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.
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