: UNRAVELING THE FEAR**

**By Nathan Rutstein**

*Washington, DC: The Global Classroom (1997)*

This book is a frank discussion about the issues of racism and the barriers that exist to our ability to ameliorate it in our society. It is recommended for those looking for additional perspectives as they continue on their personal journeys.

## **THE SPIRIT CATCHES YOU & YOU FALL DOWN: A HMONG CHILD, HER AMERICAN DOCTORS & THE COLLISION OF TWO CULTURES**

**By Anne Fadiman**

*New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (1997)*

This nonfiction book tells the story of the Lees, a refugee family from Laos and their clash with the American medical and foster care system over the care of their daughter, Lia, who has severe epilepsy. It explores what happens when cultural awareness and cultural competency are missing from an interaction between an immigrant family and the system.



## **TEACHING/LEARNING ANTI-RACISM: A DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH**

*By Louise Derman-Sparks and Carol B. Phillips*

*New York: Teachers College Press (1997)*

This book is an excellent combination of information that will assist the reader not only in his/her own personal learning and journey, but also to better understand the issues of racism. In addition to offering practical applications for teaching, the authors include an outline and description of their class as well as responses from their students over the years.

## **TRIPPING ON THE COLOR LINE: BLACK-WHITE MULTIRACIAL FAMILIES IN A RACIALLY DIVIDED WORLD**

*By Heather M. Dalmadge*

*Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press (2000)*

Heather Dalmage uses interviews with couples in mixed-race relationships and people of mixed-race heritage to talk about race in the United States and the challenges facing people from multiracial families.

## **TWO NATIONS: BLACK & WHITE, SEPARATE, HOSTILE, UNEQUAL**

*By Andrew Hacker*

*New York: Charles Scribner's Sons (1992)*

This book describes the realities of the experiences of the races in American society. Andrew Hacker, a professor of political science at Queens College, New York, provides an informative and provocative look at the issues of race and class in America. This is a good book to help develop a clearer perspective on where we stand as a nation.

## **WE DON'T EXACTLY GET THE WELCOME WAGON: THE EXPERIENCES OF GAY & LESBIAN ADOLESCENTS IN CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS**

*By Gerald P. Mallon*

*New York: Columbia University Press (1998)*

Drawing on interviews with fifty-four gay and lesbian young people who lived in out-of-home-care child welfare settings in three North American cities—Los Angeles, New York, and Toronto—Gerald Mallon presents narratives of marginalized young people trying to find the “right fit.” Their experiences help the reader to begin to understand the discrepancies between the myths and misinformation about gay and lesbian adolescents and their realities in the out-of-home child welfare systems in which they live.

Compiled by Joan Jenkins, executive director, CIP/Connecticut CASA. Expanded for the 2007 edition.

