

Cultural Sensitivity

Respect for People's Strength, Culture and Knowledge

Bronx Partners for Healthy Communities



Cultural Sensitivity

Respect for People's Strength, Culture and Knowledge

- New York City is a mosaic of cultures and ethnicities.
- Residents of the Bronx, similar to other boroughs, speak more than 100 languages; they represent every culture, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity, and bring their own unique experiences, histories, tradition.
- Culture and customs include how people live, role expectations, child rearing practices, food and include health practices. Increasing cultural sensitivity involves several major steps:
 - Defining Cultural Sensitivity
 - Valuing diversity
 - Being capable of honest self-assessment
 - Being conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures intersect
 - Having developed approaches that are adapted to diversity

Cultural Sensitivity

- **Brainstorming Activity:**
 - What does cultural sensitivity mean to you?

Defining Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural Sensitivity is defined as:

- a) Being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value – positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong.
- b) Being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist and have an effect on values, learning and behavior.
- c) A set of skills that allows you to understand and learn about people whose cultural background is not the same as your own.

Defining Cultural Sensitivity

Stages of Cultural Sensitivity

[Milton Bennett](#) developed a solid framework to understand the various stages of cultural sensitivity (or as he calls it “intercultural sensitivity” that a person may experience.

- **Denial:** At this stage of cultural sensitivity, people don't recognize cultural differences and experiences. They believe their culture is the only “real” one and they tend to interact in homogenous groups and to stereotype everyone else.
 - **Example:** People who say, “We are all the same and I don't understand why we have to learn about the different groups in the company. Why don't they just learn how we do things in America? ”
- **Defense:** At the defense stage of cultural sensitivity, people recognize some differences, but see them as negative because they assume their culture is the most evolved, the best one.
 - **Example:** People who say, “In Latin America you can't just get to the point and talk business. They want to tell you their life story. I don't understand why they can't just learn to be more direct and save everyone time.”

Defining Cultural Sensitivity

Stages of Cultural Sensitivity (cont'd.)

- **Minimization:** Individuals at this stage of cultural sensitivity are unaware that they are projecting their own cultural values. They see their own values as superior. They think that the mere awareness of cultural differences is enough. These people think we are all the same because we are more similar than different and, in the end, we all have similar physical, biological, psychological needs etc. They think they are wonderful because they see people as people but they are actually denying the influence of culture in every person's experience.
 - **Example:** Statements such as, "In the end, we all want to be liked," or, "We are all people."

Defining Cultural Sensitivity

Stages of Cultural Sensitivity (cont'd.)

- **Acceptance:** At this stage of cultural sensitivity people are able to shift perspectives to understand that the same “ordinary” behavior can have different meanings in different cultures. They may not agree or even like the differences they observe but they are interested in finding out and learning about another culture. They are able to identify how experiences are influenced by one’s culture.
- **Example:** People who approach others with genuine interest and curiosity about how they experience the same situations. They ask questions such as, “How do Dominicans do it?” or, “What would your family do in a situation like this?”

Defining Cultural Sensitivity

Stages of Cultural Sensitivity (cont'd.)

- **Adaptation:** Individuals who are at this stage of cultural sensitivity become more competent in their ability to communicate with other cultures. They can evaluate other people's behavior from these people's frame of reference and can adapt behavior to fit the norms of a different culture.
 - **Example:** People who seamlessly interact with others from different cultures by following the norms of that culture. They feel that they can respect their own values while adapting to the values of other cultures they interact with. They use empathy effectively. For example, people who bow at the right time when interacting with Japanese clients or naturally expect certain guests from certain ethnic backgrounds to show up forty-five minutes after the scheduled start time of a party.

Defining Cultural Sensitivity

Stages of Cultural Sensitivity (cont'd.)

- **Integration:** People who are at this stage of cultural sensitivity are able to shift easily from one cultural frame of reference to another. They develop empathy for other cultures.
 - **Example:** People who are equally comfortable with one culture or another. This stage is easy to see with perfectly bilingual/bicultural individuals who almost change their personality when they interact with one group (their family, for instance) or another (their Anglo co-workers, for instance) but they are equally genuine in both situations.

Defining Cultural Sensitivity

How far should you expect individuals to go regarding their own cultural sensitivity?

- Part of answering the question of what is cultural sensitivity is to realize that one of the main purposes of becoming more culturally competent is to become more effective in your relationships with colleagues, and consumers or clients.

Valuing Diversity

Diversity is defined in the dictionary as "the condition of being different." A crucial mistake many people make is to equate diversity with "race" and "culture". They think diversity is about "what Hispanics are like" or "what Europeans are like". This approach is inherently flawed because it reinforces stereotypes and promotes an "us versus them" mentality.*

**Source: Program Outcomes for Youth, Social Competencies, Susan J. Barkman and Hannah L. Speaker, available at http://ag.arizona.edu/sfcs/cyfernet/nowg/sc_valdiv.html*

Valuing Diversity

- Diversity extends far beyond race and culture to include a number of dimensions of differences. Two major dimensions of diversity include: primary and secondary*.
 - **Primary dimensions** are things that we cannot change: such as age, race, ethnicity, gender, physical qualities and sexual orientation.
 - **Secondary dimensions** include topics such as income, education, religious beliefs, military experience, geographic location, parental status and marital status.
- We are all similar and different on an infinite number of dimensions.

Valuing Diversity

- **What are some of the first things we notice about people?**
 - Difference in skin color: first notices at about two or three years old
 - Differences in height
 - Differences in weight
 - Differences in language and accents

- **Where do messages of difference come from?**
 - Parents
 - Friends
 - Teachers
 - Media
 - Socialization
 - Religious Institutions
 - Sports & on the Field
 - Extracurricular Activities
 - Government

Valuing Diversity

America: Known as the "melting pot", "salad bowl" and a "kaleidoscope."

- **Melting Pot:** The melting pot metaphor emerged from the idea that customs and traditions of people of different races and ethnicities would blend and lose their own distinctions after close contact over time, just like ingredients mix in a pot.
- **Salad Bowl:** Later the salad bowl metaphor was used to describe this blending of ethnic characteristics much like salad ingredients tossed in a bowl. Salad ingredients do not change even when they are mixed together. Although popular, this metaphor fails to acknowledge the tendency for cultural patterns to change through cultural encounters.
- **Kaleidoscope*:** Currently the kaleidoscope metaphor seems to more accurately reflect what is happening in a diverse society. When a kaleidoscope is in motion, new possibilities emerge at every turn, just like the interaction between cultural groups. This metaphor acknowledges that cultures keep changing through their interaction and yet maintain their basic characteristics.

***Source:** *The American Kaleidoscope, Race, Ethnicity and Civic Culture*, Lawrence H. Fuchs (1990)

Valuing Diversity

Valuing diversity recognizes differences between people and acknowledges that these differences are a valued asset.

- It respects individuality while promoting respect for others
- It emphasizes the contributions of the various groups (e.g. ethnic, gender, income, sexual orientation, etc.)
- It emphasizes the importance of people sharing their stories and learning from the stories of others

Self-Assessment

- Recall a time when you made a cultural assumption about someone else.
 - What assumption was made?
 - What effect did it have on the situation?

- Now, recall a time when someone else made an assumption about you based on their perception of your culture.
 - What assumption was made?
 - What effect did it have on you and on the situation?

Dynamics Inherent When Cultures Intersect

- Cultural identities are individual and complex, AND
- Cultural commonalities *do* exist, BUT
- They are often over-simplified, and assumed where they may not exist, and overlooked when they may be there, AND
- Consequences of assumptions can be serious and are rooted in unequal power and privilege.
- Power and privilege can be present in:
 - Race
 - Language
 - Gender
 - Socio Economic Status (SES) * Often refers to poverty
 - Sexual Orientation
 - Religion
 - Education
 - Occupation
 - Age
 - Housing
 - Your zip code
 - Abilities
 - Insurance
 - Name

Poverty Example—Part I

- Poverty has many complex definitions depending on the source. To best understand what poverty is, we will define it as does Ruby Payne, professional educator:
 - **Poverty** is the extent to which an individual does without resources. These resources include; financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules.

Poverty Example—Part II

- **Poverty Statistics for U.S.A.*:**

- 25% of single mom families are living in poverty
- The majority of poor families/households work 2 or more jobs
- In 2014, 47million Americans were impoverished, including 15.5 million children
- 1 in 6 Americans live in poverty
- 1 in 7 American households were food insecure in 2015
- 14% of American seniors live in poverty
- 29% of people with a disability live in poverty

- **New York City Poverty Rates by County***

- Bronx County: 31.5%
- Kings County (Brooklyn): 23.4%
- New York County (Manhattan): 17.7%
- Queens County: 15.4%
- Richmond County: 14.5%

*Source: www.povertyusa.org

Assumptions

- **Assumption:** The poor are lazy.
- **Fact*:** People in poverty expend a lot of energy on daily survival including working multiple jobs or finding employment, providing food, finding childcare, finding transportation and attending agency mandated trainings and meetings.
- **Assumption:** The poor are mostly from 1 or 2 racial groups, or are foreign born.
- **Fact*:** The average American impoverished family demographic is White non-Hispanic, American born, two parent family, aged 25-53, with two children.
- **Assumption:** The poor want to live off the welfare system, or choose to be poor.
- **Fact*:** While generational poverty exists, most experience situational poverty, or poverty due to circumstance, such as: loss of employment, health crisis, death and divorce. Situational poverty is generally short-term. People overcome their impoverished situations as their life circumstances improve.

***Source:** www.povertyusa.org

Approaches that are adapted to diversity

- Being aware of one's biases, prejudices and knowledge about the person with whom you are interacting. For example:
 - Be aware of assumptions
 - Challenge your assumptions
 - Use appropriate language

Power and Privilege

- Recognizing the power and privilege your culture and position affords you and avoiding the imposition of those values. For example:
 - Use non-judgmental questions
 - Do not assume people have resources
 - Do not assume everyone is like you

Open Discussion