
Cultural Identity

We are all at different places in our journey of developing our identity. Self-reflection is a great tool to use when setting goals of who you are with consideration of the world around you. Review the following information and identify where you are in developing your cultural identity. Set a goal for yourself to get closer to who you want to be. Write your goal on the note card.

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.

- Denial: People in the denial stage do not recognize the existence of cultural differences. They are completely ethnocentric in that they believe there is a correct type of living (theirs), and that those who behave differently simply don't know any better. In this phase, people are prone to imposing their value system upon others, believing that they are "right" and that others who are different are "confused." They are not threatened by cultural differences because they refuse to accept them. Generally, those who experience cultural denial have not had extensive contact with people different from themselves, and thus have no experiential basis for believing in other cultures. A key indicator of the denial stage is the belief that you know better than other people on what to do and how to do it.
- Defense: Those in the defense stage are no longer blissfully ignorant of other cultures; they recognize the existence of other cultures, but not their validity. They feel threatened by the presence of other ways of thinking, and thus denigrate them in an effort to assert the

superiority of their own culture. Cultural differences are seen as problems to be overcome, and there is a dualistic “us vs. them” mentality. Whereas those in the denial stage are unthreatened by the presence of other cultural value systems (they don’t believe in them, after all), those in the defense stage do feel threatened by “competing” cultures. People in the defense stage tend to surround themselves with members of their own culture, and avoid contact with members from other cultures.

- Minimization: People in the minimization stage of ethnocentrism are still threatened by cultural differences and try to minimize them by telling themselves that people are more similar than dissimilar. No longer do they see those from other cultures as being misguided, inferior, or unfortunate. They still have not developed cultural self-awareness and are insistent about getting along with everyone. Because they assume that all cultures are fundamentally similar, people in this stage fail to tailor their approaches to a cultural context.

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, school, or global culture. Your intercultural sensitivity will also affect how others view and treat you. Being trusted and accepted by the school culture into a culture you have recently come to know and accept will be thrilling and fulfilling, and will allow you to be a more effective school community member.

What is a goal for learning more about the culture of others?

Resources:

Module 7: Cultural Differences and Cultural Understanding [Here](#)

Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity [Here](#)