

Family Characteristics within a Cultural Framework

Here are some cultural features among four minority cultures. Notice ways in which they may differ from the dominant U.S. Anglo-European culture. Remember that these are general characteristics on a continuum and may not apply all the time to all families (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lynch & Hanson, 1997; Tharp & Yamauchi, 1994). It is important not to over-generalize when working with diverse families since there will be wide variations in attitudes even among people of a single cultural group. While cultural orientation is important, factors such as socio-economic status, educational level, time in the U.S., age and gender, proximity to other members of the cultural or ethnic community and other cultures, also widely influence a family's characteristics and view of disabilities.

Native American Culture:

- **Groups** - Collaborative approach to problem solving and working in groups is valued.
- **Communication** – High context culture; use of indirect cues; communication relies on the context of the conversation and shared experience.
- **Life view** - Acceptance of things as they are – the natural order of things, including the birth of a child with disabilities; importance of preserving harmony; cyclical nature of life and how all things are inter-related.
- **Cognition/Information gathering** – look at things globally; holistically vs. analytically; visual style of representing information.
- **Interactions** - Personal views aren't imposed on others unless asked; more reflection in processing information; need for longer "wait time" when answering questions.
- **Body language** – lower voice volume; gaze directed downward to express politeness.
- **Religion** – belief in the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things, balance and harmony, the individual as part of the 'oneness' of the universe; belief in people possessing spiritual powers.
- **Family** - Respect for elders; importance and involvement of extended family.
- **Children** – taught to be self-sufficient.
- **Views on Disabilities** - although disabilities may have causes (i.e., genetic disorder) there is also an explanation as to *why* it occurred. May be attributed to multiple reasons - supernatural (mystical) and natural

(disturbances of the natural 'balance' of the world brought on by such things as breaking a taboo, acculturation, and/or accidents).

African American Culture:

- **Groups** - Working in groups valued; collaborative approach to problem solving.
- **Communication** - High context culture. Use of indirect cues, communication relies on context of the conversation and shared experience. Musical aspects of communication emphasized.
- **Life view** - Respect for elders; strong support for education.
- **Cognition/Information gathering** - Aural mode of presentation in learning is best, incorporating movement and touch; learning occurs through interactions rather than introspections.
- **Interactions** - Socialized to be 'good'; fearful about being judged negatively.
- **Body language** – Full body use to convey feelings.
- **Religion** - Very important; strong spiritual orientation.
- **Family** - Extended family is very important, including friends as well as relatives. Many African American families are matriarchal.
- **Children**– Children are loved so it is felt they must have a good education; authoritarian approach to child-rearing.
- **Views on Disabilities** - Two views are held: disabilities may just be bad luck or punishment as the result of wrong-doing by parents. However, African Americans, as a whole, don't exhibit any particular prejudice against people with disabilities.

Latino Culture:

- **Groups** - Working in groups is valued; collaborative approach to problem solving; interdependence.
- **Communication** - High context culture. Indirect cues, communication relies on the context of the conversation and shared experience; personal delivery is important; perceptions are very dependent on personal interactions.
- **Life view** - To be well educated is to have skills in personal relationships.
- **Cognition/Information gathering** - High sensitivity to non-verbal cues.
- **Interactions** - Warm, interpersonal interactions valued over task-oriented interactions; social support outside the family (ethnic networks).
- **Body language** - Attuned to non-verbal communication cues.
- **Religion** - Spiritual, mystical belief system, faith and natural healers.
- **Family** - Respect for elderly; 'intergenerational folk knowledge' (knowledge passed down from older generations to younger) is valued; strong sense of family and loyalty to family; tendency to a patriarchal structure (this is changing); importance of extended family.
- **Children** – Parents are nurturing and permissive; independence is not fostered, parent child relationship is very important.

- **Views on Disabilities** – Some causes of disabilities may be the result of spiritual or folk beliefs. There are many variables in these attributions, it's important to understand to what the disability is attributed.

Asian Culture:

- **Groups** - Collectivist values – the good of the group and duty to others; public consciousness; collaborative approach to problem solving, interdependence.
- **Communication** - High context culture. Indirect cues, implicit, non-verbal; formal; goal-oriented; indirect style of responding, preservation of harmony and face; silence is valued.
- **Life view** – Tradition, harmony, hard work and responsibility are valued; reverence for ancestors and elders; acceptance of fate; sense of shame regarding failure.
- **Cognition/Information gathering** - Circular thinking; patience and stoicism valued; fatalistic.
- **Interactions** - Person-oriented; self-denial; self-discipline; self-effacing, modest; status defined by birthright, family name, age and sex; cooperation prized, non-confrontational, conciliatory. The importance of saving face; individual behavior reflects on the family.
- **Body language** – Relatively less direct or sustained eye contact; facial expressions reserved; larger interpersonal space needed.
- **Religion** – Polytheistic, spiritual, ancestor worship; humanistic.
- **Family** - Family is the central focus of the individual. Importance of family solidarity and harmony; loyalty. Hierarchical – parents (especially the father) are authority, children obey; older children responsible for younger; extended family.
- **Children** -Viewed as extensions of their parents; close physical contact; as child ages, he/she assumes more responsibility and responsibility for younger children; learn to exercise self-control.
- **Views on Disabilities** - The most severe disabilities viewed as stigma caused by the mother or punishment for acts committed by either parents or ancestors. Also attributed to spiritual interventions. Often a disability leads to family embarrassment and shame and the stigma of impeding the 'good name' of the family.

Used courtesy of Dr. Susan Donovan, faculty member at the University of Central Florida.