

NEARI NEWS:

TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

An Essential Tool for Professionals Working with those who Sexually Abuse or... A Great New Way to Stay Current with Cutting Edge Sexual Abuse Research.



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Dear Colleague,

We don't talk often enough about the cultural differences in our country, let alone the different cultural attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, and traditions about sex.

Lisa Aronson Fontes has been looking at these issues of culture and sexual abuse for decades. She points out clearly that we need to develop a deeper understanding about how our own culture and that of our clients impacts how we carry out our clinical work in the world. In this issue, we have profiled one of her articles and hope you will find it helpful.

It is essential that each of us take the time to remain current with the literature regarding culture, language, and ethnicity. One excellent resource is *Interviewing Clients across Cultures: A Practitioner's Guide*, by Lisa Aronson Fontes. This book offers a practical guide for professionals working with culturally and linguistically diverse clients. Every chapter has thought-provoking discussion questions and resources for further reading.

Cultural Competence Can Be Easier to Discuss than to Practice

by David S. Prescott, LICSW

If you come here to help me, then you are wasting your time. But if you come here because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us begin.

~ Lily Walker, Australian aboriginal women's leader

The Issue

How do we know if we are culturally competent? The high stakes involved in working to reduce sexual abuse demand that professionals be sensitive and proficient in working with people from different cultures.

The Research

In a recent article in the APSAC Advisor newsletter, Lisa Aronson Fontes provides information that may be helpful to all of us. Fontes observes that there is no direct translation for "foster care" in Spanish. It is striking that the concept that is so entrenched in our child welfare system is not even named in Spanish. She also cautions that the guttural sounds of some languages can sound harsh to observers. This can bias interviewers negatively (e.g., concluding that someone has abused or meets criteria for an unwarranted diagnosis). She notes that in at least one Asian culture, clients typically observe interviewers for signs of empathy and compassion, before they are open to talking. However, these are characteristics that many dominant-culture interviewers are trained not to display.

Fontes also calls our attention to vital research findings. In one study, children who had made a prior disclosure of sexual abuse, but declined to discuss it in the context of a forensic interview, actually received less support from the interviewer. What is disturbing is that the authors found that those interviewers who did not get the disclosures they were looking for from children (who previously disclosed) became frustrated and acted more in line with their own needs and did not maintain a

You can find this book in our catalog and online at www.neari.com/press.

As always, we welcome your feedback. And if you want us to examine a particular issue, please let us know.

Sincerely,
Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis



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Featured Websites

<http://www.brycs.org/> and <http://racemattersconsortium.org/>

This month, we asked Lisa what website she would recommend. She pointed us toward two fantastic resources.

1. Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS) provides national technical assistance to organizations serving refugees and immigrants so that all newcomer children and youth can reach their potential. They have an entire section of their website on child maltreatment resources. BRYCS also won APSAC's cultural competency award this year: www.brycs.org.

2. The Race Matters Consortium (The Consortium)

clear focus on the needs of the child.

Fontes makes the point that our rapport, respect, demeanor, and tone of voice are all vital components of culturally competent interviewing. It is not enough to display skills in these areas; the interviewer has to develop rapport in order to gather information and have a positive impact. The best interviewers truly seek to understand both the client's culture and their experience within it. The interviewer's mindset can be more important than the specific skills they possess.

Implications for Professionals

Respect is vital. Many professionals believe themselves to be respectful. Fontes makes the point that it is important to check in with clients to find out how they are doing with the interview. This is a consistent finding in psychotherapy research. Demonstrations of respect compromise neither forensic nor clinical interviews. Our respect helps others improve their lives. This is as crucial with adolescents who have abused as it is with families in which abuse has occurred. After all, if we don't model respect, we cannot expect adolescents to live respectfully, and we may cause harm.

Maintaining good professional boundaries includes being warm and empathic. Fontes observes that many professionals who interview clients take on a cold and distant tone. Since meaningful rapport is essential to the client relationship, this lack of warmth and empathy can prevent a clinician from getting critical information. This can be particularly detrimental in the case of working with immigrants, who have often had very unfortunate experiences with other professionals.

Implications for the Field

Much of what we know about understanding and treating sexual abuse has focused on the causes of abuse and risk reduction rather than in understanding and attending to complex human beings. Understanding the cultural (as well as developmental) context of sexual abuse is vital to helping adolescents build better lives. Not only do we need to be competent, we need to be extremely careful. Professionals cannot make assumptions about statements or behaviors in the absence of cultural knowledge. It benefits us all to question our interpretations and actively remain open to cultural realities about which we may have no knowledge. Otherwise, it is far too easy to unintentionally harm our clients and violate the ethical standards to which we have all committed ourselves.

Reference

- Fontes, L.A. (2009, Spring). Interviewing immigrant children and families for suspected child maltreatment. *APSAC Advisor*, 7-11.

To print a pdf of this article, click [newsletter](#).

Article available from: <http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/onechild/documents/LisaFontes->

is a diverse group of child welfare experts representing research, policy, administration, practice, and advocacy. Their website has products, working papers, webinars, and other resources of interest to those working with children and youth: <http://racemattersconsortium.org/>.

NEARI RESOURCES

Publication from NEARI

[Interviewing Clients across Cultures: A Practitioner's Guide](#)

By Lisa Aronson Fontes

Packed with practical pointers and examples, this indispensable, straight-talking guide helps professionals conduct productive interviews while building strong working relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse clients. Chapters cover avoiding different types of bias; verbal and nonverbal ways to build rapport and convey respect; how to overcome language barriers, culturally competent interviews with children and adolescents; and key issues in working with immigrants and refugees.

Paperback, 334 pages
ISBN #: 978-1-59385-710-3
Cost: \$24, plus s&h

[InterviewingImmigrantChildrenAPSACAdvisor.pdf](#).

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A nationally recognized expert in the field of sexual abuse assessment, treatment, management, and prevention, Mr. Prescott has published numerous articles and authored, edited, and co-edited books on risk assessment, interviewing, and providing residential treatment to youth. He is the President of ATSA and is currently the Clinical Director at the Minnesota Sex Offender Program in Moose Lake, Minnesota.

Questions/Feedback

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