Chapter 10
Culture

Research on the transition to adulthood shows that social and economic conditions contribute to different pathways to adulthood. These conditions, although experienced individually, exist and operate across individuals. For example, youth who grow up in poor families move earlier than other youth into marriage and cohabitation (Meier & Allen, 2008). These differences can be approached by thinking about the variables of family income and education. But a variable approach only provides a social address. It does not tell us about the processes that contribute to different pathways to adulthood. A different approach, particularly when addressing the link to processes across individuals, is to consider culture.

Culture is central to understanding the transition to adulthood. The transition is not a shift in individual development that takes place within a stable or static culture. Age periods are socially constructed with historical and regional variations (Keith et al., 1994). Similarly, the transition to adulthood is not a thing or a single event but a socially constructed process or sets of actions. Understanding these sets of actions requires viewing the transition to adulthood as cultural in nature (Valsiner, 2000). To view the transition to adulthood as a cultural process might appear to discount the biological processes of ontogenesis and phylogenesis. But we should remind ourselves that the brain is seen by neuroscientists as a relational social construction, which makes the dichotomy of culture versus nature obsolete.

This chapter illustrates how an understanding of culture can be incorporated into views of the transition to adulthood and counseling practice, even when culture is often taken-for-granted processes. Beginning with a description of culture as a construct, we outline steps to making practice with youth more culturally sensitive. To illustrate these steps, we describe how the action-project approach was used to understand the transition to adulthood in a particular culture, time, and geographic location.

Culture

Although culture has been declared undefinable due to its complexity (Valsiner, 2001, 2004, 2009), we need a description or understanding of it to guide counseling practice with youth. Explicating culture helps counselors in a number of

ways. First, it helps counselors understand their own theorizing about counseling as a culturally embedded activity. Second, it allows counselors to understand youth-to-adult transition processes. Third, it provides counselors with a framework to understand transition processes for various groups of youth. One group is minority youth. But it is also important to attend to the cultures of youth who are not considered minorities. In mainstream research on non-ethnic minority youth, culture is overlooked as if culture was irrelevant for these youth or as if they did not relate to their own cultural processes. In research addressing culture and the transition to adulthood, there is a tendency to focus on ethnic minority groups of youth (e.g., Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004), which is understandable, as it is in these cases that the taken-for-granted tacit cultural processes become visible. However, in this research, comparisons are often made between groups of youth with little attention paid to the context in which youth live their lives (Burton, 1997). Rather than focusing on certain groups of youth making the transition to adulthood, it is important to remember that all youth are agents of cultures. Finally, although researchers and counselors are often called upon to develop or use culturally sensitive paradigms and methods, it is not as if culture was just a backdrop for our scientific and professional work. Culture is part and parcel of the work of researchers, counselors, and other professionals. However, the complexity, taken-for-grantedness, and far-reaching characteristics of culture can make it a vague notion and unworkable without parameters. To set parameters, it is helpful to first consider how conceptualizing culture goes beyond the simple expression of culture.

Culture is not simply the rites of passage into adulthood, language, or music. Ritual practices, language, and music are human accomplishments suggesting evidence of culture. Culture is also not ethnicity or race. These are social addresses (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Culture is dynamic and made of meaningful joint actions and action patterns that encompass the past, present, and future (Valsiner, 2009). With this understanding, we turn to describing how culture can be understood within an action-theoretical approach.

We find Boesch's (1991) approach to culture particularly useful because it is consistent with our action-theoretical approach. He defined culture as "a field of action" (p. 29). People act within action fields; each action or experience contributes to the construction of individuals' personal histories (Boesch, 2001). People's actions are also part of the construction of the culture. Culture is dynamic; "as an action field, culture not only induces and controls action, but is also continuously transformed by it; therefore culture is as much a process as a structure" (Boesch, 1991, p. 29). This definition of culture permits us to observe the transition to adulthood as part of individuals' personal histories that are constructed through actions with others and are part of joint processes.

Both individuals and their cultural fields change over time in response to one another. The complex process of change in the cultural field yields, for the individual, "a world that appears to be ordered, 'transparent', providing the space and the rules for action" (Boesch, 1991, p. 362). This means that, despite ongoing changes, the notion of adulthood and entrance into adulthood is perceived as, if everything

goes well, somewhat ordered for youth and the individuals around them such as parents or teachers. At the same time, making the transition to adulthood is perceived as a process that one can contribute to and change through one's own and joint efforts. The most popular cultural concepts addressing issues of directing, steering, controlling, and regulating the transition to adulthood are values, norms, rules, and conventions. In speaking to parents and youth involved in the adolescent-to-adult transition, one of the most referred to cultural concepts appears to be the notion of "rule." There is a sense that there are rules, broadly understood, and an order to the process enabling youth, and the people around them, to establish or act upon, and achieve goals. But such "order" does not mean that the culture is static. Rather, the cultural field is changing at the same time as providing the space and rules for action such that individuals perceive some sense of order for their lives.

Goal-directed activities such as completing education or searching for employment can be viewed as following cultural rules for action that lead to acceptance as an adult. Here we have used the term "cultural rules" in the broad sense to include the "values, rules, images, and symbolic qualities implied by diverse contents of the action field" (Boesch, 1991, pp. 34–35). But where do the rules for action come from? We know that the human desire and capacity for meaning, for ordering what is sometimes called negative entropy, and for the meaningful integration of the structural properties of our lives, such as time, provide the fabric for cultural construction. We can look specifically to the notion of time. The past, present, and future are all key aspects of culture. Without these links across time, there is no sense of continuity of life. Rules for action come from the past or history of the peoples involved in a particular culture. Although they are complex and changing, rules for action guide current actions as well as goals for the future. In this way, the individual's transition to adulthood is rooted in the culture by the past, for example, historical understandings of education, marriage, and what it means to be mature, present affordances and constraints, and goals for the future.

The idea that the culture provides space and rules for action does not mean that individuals are passive recipients of cultural knowledge. Rather, they are active agents, participating and changing the very culture they are being guided by. Evidence for individuals acting as agents during the transition to adulthood comes from research on maturity and behavior during adolescence and young adulthood. Implicit understandings of age and maturity are found amongst youth and adults (e.g., Hubley & Russell, 2009; Keith et al., 1994; Montepare, 1991, 2009; Tilton-Weaver, Vitunski, & Galambos, 2001). These implicit understandings guide behavior (Galambos & Tilton-Weaver, 2000). For example, researchers (Jessor, 1992; Moffitt, 1993) suggest that youths' engagement in problem behavior with peers is a way of accessing a more mature, or adult status. Efforts to gain this social status likely emerge because access to adulthood is associated with power and privilege in North America (Moffitt, 1993). Youths' actions with their peers illustrate how they are active agents within the cultural field in shaping their transition to adulthood as well as their culture.

In our notion of joint action, project, and career, we go even further in explicating the processes of culture by leaving behind the individualistic conceptualization of

action as impacted by and influencing culture. In our view, culture is addressed in joint and individual cultural actions, projects, and careers. For example, in the case of Chinese-Canadian families in which the parents had emigrated from Hong Kong, we found that many parents and adolescents sought cultural continuity in a bicultural context, thus reflecting a trans-generational cultural project (Young et al., 2003). Here, culture is represented in the trans-generational career of a communication community embodied, maintained, and generated in the joint and individual actions, projects, and careers of their members and participants.

In individual action, the internal thoughts and feelings of the actor control and steer the action. In joint action, controlling and steering the action is a function of the communication between and among the participants in the action, but that communication is itself controlled and steered by the participants' internal cognitive and emotional processes. Thus, action, projects, and careers encompass joint and individual processes. Both communication between participants and the individual's thoughts and feelings are important.

Steering processes are particularly highlighted in the transition to adulthood because many of the issues are new to the participants. Issues that are new are not easily resolved through habits or unconscious processes. Habits guide everyday behavior such as two family members washing and drying dishes. But new issues are different. For example, deciding whether a young person should move into a shared residence with friends or remain at home cannot be addressed or resolved by relying on habits or unconscious processes. What people often turn to for guidance are rules. Rules are frequently referred to in coordinating the steering and controlling of individual and group actions, projects, and careers.

In more colloquial language, what we have argued for above is that culture is hard to get a hold of. It is difficult to understand when thinking about the transition to adulthood – and this difficulty extends to counseling. Automatic, habitual, and unreflective conventional action processes might lead us to forget our and everybody else's everyday work on culture. Actions in the counseling session can be understood as part of the multiple sets of joint actions and projects that youth and their social supports are engaged in across time. Counselors join in those actions because they are in an action field when working with clients. Thus, counseling is cultural work.

Culturally Sensitive Understanding of the Transition to Adulthood

We have suggested earlier in this book that counselors should become part of the ongoing projects clients bring to counseling. The cornerstones of counseling are not dictated by necessities of causal laws of nature or biological purposes. Rather they are cultural processes. If cultural processes become automatic, habitual, and not reflected on, they may not be attended to by counselors. Thus, it is important to develop and explicate a culturally sensitive understanding of the transition to adulthood.

Assuming that counseling is cultural work, counselors may use the following steps to develop a culturally sensitive understanding of the transition to adulthood (Young, Marshall, Valach, 2007). The first step toward working with a culturally sensitive approach to the transition to adulthood is to understand culture. This is not general knowledge of particular cultures. This is an understanding of culture as it pertains to human development. The definition we have used in this chapter recognizes culture as dynamic processes. Specifically, it is joint sets of actions, projects, and careers which are both guided by, and contribute to, the action field. When we refer to these actions, we imply the actions youth are engaged in outside counseling and the joint actions of the youth and counselor during counseling. In this way, counselors are not viewed as working "outside" of youths' culture.

The second step involves listening to, and recognizing, the folk descriptions, explanations, and narratives of youths' actions during the transition to adulthood. We stress the relevance of descriptions as these are nearer to procedural knowledge. Folk explanations are sometimes called "rationalizations," implying a justification process (Davidson, 1963). Folk explanations are the ways that people organize their understanding of the world and narratives are the process by which they represent these explanations (Bruner, 1990). These narratives, or representations of explanations of the transition to adulthood, may come from youth themselves. But there are other sources as well such as the significant adults in youths' lives or peer groups. Narratives are embedded in clients' stories which emerge in conversations. Narratives offer a step toward understanding meanings that are attributed to actions. Descriptive narratives are accessible by using naïve observations.

The third step is to engage in naïve observation within local communities. Naïve observations include clients and, when they are involved in counseling, their social supports. These observations can be made during sessions and through self-confrontation interviews of joint conversations with others. Observing actions and listening to narratives helps to unpack the cultural meaning of the transition to adulthood. This is not about sitting back and observing in order to learn "from" youth or their social supports. Using clients as a resource for information veers away from the purpose of counseling and may make the client feel different from the counselor. Rather, naïve observation is a process of remaining open to the narratives of youth and their social supports and supporting clients in unpacking the meaning of joint actions. This process is supported by the use of self-confrontation interviews when possible. The procedure of naïve observation is further detailed later in this chapter.

Finally, the fourth step is to think about processes. Culture is about the past, present, and future. Culture enables us to define and segment ongoing social action processes into childhood, adolescence, transition to adulthood, and so forth, to understand them as such, and to construe them in reference to these cultural goals. The transition to adulthood is about the process of leaving childhood and entering adulthood, bringing the past and future into the present actions. Consequently, current actions in the counseling session can be understood as part of the multiple sets of joint actions and projects that youth and their social supports are engaged in across time. Processes such as the transition to adulthood may be agreed upon within and across cultures. Specific actions needed to engage in the transition to adulthood may differ across cultures.

Naïve Observation

As described earlier, naïve observation can contribute to culturally sensitive counseling with youth. We highlight naïve observation here because it is an important means of information gathering and intervening. Naïve observation offers an alternative to approaches in the larger professional discourse. We describe, briefly, some of the problems emerging in the professional discourse and illustrate how naïve observation provides an alternative.

The professional discourse mainly follows two lines. One discourse questions the Western academic approach to counseling as being universal. The second discourse offers information on the culturally bound meaning of certain actions, utterances, and discourses. The first discourse is very academic; the second one is anecdotal. We can observe the arguments in critiques of career theories. For example, Stead (2004) was able to critique career theories for their extreme ethnocentric view. He also critiqued efforts to accommodate existing theories to other cultures by adding cultural concepts and models (e.g., Leong & Serafica, 2001). He suggested that theoretical concepts in the career domain need to have meaning and salience in the particular cultures in which they are developed. In other words, from the outset, culturally sensitive theories should be based on the recognition of particular cultures.

Proposals to make counseling more culturally sensitive include understanding the cultural roots and histories of psychological theories. The proposition that we should distinguish between psychology-importing and psychology-exporting countries (Castro & Lafuente, 2007) and solve the assimilation problems might not provide the complete solution. How substantial these problems have been is illustrated in the case of Japan where objectivity and the subject–object division, the basis of psychological experimentation, was not a concept until the late nineteenth century (Takasuna, 2007). Similarly, the Confucian cultural tradition, which inspired relationalism in Chinese thinking (Hwang, 2000), had to wait for a long time to become complemented by a Western conceptualization (e.g., Blustein et al., 2004; Schultheiss, 2003; Young, 1984). Many Western theories of behavior such as those in psychiatry are indigenous to societies with a shared religion and culture (Gaines, 1998). These theories cannot serve as a measure for other societies. Rather, useful theories must reflect the impact and contribution of cultural traditions and their social bases, and provide methods for including cultural traditions and social beliefs. This is what we propose naive observation can achieve.

Occasionally, some empirical literature that locates cultural differences along certain dimensions, for example, individualism versus collectivism (Triandis, 2001, 2005), seems to provide some insight into the issue. However, as in physics, Einstein showed that space, matter, and time are not dimensions which could be seen as a stable back drop for theories in physics. Rather these dimensions are part of the play, part of the theories. Similarly, we have to accept the notion that culture is part of psychological and social theories and vice versa. Naïve observation offers us the best discourse window onto naïve theories, which can be valid for a large cultural community or a small joint career-related group.

Making Naïve Observations

Sometimes the term *naïve observation* is seen as synonymous to uninformed observation, which is misleading. Naïve observers are scientifically more "naïve" than professional observers, but more socially informed than the professionals. Latour and Woolgar (1986) took a methodological position by stating that their ethnographic observations were conducted by applying the perspective of a "very naïve observer." They described the "naïve" investigators' perspective as that of an outside observer who does not know the language and the customs of the natives. The contrary is the case in our research and practice (Valach, Young, et al., 2002; Young et al., 2005). The participants in the particular communication community are informed, though scientifically naïve observers.

Making naïve observations is fairly simple. First, we choose target behavior processes, that is, we identify actions we want the naïve observers to describe. Next, naïve observers should be clearly identified, for example, nonprofessionals from our own culture or from another culture or subculture. Naïve observers can come from a group of people participating in the same target behavior. Naïve observers can also come from a group which has not participated in the target phenomena, but understanding of this particular group is important to the researcher or counselor.

Having selected the target behaviors and naïve observers, the next step is to present the behaviors to naïve observers. As we are primarily interested in descriptions of ongoing processes ("what are they doing?") and not in reasoning or explanation ("why are they doing this?"), we work with the naïve observers as close to the target processes as possible. For these purposes working with video-recording is very helpful. This is what distinguishes action-theoretical research as we have implemented it from attribution research, which asks about the causes a particular group of people attaches to certain events or actions.

Video or film recording is useful because it can be replayed easily and shown repeatedly to different naïve observers. Additionally, the ability to stop the recording and listen to naïve observers without rushing is valuable. In our research we consecutively showed naïve observers, mostly in individual sessions, a meaningful unit of behavior. This unit was a short sequence of the video-recording of the target behavior ranging between 0.5 and 3 min in various studies. The naïve observers were asked to describe what was going on in that sequence and whether they had any other information or thoughts they would like to share with us. After their description the next video segment was presented. Another strategy was to ask the observers to indicate where an action began and/or ended and about their criteria for segmenting the stream of behavior. We also asked the naïve observers whether certain action theoretical concepts occurred (e.g., decision, consideration, goal, abolishing of goal, setting up a new goal, persisting on a goal, evaluation, changing a goal, overcoming difficulties, certain emotions and others) (Valach, von Cranach, & Kalbermatten, 1988; Valach, Young et al., 2002). Finally, the extent of certain qualities in predefined sequences of ongoing joint actions could also be assessed (Valach, Scheidegger, Michel, Young, & Dey, in press).

An alternative to video is to interview people participating in comparable actions and projects. These people could provide important information on the conventions within projects and thus help better understand them. Further, people engaged in other projects might help us obtain information on important conventions, social rules, and norms. It is helpful to distinguish between self-reported subjective processes and the subjective comments of other partners. For example, it may be helpful to gain insight into how parents in Western cultures see the behavior of their adolescents in transition to adulthood and how first generation Chinese-Canadian parents see their adolescents' behavior during the same process.

Counselors' most prominent use of naïve observation is when dealing with clients from a culture, subculture, or communication community with which they are less familiar. This is not a question of obtaining translation of the language but of gaining insight into procedural conventions. The naïve observation should be generated while describing ongoing actions and not in a general discourse on cultural specifications and behaviors of ethnographic interest. To illustrate this process, we describe an example of naïve observation with a family and their social supports.

Case Illustration

To illustrate the centrality of culture for the transition to adulthood we present, next, an example from our research. This example is drawn from our research with urban-residing First Nations youth and their families. We use this case because it illustrates how globalization and migration to urban centers are important dimensions in understanding culture and the transition to adulthood. The world's populations have now passed the milestone of transforming from mostly rural to more than half of the globe's population living in towns and cities (United Nations Population Fund, 2007). Globalization and the migration to urban centers are transforming cultures and the places in which youth are entering adulthood. We cannot fully rely on past thinking about First Nations communities, nor can we rely on past thinking about the transition to adulthood in urban centers. Therefore, we sought to understand the transition to adulthood as it occurred within the particular historical time and place. To do so, we informed ourselves of current and historical understanding of First Nations youth living in urban settings. Then, we used naïve observation with youth, their families, and self-identified social supports. A case is used to illustrate some ways that naïve observation contributed toward building an understanding of the transition to adulthood for a young woman. To begin, we turned to current and historical literature on First Nations youth in Canada.

We knew, from government surveys of Canadian youth (Statistics Canada, 2002, 2003), that many First Nations youth living in urban centers faced difficult circumstances as they entered adulthood. Many had not completed high school and were unemployed. Their families were living in poverty and struggling to support their youth financially. Additionally, we knew that many of these youths' parents had faced considerable hardship during their own transition to adulthood due to forced

separation from their own parents to attend residential schools (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Bull, 1991; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996). Many students at residential schools experienced physical and sexual abuse along with the racism that is inherent in educational policies aimed at assimilation. Despite this knowledge about First Nations youth, we knew very little about the processes by which First Nations youth transition from childhood to adulthood. In particular, we knew very little about the transition to adulthood among urban-residing youth and their families. Our research was designed so that we could describe how one group of urban-residing First Nations youth were becoming adults.

We set out to describe the goal-directed joint actions of youth, their parents, and key significant social supports, for example, grandparents and friends, of participants living in one particular city in Canada. That is, we situated the study within a very specific context rather than trying to describe broad or general phenomena. This is important because it enabled us to avoid the assumption that all First Nations peoples are from the same culture, located in the same geographic space, or same historical period. Instead, First Nations peoples are from many cultures and these cultures are located within space and time. Thus, our efforts to understand the youth and families in our study were directed toward situating the transition to adulthood processes within the localized context.

Very little literature was available to guide our understanding of the transition to adulthood processes among urban-residing First Nations peoples. Given that age groups are socially constructed (Keith et al., 1994; Kessen, 1979), we did not want to engage in language that would predefine what we meant by the transition to adulthood. We consulted community members about our approach to this issue. With their help we decided to ask families to talk about "growing up" processes.

With an informed understanding of the demographic and historical literature on First Nations youth, we approached the transition to adulthood mindful of our understanding of culture as a dynamic ongoing process. We avoided thinking of these First Nations youth as an ethnic or cultural minority group. Such an approach would have distinguished the youth and their families as living "outside" of the researcher's culture. But we could not assume that we were fully informed about the transition to adulthood for them and their families. The understanding rests with the youth and their community. Therefore, to begin building a better understanding of the transition to adulthood for this community, we used processes of naïve observation.

First, we selected the behaviors we wanted to understand. These behaviors were those related to "growing up." The first sets of behaviors were video-recorded parent–youth conversations about growing up. Then we selected the naïve observers we felt would help us understand the behaviors. We selected the parents and youths. The second set of behaviors we wanted to understand were those observed by the parents and youths and then described to researchers via telephone calls. These behaviors were viewed, by parents and youths, as relevant to the process of growing up. The naïve observers of these behaviors were the families and the social supports of the families. We asked the parents and youth to invite their social supports to a talking circle which, although pan-traditional, is consistent with First Nations traditions in Canada. Using core principles of talking circles (see Running Wolf & Rickard, 2003), naïve observations were made about the joint growing up projects.

Through systematic and naïve observations, we were able to listen for the ways that people positioned themselves and made sense of one another and the community in which they lived. But we did not simply take away our interpretation of these observations. We sought additional assistance by asking community leaders to check our interpretations.

The following case illustrates meaningful actions across time which, taken together, contribute to the transition to adulthood for a young First Nations woman, Alexis. The actions encompass the past, present, and future, and are in the service of Alexis becoming an adult. The interpretation is founded upon the naïve observations of the youth, parent, and close family members, and guidance from community leaders.

Alexis lived with her mother Silvia, Alexis's three sisters, two older brothers, and an older cousin. Before moving to the city, the family lived in a rural area. Silvia decided several years prior to her involvement in the research project to move to the city and away from what she felt were many negative influences upon her children. At the time of data collection, Silvia's physical health was poor so she was unable to work at a steady job. Alexis and her sisters were ambitious and active at school, sports, and in Native organizations in their neighborhood. Alexis worked hard to attain good grades in school and was working on securing scholarships so that she could attend college. She also worked at a part-time job in order to help her mother cover day-to-day financial expenses.

Alexis and her family members identified themselves as members of their First Nation. They participated in gatherings of their people in the city and Alexis was active in youth programs at the community center. Alexis and her sisters frequently joined in the dances of their cultural community. This self-identification was important but it was only one part of Alexis's cultural identity (see Chapter 7). To observe and understand cultural processes related to the transition to adulthood, we looked to the actions and naïve observations of Alexis, her mother, and members of the family.

The "growing up" projects of this family focused on (a) the development of values of respect and responsibility for others and (b) learning to have a voice or an independent way of thinking about ideas. Silvia, in particular, tried to guide Alexis and her siblings toward being respectful and caring of others. Her reflection, during a family interview, demonstrated the importance of time. Her family's past influences her present actions and goals for her children's future.

Mother: They are so much different than – than what we grew up as – like we didn't have anybody to look at – like our mother passed away when we were like – I was – like – 13. And so like – watching these girls grow up and just – like a different world. And a whole different life – they've seen the worst in me as a person – and they've seen like me trying to be a better person...

Becoming a better person involved respecting and acting responsibly toward others. These values are revealed in a conversation between Silvia and Alexis about interacting with people when hurt or angry.

Mother: . . .like we had our down side . . . for . . . for a long time right . . . Do you
              think it could be because of . . . how you were brought up why? . . . I
              think you're special – in how you perceive other people . . . even if other
              people don't respect you – you still have – you still have it in you to be
              polite and . . . you know not to lash out at them and call people names . . .
              and. . .

Alexis attributed her politeness to learning from her auntie.

Youth: [Auntie], she's cool . . . she's taught me a lot. . .
Mother: [Auntie] has a lot of wisdom in her – because of the tough life that she's
              had – you know you know you live and learn.
Youth: Yeah.
Mother: You always learn from your mistakes or other people's mistakes. . .
Youth: No but . . . I think it's not . . . it's like kind of like split up into categories
              . . . how you treat people. I guess not just [treating] children but. . .
Mother: Uh hm.
Youth: We have a choice . . . on which way we go . . . we can take the easy way
              or the hard way . . . most people choose the easy way. . .

In addition to conversations about respect and responsibility for others, Silvia
modeled care by preparing large community meals on birthdays and holidays and
emotionally supporting others when a member of the community died. Alexis
helped her mother prepare the food for the large community meals. Time together
preparing food facilitated close connections in a busy family. It was also a time for
Alexis to learn responsibility for others. When Silvia was physically unwell and
could not prepare New Year's Eve dinner, Alexis cooked the entire dinner for the
whole family on her own. Family members made it known, through teasing and
enjoying the food, this achievement was another indication that Alexis was growing
into an adult.

The other transition-to-adulthood project, learning to have a voice or an inde-
pendent way of thinking about ideas, involved formal and informal education. This
family viewed education as an opportunity to learn how to think and express ideas.
Silvia noted how Alexis learned to speak out over the past year "Alexis – like when
she has something to say it's not – not like she rambles-rambles-rambles-rambles –
it's just like right to the point." The growing ability to speak ideas clearly and
be heard by others was credited to education at school and at home. This seemed
particularly important for women. Alexis' aunt said,

> Also as a First Nations – being a woman – and like – it's just like there's a double – double
> whammy there right – it's just like for these – for these kids it's getting them out of our
> community basically – because it's all negative there and like everybody is like fending for
> themselves. Yeah, and their education is – [Alexis and her siblings] education is like it's
> first. . .

The double whammy meant the prejudice and difficult social conditions faced
by First Nations women. Alexis' mother and aunt did not want to repeat past ways
of entering adulthood; they were working toward shaping a different transition to
adulthood for Alexis and her siblings.

Learning to speak her mind as an educated woman in her community involved Alexis forming independent ideas. Sometimes her ideas conflicted with what her mother believed. They argued but Silvia helped Alexis deal with her anger when expressing ideas or pushing limits. She called Alexis "Bubbles" because she pretended to see a cartoon "thought" bubble of anger. That was a signal to "hold your tongue (laughing)." Alexis noted " Yeah, I can see when you call me 'Bubbles' 'cause now when I get mad – I don't say anything out loud – I just think alright when two minutes have gone by and I think in my head . . . well, it's over . . . each time."

This case illustration allowed us to understand how communities use the past and future to inform current joint actions. The adults in the family recalled the past and, looking to the future, tried to shape Alexis' entry into adulthood. Cultural practices included large meals at family gatherings. These practices were brought into the present from the past. But not all practices were carried forward. Silvia and her sister wanted the girls to be well educated and able to express ideas clearly. They did not want the girls using alcohol and struggling like their aunt. To that end, the goals of this family were acting on the culture to make changes.

The naïve observations of the family help us understand the context in which Alexis and her siblings were entering adulthood. The aunt's description of the double whammy of being a woman and First Nations revealed prejudices and hardships. It helped situate the transition to adulthood in the larger context of prejudice against First Nations communities. Silvia's narratives situate her family's past experiences in their rural home and the hardships faced in that setting. These narratives provide current and historical contextual information.

The naïve observations of the transition to adulthood were unpacked during self-confrontation interviews and larger family gatherings. By listening to the naïve observations of family members, we were able to understand the complex relationship between the two transition projects. Becoming responsible and caring for others involves education about issues and learning to clearly state opinions. By clearly voicing views on issues, adults can help protect and care for others. These narratives situate the meaning of adulthood within the actions of preparing meals for large family gathering, learning to control angry outbursts and speaking clearly, and seeking education.

Conclusion

In summary, working with youth during their transition to adulthood involves understanding the vague and complex notion of culture. In this chapter, we describe an action theoretical approach to thinking about transition to adulthood and culture. Thinking about the transition to adulthood as inherently cultural highlights the importance of history, meaning-making, and process. Attention to folk explanations, narratives, and joint sets of actions orients counselors to being responsive to culture.