

Exercise Two: What is my client's culture? (done during module 3 or 4)

Everyone we help has a culture, even if sometimes it is invisible because everyone around them appears to share their values, beliefs and daily practices. Our culture, though, shapes our everyday interactions with the world around us.

Understanding our client's culture is very important to understanding our client's resilience. The risk factors that most threaten us, the outcomes we most cherish, and the protective factors we find most helpful, are all shaped by culture.

For this intervention do the following:

Part 1:

- Ask your client to think of a book, movie, television series or song which reflects their cultural identity.
- Which qualities of their culture (taken from these artistic expressions) are useful to them when they face difficulties, or have to make life-changing decisions?
- Group these qualities on a piece of paper (or on a screen) under the two categories of Rugged and Resourced. If a client has identified mostly factors that fit under one or the other categories, probe them with questions to see if you can help them identify an equal number of factors from both categories that are culturally relevant. For example, a person that says, "My faith gets me through difficult times" (a rugged quality) could be asked to consider, "How does your faith community also make it easier to cope with life's challenges?" (a resource). Likewise, someone who says, "I really like celebrating the holidays because it brings together family and friends" (a resource) could be asked to consider "And how does the rituals, the routines of these holidays make you feel?" (a rugged quality).

Part 2:

- Ask your client to think of a recent problem which caused them to become stressed.
- What solutions did they use (or try to use) to solve the problem.
- Did these solutions reflect their culture (the way they see the world, their beliefs, or the expectations of others for how they should behave)?
- How did others view their proposed solution? Was it socially acceptable? Did it fit with the way others handle problems (reflect the culture of those around the client) or was it different than the way people expected the client to cope?

Culture can be a powerful tool to help guide people to solutions, or it can constrain choices. Introducing culture as a topic into our efforts to help others will make the work much easier.