

CULTURAL AWARENESS, SENSITIVITY AND COMPETENCE

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Preface

Today we live in societies characterized by cultural pluralism-- the existence of different cultures living side by side. This cultural pluralism makes the dynamics of interpersonal relations more challenging, requiring that we learn how to relate effectively to people who may behave, think and feel differently from our own personal and cultural expectations. The necessity of relating effectively to people of other cultural groups increases the difficulties in client relations for the many different helping professions-- social workers, doctors and nurses, psychologists and counselors, educators, and many others.

This book provides the basis conceptual frameworks for understanding people of other cultures and working effectively with them. Perspectives from anthropology, communication, psychology, sociology, cross-cultural medicine and education are integrated to provide guidelines for engaging in the processes of self-assessment and personal development necessary to be culturally competent.

This text is designed to help move the individual from cultural embeddedness-- a normal ethnocentrism-- towards appreciation of the importance of understanding and working with the perspectives of people from other cultures. The self-assessments, exercises and text material is designed to set you on a course of moving towards cultural awareness, developing cultural sensitivity, and understanding the bases from which you may develop cross-cultural competence.

The need for people to develop these cultural skills is becoming increasingly apparent within our society and around the world. All too often cultural differences create insurmountable barriers to effective social and political relations. Most humans are trapped in a "cultural encapsulation" in which they are unable to understand others points of view and work effectively with them. This text is designed to help you begin to overcome these limitation and move towards being a culturally competent global citizen.

CULTURAL AWARENESS, SENSITIVITY AND COMPETENCE

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1	
Cultural Competence in the Helping Professions	1
Introduction: Understanding Cultural Diversity	2
Culture in Generalist Social Work Practice and the “Helping Professions”	3
Culture in the Process-Stage Approach	5
Strengths Perspectives and Cultural Sensitivity	6
Cultural Systems Perspectives.....	7
Cross-Cultural Awareness, Sensitivity, Competence and Proficiency	8
Cross-Cultural Learning and Training.....	9
Benefits of Cross-Cultural Skills and Cultural Knowledge.....	11
Overview of the Text.....	11
Basic Conceptual Distinctions for Culturally Pluralistic Societies.....	12
References and Additional Readings.....	15
Self-Assessment 1.1: Cross-Cultural Development.....	17
Self-Assessment 1.1: Scoring	19
Self-Assessment 1.2: Culture and Personal Style.....	20
Self-Assessment 1.3: Class Exercise: Social Interaction Styles	21
Chapter 2	
Race and Ethnicity	23
Introduction: Differentiating Race and Ethnicity	24
The Concept of Race	24
Race in Historical Perspective.....	24
Modern Concepts of Race	26
Skin Color and Racial Distinctions	29
Racism and Ideology	30
Ethnicity	31
Classic Perspectives on Ethnicity	31
Ethnic Categories	33
The Construction of Ethnicity	34
Acculturation and Stages of Ethnicity Identity Development	36

Types of Intercultural Adaptation	36
Minority Ethnic Identity Development.....	38
Dominant Groups' Development of Ethnic Awareness.....	39
Summary: Self and Identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective	40
References and Additional Readings.....	42
Self-Assessment 2.1: Racial and Ethnic Identity.....	44

Chapter 3

Culture, Biology and Socialization: The Psychocultural Model.....	47
Introduction	48
The Concept of Culture	48
Culture, Biology and Human Needs.....	49
Effects of Socialization.....	50
Unconscious Cultural Acquisition.....	50
Behavioral Determinism.....	51
Cultural Adaptation and Integration.....	52
Socialization and Deviance	53
Intracultural Variation	53
The Ecology of Human Development.....	54
The Psychocultural Model.....	55
The Socialization of Biology.....	58
Life Cycle Human Development in Cross-Cultural Perspective	60
Culture and Cognition	62
Anthropological Approaches to Ethnicity	63
Personality and Self.....	64
Indigenous Psychologies	65
Social Roles and Cultural Self.....	67
References and Additional Readings.....	70
Self-Assessment 3.1: Socialization Experiences	73

Chapter 4

Cultural Systems Models.....	77
Addressing Ethnicity and Culture within Systems Perspectives	78
Cultural Systems Approaches in the “Helping Professions”	79
The Cultural System: The Pyramid of Culture.....	80
Culture in General Systems Theory and Conflict Perspectives.....	82
Emic Perspectives in the Systems Approach.....	83
Infrastructure: The Technoeconomic System.....	84

Ecology and Demography: The Population-Environment Interface	84
Production: Technology and Subsistence	85
Economic Systems and Society	85
Social Organization and Structure: Domestic and Political.....	88
Social Organization and Behavior.....	88
Family and Kinship	90
Political Structures	91
Politics of Intercultural Contact: Group-Level Dynamics	93
Forms of Intergroup Contact	94
Institutionalized Discrimination	96
Group Reactions to Subordinate Status	97
Social Stratification	98
The Culture and Structure of Poverty.....	99
Superstructure: Ideology, World View and Identity.....	100
Language and Communication.....	101
Socialization and Education	101
Values.....	102
Religion and Cosmology	104
References and Additional Readings.....	106
Self-Assessment 4.1: Culture Assessment.....	107
Self-Assessment 4.2: Values Assessment.....	108
Self-Assessment 4.3: Values Orientation Assessment	111

Chapter 5

Process Dynamics of Intergroup Relations	113
Introduction	114
Cross-Cultural Contact and Conflict	114
Cultural Shock.....	115
Attribution and Interpretation.....	118
Types of Causal Attributions.....	118
Cultural Attribution	119
Stereotypes and Cultural Characterizations	120
In-Group Versus Out-Group Dynamics.....	122
Ethnocentrism.....	123
The Ethnocentric Syndrome	124
Prejudice and Discrimination	125
Classic and Normative Views	126
Prejudice.....	127

Discrimination	129
Explanations of Prejudice and Discrimination	131
Psychodynamic Process in Intercultural Relations	132
Minority Defense Mechanisms.....	134
Minority Status: Psychology and Self-Esteem	134
Majority Defense Mechanisms.....	136
Dynamics of Group Intercultural Accommodation	137
Integration and Segregation	137
Theories of Assimilation	140
Aspects of Assimilation.....	141
Cultural Pluralism	143
References and Additional Readings.....	145
Self-Assessment 5.1: Social Distance.....	147

Chapter 6

Cross-Cultural Awareness, Sensitivity and Competence	152
Introduction: Cultural Awareness, Sensitivity, Competence and Proficiency	152
Major Stages of Cross-Cultural Development.....	152
Aspects of Cultural Competence	154
Toward Ethnorelativism: Stages of Intercultural Sensitivity.....	155
Ethnocentric Stages	156
Ethnorelative Stages	157
Developmental Approaches to Cross-Cultural Competence	158
Ethnorelativism	159
Multicultural Identity Development	160
References and Additional Readings.....	163
Self-Assessment 6.1: Cross-Cultural Development I	164
Sel-Assessment 6.1:Scoring	166
Self-Assessment 6.2: Cross-Cultural Development II.....	167

Chapter 7

Developing Cross-Cultural Competence.....	169
Introduction: Cross-Cultural Learning and Adaptation	170
Perspectives for Cross-Cultural Adaptation	171
Intercultural Effectiveness Skills.....	171
Anthropological Understandings as Intercultural Tools.....	172

Personal Skills for Cross-Cultural Adaptation.....	173
Stress Management and Culture Shock Adaptation	174
Managing Personal Life-Transformations	176
Managing Emotional Reactions: Self-Maintenance.	177
Interpersonal Skills for Intercultural Relations	178
Language Barriers and Communication	178
Establishing Personal and Social Relations: Understanding Social Interaction Rules	179
Behavioral and Communication Styles	180
Managing Cross-Cultural Conflict	183
Developing a Multicultural Self	185
References and Additional Readings.....	187
Exercise 7.1: Interview Assignment	188

Chapter 8

Cross-Cultural Work in the Helping Professions.....	189
Introduction: Cross-Cultural Contexts in the Helping Professions.....	190
Social Work and Education	190
Ethnic Sensitivity in Social Work Education	190
Social Work in Schools	192
Cross-Cultural Issues in Contemporary Education.....	193
Cross-Cultural Issues in Social Work in the Health Services.....	194
Social Work in Public Health.....	195
Cross-Cultural Issues in Medicine and Nursing	196
Cross-Cultural Issues in Psychology, Counseling and Psychotherapy	200
Adaptations to Barriers to Cross-Cultural Therapy	202
Family and Child Welfare Services.....	204
Cultural Factors in Criminal Justice	206
The Cultural Defense in Criminal Law	207
Multicultural Management in Occupational Social Work	210
Cross-Cultural Perspectives in Administration	211
References and Additional Readings.....	214
Self-Assessment 8.1: Cross-Cultural Interactions	217