

# **From We to Me**

Developed by:

Jane Berdie, MSW

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**From We to Me:  
Working with Youth From a Cultural Perspective**

**SECTION I  
Orientation to Culture**

- *Welcome the group to the training, introducing yourself briefly. Explain the purpose: understanding the cultures that influence a young person is a way to better understand what motivates them and how they can best use help. Culture is the “we” of a youth’s world. The youth as an individual within the culture is the “me”. Understanding the youth within the context of his or her cultures can give the adult some new ways to think about how to frame interactions and interventions to help the young person move successfully on the path towards becoming a young adult. Cultural competence is described by James Leigh as “the ability to give assistance to clients in ways that are acceptable and useful to them.” (Refer to pre-printed flip chart.) In this training we will focus both on ways to better understand youth within the context of their culture and how to use that information in helping them.*
- *Review housekeeping items including mileage, restrooms and lunch.*
- *Tell participants that we will all introduce ourselves in a few minutes. In preparation for that, turn to Handout I-a and take a minute to think about and record some information about yourself. All of us are a part of many cultures. Identify three of your cultures – give them a name. These might be ethnicity, lifestyle, religion, work or any others. Also, all of us have been influenced by a culture which we don’t see ourselves as a part. Identify one of those also and for that one, identify how it has had an effect on your life (positive, negative or mixed). Describe the effect. After participants have had a chance to do this, introduce yourself, giving this information (three cultures you are a part of and, additionally, another culture of which you are not a part but which has had an influence on you; describe the*

*influence). Also, ask participants to give their names, jobs and counties/agencies. At the end, comment on similarities and differences of cultures identified by participants.*

➤ *Refer trainees to Handout I-b “Agenda”. Go over the blocks of time. Also refer them to Handout I-c and briefly cover the competencies for the training. Over the course of this training we will cover six areas related to a cultural perspective on working with youth in relation to independent living: 1) what a cultural perspective and what can be learned from this, 2) how developmental cognitive stages of cultural sensitivity form a foundation for how we are able to view youth from a cultural perspective, 3) an approach to learning more about a youth’s culture based on a social work interviewing technique called ‘ethnographic interviewing’, 4) what young people tend to think are important issues related to culture, 5) how to help youth find resources that are culturally relevant, and 6) how interactions and interventions can be framed based on what is known about a youth’s cultural influences.*

### **Activity I-1: Identifying Cultures**

- *Ask the group to identify **types of culture** that may affect youth. Record these on flip chart. Be sure the following are identified:*
- Ethnicity/race
  - Religion
  - Lifestyle
  - Gender and sexual orientation
  - Sports
  - Military
  - Violence
  - Youth
  - Incarceration
  - Foster care/group homes
  - Psychiatric hospitals
  - Child welfare
  - Alcohol and drugs
  - Prostitution/pimping

Ask about **subcultures**. Elicit examples, e.g., the following:

- Youth: subcultures include posers, jocks, frats, freaks, geeks, wiggers, neo hippies, mainstreamers; youth music subcultures include rap and nu metal.
- Lifestyle subcultures might overlap with other cultures such as youth culture. This might include street youth and weekend street youth for example. Drug subculture is another example.

What do you think about **how many cultures** most people have as a part of their lives? *Stress no right/wrong answer to this: purpose is to get participants thinking about the complexity of life in relation to culture and how few of us are influenced by only one culture.*

Let's identify **what about a person's life is influenced by their cultures**, e.g.,

- How they see the world, e.g., what is important, what is right and wrong, what is fun, what is shameful, what is embarrassing.
- How they want to spend their time
- What makes them feel worthwhile, important, powerful, good, bad.
- How they interact with others, particularly given their perceptions of another person's role or demeanor.
- What they eat and wear; where they live, what vehicles they have.

### **Activity I-2: How Culture Exerts Influence**

I'd like you to find a partner (get into a dyads) by picking someone whose cultures differ in at least one way from your own. In the dyad both of you will explain your cultural matrix (from Handout 1-a). Talk about and record on Handout I-a at least one characteristic of each of your three cultures that influences you in one way or another. Be specific. Be aware that you may need to really think about this – it can be a lot easier to identify the cultures you are a part of than to actually think about what the characteristics of the culture are and how they influence you. When you are listening to your

partner describe cultural influences, you may not understand fully. If so, probe, ask good questions until you do understand - because you will need to explain your partner's cultural influences to another dyad a little later. *Give them about 10 minutes. Then ask them to pair up with another dyad. In these groups of four, the partner should explain the cultural influences of his partner to the new dyad. The new dyad should ask questions so that they understand the specific influence. Only the partner who is explaining should answer. The person whose culture is being explained should wait until the end of the explanation and questions. Then his or her partner should invite this person to explain more fully, correct misperceptions, or elaborate. Allow 20 minutes for this phase.*

*Bring the group back to plenary and ask the following:*

1. When you explained your own culture, what did you experience? (Draw out feelings such as wanting to be clear, feeling unclear oneself about the specifics, not wanting to be stereotyped, wondering if other would understand the nuance).
2. When you were asking questions to better understand, what did you experience? (Draw out feelings such as not sure how to ask a question to get at precise influence, not wanting to appear ignorant or stereotyping, not wanting to invade, curiosity, and interest)
3. When you attempted to explain your partner's cultural influences to the other dyad, what did you experience? (Draw out feelings such as not sure I had it right, felt odd trying to explain something that the other person understood better than I did, wanting to do justice to what I had learned)
4. When you listened to your culture being explained, what did you experience? (Draw out feelings such as I was impressed he got it right, I was annoyed he hadn't gotten the gist of it at all, I thought I could do it faster and better myself)
5. As you listened to information about the other three people in your group, did you have ideas about how understanding their culture would help you to understand them better? How might you use this information when you interact with them next?
6. Given this experience, including the discussion we have just had, what are your thoughts about both the importance of understanding culture in terms of understanding another person and also the

process of learning about their culture? (*Draw out and emphasize the influences of cultures are not always obvious or clear cut – even to a person whose culture it is.*)

### **Activity I-3: How Culture Can Influence Youth Learning Independent Living Skills**

Like all people, youth are influenced by their cultures, sometimes overtly, and sometimes in subtle ways. Like all people they may or may not be aware of the impact of their cultures on them. Let's take a look at three youth and the adults working with them. Our main purpose here is to see if we can get a sense of **what cultural issue or dynamic may be affecting the youth's progress in transition or learning skills that will help with this.** Remember, cultural influences are often mixed with many other dynamics and issues but it can be useful to ferret out what is cultural and how it exerts influence because understanding this can give both the youth and the adult additional perspective. In addition to this main purpose, think about **how the adult in the case scenario tried to learn more about the issue.** What did he or she do to gain information and do you think they did this in a useful way?

Let's look at some case examples of how cultural influences affect how youth see issues of their lives and how they are motivated. *Explain that as a group we will all go over one example and then the participants will deal with other examples in two groups.*

*Ask them to read about Eduardo from Handout II-d, Part I only at this point. After they have read Part I, facilitate a discussion of the questions on Part I. Then, ask for one or more volunteers to read the Part II dialog (either with you or with another volunteer). Once this has been done, lead a discussion on the questions following Part 2. Record the main points on flip chart labeled "Eduardo". You will use this later, in Section V.*

*Divide the participants into small groups of 4-6 and assign each group either Handout I-e (Janice) or I-f (Thomas), giving them several pieces of flip chart paper labeled with the youth's name. Ask them to follow the same process as we just did for Eduardo. Ask them to have a recorder make notes of their discussion on the flipchart paper. Give them about 20 minutes for this. Then bring them back to plenary and go over each of the two examples. Ask the whole group to first read Part 1 of Janice and then ask the Janice group(s) to discuss their answers. Then ask on Janice group to read the dialog and discuss their answers to the questions. Facilitate input from all participants. Repeat with Thomas. Allow about 25 minutes for the processing of both examples.*

**Activity I-4: Openness to Seeing the Impact of Culture**

We can see from the last exercise some examples of how culture might affect a young person's way of learning and practicing self-sufficiency skills. For each of us, as adults who work with youth, our own ability to see cultural issues and to utilize them in working with youth rests in part in our own awareness level. Milton Bennett, an interculturist, has developed a developmental scheme for assessing our own cognitive perspective on culture.

*Go over Handout I-g. Ask for examples and give some personal ones reflecting your own development. Ask participants to evaluate their own place and progress and ask for volunteer examples. Facilitate a discussion on how being in one place or another might affect one's ability to deal with cultural issues affecting youth.*

## SECTION II

### Talking to Youth about Culture

Most of us have been trained to professionally talk with (i.e., interview) others from a perspective of individual or small group issues. Small groups might be family or peer groups. We haven't been trained to think as much about cultural issues and we haven't been trained to interview with this in mind. So, to get a grasp on how to understand and then utilize cultural issues in practice, we need an additional perspective. One such perspective comes from James Leigh, a social worker at the University of Washington who has developed an approach called "ethnographic interviewing."

#### **Activity II-1: Ethnographic interviewing overview**

Ethnographic interviewing is an approach to interviewing that attempt to understand the cultural influences on people's thoughts and behaviors. The idea is that understanding these influences helps the worker to find ways of helping the youth or family that is consistent with their world views and thus doesn't cause cognitive dissonance and is easier therefore to act on. *Refer them to Handout II-a and cover the main points from pages 1 and 2 only.*

#### **Activity II-2 Differentiating Ethnographic from Other Forms of Interviewing**

In ethnographic interviewing the idea is to first learn about the culture and then find out how the culture influences the individual. So, it's important to ask questions about the culture(s) first. Let's see if you can identify the difference – when a question is about culture, when it is about individuals, and when it is bridging from one to the other. *Ask for a volunteer to help you read dialogs to demonstrate several approaches to interviewing. Refer them to Handout II-2 to follow the dialogs. See if you can identify which approach is being used, individual or cultural. What are the indicators?*

*Read the dialogs form Handout II-b. After each, ask the participants whether it is an example of a cultural or individual focused interview and what are the indicators.*

Example 1 is cultural.



Example 2 is personal. It MAY have cultural origins but the worker has not explored this.

In Example 3 the worker first clarifies the cultural information and then asks about how the cultural and the personal conform.

### **ACTIVITY II- 3: When A Cultural Focus Can Be Helpful**

Omitting a cultural perspective can lead to poor assessments and planning as well as missed opportunities to connect with clients, that is, build a working relationship. Let's look at a couple of cases where that happened. Read the first example on Handout (*Lead a discussion on what was lost using the Trainer Notes below. Then do the same for the other example.*)

**Example 1:** Jack and the Ellisons could benefit from talking to Melissa about the church. It is possible that the church has some specific values and beliefs about children and young people lying and about how parents should respond. For instance, the church doctrine could be that lying is a direct blasphemy against God and that punishment is the only means to expiate the child. It would be important to know how Melissa feels about all of this. She may agree and thus feel that she was saved by the spanking. She may totally disagree. She may be ambivalent. It is likely, though, that this issue about what her mother's church believes about lying and punishment is having a real impact on Melissa and may be standing in the way of her being able to communicate with the Ellisons and Jack and to be able to work on other issues.

**Example 2:** It would make sense for the adults working with Rose to get a better handle on the influence of the gang. Even if it is true that she has had no contact with them, there well may be a real influence at work. Gang experts say there has been a precipitous rise in girl gangs in recent years, particularly Hispanic and Asian girl gangs. (*See Juvenile Justice Bulletin March 2001, an issue on female gangs – tell them this appears as a web site in a later handout on resources*). While gangs vary greatly, the grip of the gang on girls is generally as strong as it is on boys. Most girls who join gangs have been abused at home, often sexual abuse. They are likely to make pledges of fidelity to sister members of the gang as well as to male

gangs with whom they are affiliated. Rose's behavior may reflect allegiances that she has to the gang and beliefs that she has that come from the gang. Even if she has had no recent contact, she may be highly influenced by loyalty and shared beliefs.

#### **ACTIVITY II-4: Key Terms in Ethnographic Interviewing**

Before we go into the steps of ethnographic interviewing, let's go over the key terms. Look at Handout II-d and I'll read each definition and we will talk about it. *(Read and lead brief discussion using the examples given and from your own experience.)*

#### **ACTIVITY II-5: The Steps of an Ethnographic Interview**

To cover the steps of an ethnographic interview, we are going to follow a case and see some of what happens and how the information is used. We'll be working off of two handouts: II-a, starting on page 3 goes over each of the steps of a formal step-by-step approach to ethnographic interviewing and Handout II-e is an example. While in actual practice you may not use such a formal approach, it helps to know what the model is, so we will cover it with all the steps. I'd like a volunteer to read with me from a dialog, handout II-e.

Let's start by going over the first step and then listening to a dialog (or monolog in the case of the first step). Our example will be an Angla worker with a Native American youth as her client.

Now let's see this in action. *First cover each step from Handout II-a and then read from the same step in the dialog in Handout II-e. Preface each step by repeating the name of the step and its purpose).*

*Lead discussion on each step and note key ideas on flip chart.*

### **Section III**

## **Young People's Views of What is Important About Culture**

The Youth Theater Project working with the Independent Living Training Project met at one point to talk about what they saw as important issues for workers and out of home care providers to understand about cultural issues facing youth. We will see the tape in a minute. You will see several youth, all of whom have been in foster care and are working on the Theater Project. You will also see several adults working with them. You may recognize Valerie Jenkins who works at State DHS on youth programs. The others are adults working at Metro State College on this project.

As you watch this tape, watch for what these youth see as important issues about how culture affects them and other youth (write on the flip):

- What cultures do they talk about to?
- What do they see as examples of stereotyping?
- What do they see as examples of prejudice?
- How does knowing what they think is important influence your ideas about working with youth around cultural issues?

Facilitate a discussion about what they saw.

## **SECTION IV CULTURAL RESOURCES FOR WORKING WITH YOUTH**

One of the things we know about helping youth along their paths of transition is that a variety of other people and resources can be useful in helping youth learn, in making connections and in serving as role models. Other people and resources may offer support and help that are different than that which is usually provided by caseworkers, IL workers, and out of home care providers. This is especially true for potential helpers who share a culture with a youth. However, it can be difficult to find these resources because not all of them are as well known as traditional resources. Also, cultural resources may be less available in some areas of the state than others. Others may not be particularly useful for young people.

Some youth tend to find their own resources on the internet: remember Thomas and the chat room he found for gay youth.

Finding resources often means going beyond the United Way resource directory, although that is a good place to start. Often it means calling traditional organizations and asking not only what they provide but what other organizations or individuals they know about who provide help or information. For instance, PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) may be able to refer you to not only their own support groups for youth and for their parents or foster parents, but also to churches and community college-based youth groups for gays and lesbians. AT CDHS both Meg Williams and Val Jenkins have a good working knowledge of resources for youth around the state. Increasingly, national and Denver metro area groups have 800 numbers and websites as well as resource directories and internet links to other groups (some of them local) which offer services. For instance in Denver the Colorado Youth at Risk Program maintains a crisis referral service for both the metro area and other parts of the state. However, often the best local directory is compiled and updated by county DSS staff who work with youth

### **Activity IV-1      Brainstorming Possible Resources**

Take a look at Handout IV-a. It is a matrix of common cultures that influence youth. A couple resources, some suggested by advisors to this training, are filled in. Work with a partner for about 10 minutes and brainstorm some other ideas. These may be organizations that you know of or they might be generic ideas such as “call the community college” or “look up “girl gangs” that might lead you to resources.

*Give them about 15 minutes to brainstorm and then discuss as a group, asking for examples. Ask participants to hand them in, explaining that the training project will compile a list from all of the trainings and return it to people who took this course.*

## SECTION V INCORPORATING CULTURAL ISSUES INTO WORKING WITH YOUTH

Let's look now at how gaining a better understanding about a youth's culture can help in working with youth on transitioning to independent living. While only youth in placement 16 and older need a formal plan (Part 4D of the FSP), it is good practice to involve all youth in identifying and working on some knowledge and skills that will help them transition to young adulthood.

Remember, the idea of learning about culture is to find some ways to work with a young person that deal with the reality of the cultural issues. This might mean finding strategies or solutions that are congruent with the cultural issues or at least do not confront them in a no-win kind of way. Or, it might mean putting the cultural issue on the table with the youth and exploring the congruences and conflicts with the goals of independent living and the constraints and resources of the DSS and the independent living program. In any event, it means planning with the youth in such a way so that cultural issues are at the forefront. Let's go back to some of the youth we met earlier and see what a focus on culture might suggest in terms of intervention.

### **Activity V-1      Planning and Assessing Progress**

*Refer back to Handout I-d and the flipchart on Eduardo. Review Eduardo's situation briefly, reminding them that a key cultural factor is when young men begin living away from home. Ask them to think about how they would use this information in working with Eduardo. Use the set of questions (found on Handout V-1) to address this issue. Process Eduardo in plenary. Then divide the group into three subgroups and assign on the following to each: Group 1: Janice, Handout I-e and flipchart from Activity I-3. Group 2: Thomas, Handout I-f and flipchart from Activity I-3. Group 3: Jackie, Handout II-e. Give each group about 10 minutes and then process by asking each group to give a brief summary of their youth and then the answers to the questions.*

## **SECTION VI**

### **Exercise and Wrap-up**

We are going to conclude with an exercise to help us as the trainers to get a sense of whether this training curriculum is getting across the points we want to be making. This is NOT an assessment of your individual learning. As you complete these we will ask you NOT to write down your name. After doing this, we will talk about the questions you're your responses and then ask you to give your sheets to us so that we can see how well the class as a whole is getting the points. This, along with your evaluations after this exercise, will help make changes in the training.

*Pass out the Culture Exercise. Give people about 10 minutes to complete it and then go over the responses using the Trainer Notes. Collect the sheets after this for data analysis.*

*Ask people to complete the Workshop evaluation.*

# TRAINER NOTES

Handout I-b

## AGENDA

- 8:30 – 8:45**      **Welcome and Overview**
- 8:45 – 9:30**      **The Influence of Culture**  
I-1    10 minutes  
I-2    30 minutes
- 9:30 – 10:15**      **Cultural Influences on Youth**  
I-3    45 minutes
- 10:15 -10:30**      **Cognitive Frameworks for “Seeing” Culture**  
I-4    15 minutes
- 10:30 - 10:45**      **BREAK**
- 10:45 – 12:15**      **Ethnographic Interviewing**  
II-1   10 minutes  
II-2   10 minutes  
II-3   10 minutes  
II-4   10 minutes  
II-5   50 minutes
- 12:15 – 1:15**      **LUNCH**
- 1:15 - 2:00**      **Youths’ Views about Culture, Stereotyping and Prejudice**  
Section III, video and discussion



**2:00 – 2:30**      **Identifying Resources**  
IV-1 30 minutes

**2:30 – 2:45**      **BREAK**

**2:45 – 3:45**      **Planning with Youth within the Context of Culture**  
IV-1 60 minutes

**3:45 – 4:30**      **Exercise and Wrap-up**  
Exercise 30 minutes  
Evaluation 10 minutes

## TRAINER NOTES

### Culture Curriculum Assessment

For Pilot July 11, 2002

Please answer the following questions. Feel free to use your handouts.

**A. For questions 1-5, identify whether the adult's statement addresses culture, individual issues, or both.**

1. Tell me people who follow nu metal music. What is important to them?  
 **culture**                       **individual issues**                       **both**
2. So, part of being in the gang is keeping this kind of information secret. What would members do if someone talked about this stuff?  
 **culture**                       **individual issues**                       **both**
3. You say that there is a whole different way of looking at life for kids growing up on a military base. How would young people on a military base describe their lives?  
 **culture**                       **individual issues**                       **both**
4. I know you've said that males shouldn't have to learn to do some of the things on this IL list – you call them "housework". Tell me more about that.  
 **culture**                       **individual issues**                       **both**
5. Do you feel like the rest of your group, that you are safe using meth if you know who's cooked it?  
 **culture**                       **individual issues**                       **both**

**B. From the case scenarios we talked about today, which of the statements BEST reflects what we learned? (Be careful of making assumptions beyond what was actually addressed.)**

6. In Eduardo's culture, by age 16, males (select one only)  
 a. Move out of the home  
 b. leave school to work  
 c. live off and on at home  
 d. take on financial responsibility for the family
7. In Janice's mother's church, an Important value or belief is (select one only)  
 a. women should work only in the home  
 b. discussion of negative feelings reflects self-centeredness  
 c. typical adolescent interests and behaviors endanger the youth's relationship with God.

\_\_\_\_\_ d. honoring one's mother and father

8. In Thomas's view of gay youth culture, it is imperative that gay youths (select one only)

- a. act as they really feel  
\_\_\_\_\_ b. use violence against violence  
\_\_\_\_\_ c. stick together  
\_\_\_\_\_ d. segregate from straights

9. In Jackie's situation, which of the following dissonances are relevant? The statement under the first column pertains to the Independent Living service culture. The statement under the second column pertains to N. Cheyenne culture. Check all apply based on Jackie's scenario.

	<u>IL Culture</u>	<u>N. Cheyenne Culture</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> a.	save money	help relatives
_____ b.	be self sufficient	depend on others
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> c.	assert yourself	be polite
_____ d.	plan ahead	be spontaneous
_____ e.	achieve individual goals	be part of a group

**C. Which term from Ethnographic Interviewing best describes each of the following statements?**

Terms: cover term    descriptor    central tendency    cultural knowledge  
cultural guide    global question    ethnology

10. That's sweet \_\_\_\_\_ cover term \_\_\_\_\_
11. A wigger is a White guy trying to act Black \_\_\_\_\_ descriptor \_\_\_\_\_
12. Tell me about how young people in foster care feel about learning independent living skills. \_\_\_\_\_ global question \_\_\_\_\_
13. Sad Girls \_\_\_\_\_ cover term \_\_\_\_\_
14. Miqwa has lived there all her life and has been describing the community to me. \_\_\_\_\_ cultural guide \_\_\_\_\_
15. Sad girls are all kinda mopey like in the movie, La Vida Loca, you know what I'm sayin. \_\_\_\_\_ descriptor \_\_\_\_\_
16. If you want to make it on the street, you need to know stuff like what john is gonna hurt you, what pimp gonna steal from you, what john is a cop. \_\_\_\_\_ cultural knowledge \_\_\_\_\_
17. Most people from home think that teenagers need to stay real busy all the time or they will get into trouble. \_\_\_\_\_ central tendency \_\_\_\_\_

18. According to Mrs. Alvarez, there used to be a lot expected of a girl once she has had her quinciniera. She was expected to act more lady like and to take on more responsibilities. However, here, that is changing. Many parents don't seem to expect much of anything anymore, they just see it as a party. \_\_\_\_\_ ethnology \_\_\_\_\_