

WNY Advising Conference Session: Advising Through a Global Lens

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Supporting Content Information

Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Ethnocentrism

A simple way to conceive of the three stages of ethnocentrism is in terms of attitudes toward cultural differences:

- ❖ those in the **denial** stage deny the existence of cultural differences,
- ❖ those in the **defense** stage demonize them,
- ❖ and those in the **minimization** stage trivialize differences

Ethnorelativism

- ❖ **Acceptance:** In this first stage of ethnorelativism, people begin to recognize other cultures and accept them as viable alternatives to their own worldview. They know that people are genuinely different from them and accept the inevitability of other value systems and behavioral norms. They do not yet adapt their own behavior to the cultural context, but they no longer see other cultures as threatening, wrong, or inferior. People in the acceptance phase can be thought of as “culture-neutral,” seeing differences as neither good nor bad, but rather as a fact of life.
- ❖ **Adaptation:** During the adaptation phase, people begin to view cultural differences as a valuable resource. Because differences are seen as positive, people consciously adapt their behaviors to the different cultural norms of their environment.
- ❖ **Integration:** Integration is the last stage in one's journey away from ethnocentrism. In this stage, people accept that their identity is not based in any single culture. Once integrated, people can effortlessly and even unconsciously shift between worldviews and cultural frames of reference. Though they maintain their own cultural identity, they naturally integrate aspects of other cultures into it.

Once you have progressed to an ethnorelativistic view of cultural differences, you will in essence be bicultural. You will revel in cultural differences, and be able to effortlessly take on subtle characteristics of the local culture. Your intercultural sensitivity will also affect how others view and treat you.

<http://www.uniteforsight.org/cultural-competency/module7>

Briefly, some characteristics of each stage are:

- **Denial.** Being comfortable with the familiar. Not anxious to complicate life with “cultural differences”. Not noticing much cultural difference around you. Maintaining separation from others who are different.
- **Defense.** A strong commitment to one’s own thoughts and feelings about culture and cultural difference. Some distrust of cultural behavior or ideas that differ from one’s own. Aware of other cultures around you, but with a relatively incomplete understanding of them and probably fairly strong negative feelings or stereotypes about some of them.

Reversal is the opposite of Defense. The person feels that some other culture is better and tends to exhibit distrust of their own culture.

- **Minimization.** People from other cultures are pretty much like you, under the surface. Awareness that other cultures exist all around you, with some knowledge about differences in customs and celebrations. Not putting down other cultures. Treating other people as you would like to be treated.
- **Acceptance.** Aware of your own culture(s). See your own culture as just one of many ways of experiencing the world. Understanding that people from other cultures are as complex as yourself. Their ideas, feelings, and behavior may seem unusual, but you realize that their experience is just as rich as your own. Being curious about other cultures. Seeking opportunities to learn more about them.
- **Adaptation.** Recognizing the value of having more than one cultural perspective available to you. Able to “take the perspective” of another culture to understand or evaluate situations in either your own or another culture. Able to intentionally change your culturally based behavior to act in culturally appropriate ways outside your own culture.
- **Integration.** To varying extents, have integrated more than one cultural perspective, mindset, and behavior into one’s identity and worldview. Able to move easily among cultures.

The first three stages are considered “ethnocentric” in that one’s own culture is seen as the only culture or to varying extents the “better” culture.

The last three stages are considered “ethnorelative” in that one’s own culture is seen as equal among many other cultures.

The ethnorelative stages are characterized by a positive mindset about cultural difference. These stages are indicative of a person who will tend to make more inclusive decisions and actively seek to build a diverse workforce and an inclusive work environment.

This highlights the central importance of developing individuals to the point where they have an ethnorelative experience of cultural difference.

<https://www.evansville.edu>