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Multicultural Toolkit

(Toolkit for Cross-Cultural Collaboration)

Executive Summary

The *Toolkit for Cross-Cultural Collaboration* was created as a result of a study of collaboration styles of African American, Asian American, Native American, Hispanic American, and Anglo American communities. While some similarities in styles were found across communities, a great chasm separated each minority community from the European American Communities. The chasm was created by differences in expectations, styles, assumptions, values, body language, and privilege. Each minority community understands that great differences separate them from the European American mainstream cultures. In contrast, European American communities do not have much awareness of the magnitude of differences. Occasional events open a small portal to this awareness, but European Americans do not experience cultural differences as a central concern in their lives. For minority communities, the differences are not only central, but vast and inescapable.

The consequences of gaps in collaboration and communication styles are devastating to each minority community and to the nation as a whole. For minority communities, some consequences are that health services are underutilized and many children do not complete their education. The resulting economic disadvantages are passed from generation to generation.

The Toolkit discusses barriers to cross-cultural collaboration and provides methods for assessing and improving communication patterns and cultural competence on an organizational basis and on an individual basis. By improving cultural competence, trust and mutual respect can be improved between agencies and minority communities, forming a solid foundation for cross-cultural collaboration.

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Introduction

The *Toolkit for Cross-Cultural Collaboration* was created as a result of a study of collaboration styles of African American, Asian American, Native American, Hispanic American, and Anglo American communities. While some similarities were found across communities in styles and markers of success, a great chasm separated each minority community from the Anglo American Communities. The chasm was created by differences in expectations, styles, assumptions, values, body language, and privilege. Each minority community understands that great differences separate them from the Anglo American mainstream cultures. In contrast, Anglo American communities do not have much awareness of the magnitude of differences. Occasional events open a small portal to this awareness, but Anglo Americans do not experience cultural differences as a central concern in their lives. For minority communities, the differences are not only central, but vast and inescapable.

The consequences of gaps in collaboration and communication styles are devastating to each minority community and to the nation as a whole. For minority communities, some consequences are: health services are underutilized, and many children do not complete their education. The resulting economic disadvantages are passed from generation to generation.

Following are examples of differential at-risk behaviors and outcomes for ethnic minorities, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site (1998, 1999) and the Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Services Web site (1998, 1999):

Asian American and Pacific Islanders: The number of **Hepatitis B** cases among Asian American and Pacific Islander (API) children is two to three times greater than the rates for all children in the United States; **tuberculosis** rates for APIs is five times higher than the rates for the total population; 36 percent under the age of 65 have no health insurance; and for Southeast Asian men, **smoking** prevalence is 34% to 43% compared to 27.6% for Anglo American men (Department of Health & Human Services, Public Health Service (1998).

Hispanic Americans: **Tuberculosis** prevalence is twice the rate for the total population; Hispanic Americans are almost twice as likely to have **diabetes** as Anglo Americans; and among Hispanic American youth ages 15-24, **homicide** was the leading cause of death (Department of Health & Human Services, Public Health Service, 1999).

African Americans: Through 1997, over one third (36%) of **AIDS** cases were among African Americans, who represent only 13% of the U.S. population; 60% of all women reported with AIDS in 1997 were African American; 62 percent of all reported pediatric cases for 1997 were African American; 63 percent of HIV diagnoses for young people ages 13 to 24 were among African Americans; African Americans are 1.7 times as likely to have **diabetes** as Anglo Americans; over 20 percent of poor African American children have **high blood lead levels** compared to 8 percent of poor Anglo Americans; African American children have twice the **infant mortality** rate of Anglo American children and four times the rate for causes related to **low birthweight**; and among African American youth ages 15-24, **homicide** was the leading cause of death (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (1999).

Native Americans: **Diabetes** prevalence is 70 per 1,000 compared to 30 per 1,000 for the total population and **cirrhosis** deaths are 21.6 per 1,000 compared to 8 per 1,000 for the total

population; the rate for **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome** is 2.5 times higher than for Anglo American infants (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999).

What is the **cost of failing to prevent** at-risk behaviors or reduce poor health outcomes through collaboration with ethnic minority communities? Diabetes alone was estimated to cost **\$98 billion** in direct and indirect health care costs for 1997 for the total population (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998). If the rate of diabetes for ethnic minorities matched Anglo American rates, billions would be saved each year in health care costs.

In terms of human suffering:

- Risk of stroke is 2 to 4 times higher in people with diabetes
- Sixty to sixty-five percent of people with diabetes have high blood pressure
- Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in adults 20 to 74 years old
- Heart disease death rates are 2 to 4 times higher for persons with diabetes
- Diabetes is the leading cause of end-stage renal disease (dialysis, kidney transplants)
- Sixty to seventy percent of people with diabetes have mild to severe forms of nervous system damage
- More than half of lower limb amputations occur among persons with diabetes

Starting the Collaboration Process

This toolkit brings a new set of perspectives to the study and practice of collaboration between and across ethnic groups. A similar perspective has not yet been found in the collaboration literature, especially in cross-cultural collaboration. Studies in the past have been built primarily upon the disciplines of speech communication, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. What the authors bring to this study is the perspective of intercultural communication, and methods to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. This process can lead to improved communication and collaboration between agencies and ethnic minority groups.

While persons in minority communities know that differences separate them from the Anglo American communities, they do not understand the exact nature of the differences in communication styles and values. Instead of understanding these differences, persons from minority communities perceive that they are treated disrespectfully. (Sometimes they are, by individuals displaying prejudice). Because of behaviors they experience as disrespectful from the Anglo American communities, minorities often withdraw from participation in services designed on an Anglo American model. Cross-cultural collaboration to improve services for members of other cultures then becomes very difficult.

Some members of minority communities move away from their own traditions and adopt the values and styles of the mainstream or Anglo American community; such individuals may have frequent communication gaps when dealing with both traditional and mainstream communities. They may find they are not trusted within their own minority communities and they are not fully accepted within the mainstream community. Since they usually work and associate with Anglo Americans, such individuals are more accessible to mainstream organizations and are most often asked by mainstream agencies to represent minority communities. This further expands the gap in communication.

Minority communities perceive it as an act of disrespect when a mainstream agency appoints someone to "represent their interests." Instead, communities believe that they should choose their own representatives.

In these circumstances Anglo Americans are frustrated because they have chosen persons of high visibility—to them—from minority communities in an attempt to bridge gaps and increase

involvement of the community. They then find that participation or service utilization from those minority communities is still lacking, even after the agency's good-faith (but uninformed) effort to correct the situation.

If persons from a minority background have high visibility within the Anglo American community, such as administrators within mainstream organizations, it does not mean that they also have high credibility or visibility within a minority community. Their adoption of values and styles of the Anglo American community may have simultaneously discredited them within their communities of origin. Persons who have high visibility within the Anglo American communities are usually not the best people to choose as representatives for minority communities.

The best choices for representatives for minority communities are found by asking those who actively serve within those communities. For example, leaders within the African American communities may be found by contacting leaders of some of the larger churches serving primarily African Americans. Leaders of Native American communities may be found through contacting members of the tribal governments, who can consult with traditional leaders. For Asian Americans, contact the faith communities serving primarily Asian Americans; also, contact neighborhood associations where Asian Americans predominate. For Hispanic Americans, contact the faith communities and the Hispanic advocacy groups.

Each of the above organizations may help identify the most respected leaders within the communities they serve. Such respected persons, however, may not be particularly effective, or interested in communicating with, the Anglo American communities. The community leaders may have had a history of frustration and perceived or actual disrespect.

Finding respected minority community leaders to represent a community is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for effective cross-cultural collaboration. A person with training in bicultural competence may also be necessary to bridge communication gaps before and during the collaboration process. Having a respected representative and a culturally competent facilitator are two necessary elements for effective cross-cultural collaboration. For long term success, however, much more is needed.

The Cross-Cultural Collaboration Toolkit identifies areas of miscommunication that defeat attempts at cross-cultural collaboration. The Toolkit is designed to help administrators and community leaders become more culturally aware and therefore more effective at collaborating successfully.

Issues underlying the gaps in cross-cultural collaboration, however, are deep, systemic, and even global. A toolkit cannot, of course, solve the problems alone. Training to increase cultural competence must be incorporated into our national and local infrastructures. We need to work with schools and media, as well as politicians and administrators. Our current and future leaders need specific training to increase their cultural competence.

The problem of insufficient cultural competence for cross-cultural collaboration goes back to the earliest beginnings of humanity. Every human culture teaches its members to value their beliefs, mores, and views of reality as the best, as the ideal; in some cases, cultures teach that their beliefs are the **ONLY** acceptable way to be or think. The resulting lack of cultural interchange and adaptation is pervasive and severe. However, given the wide diversity present in modern societies, cultural competence is a necessary skill, allowing us to provide appropriate services to all citizens. Given our modern technologies, it is also a skill we need for global survival.

Bias in Terminology

It is difficult to discuss issues of diversity or multiculturalism. Many of the words related to this

issue have unintended connotations, leading to inaccurate communication and the furthering of unintended biases. Finding an appropriate term for the non-minority population is especially challenging.

"Whites" is the official term used by the federal government. However, referring to a group based on skin color rather than ethnic affiliation is not supportable on the basis of biology, anthropology, or any science. As Jared Diamond points out in Race Without Color:

...it's easy then to distinguish almost any native European from any native sub-Saharan African; we recognize Europeans and sub-Saharan Africans as distinct races, which we name for their skin colors: whites and blacks, respectively. What could be more objective? As it turns out, this seemingly unassailable reasoning is not objective.

For example, **"...races defined by body chemistry don't match races defined by skin color."** Based on biological systems of classification, **"...many anthropologists today conclude that one cannot recognize any human races at all."**

If "race" is based on DNA rather than body chemistry, another conclusion is reached. **"If so, the primary races of humanity may consist of several African races, plus one race to encompass all peoples of all other continents."**

If we were just arguing about races of nonhuman animals, essentially the same uncertainties of classification would arise. But the debates would remain polite and would never attract attention outside the halls of academia.

*Classification of humans is different 'only' in that it shapes our views of other peoples, **fosters our subconscious differentiation between 'us' and 'them,' and is invoked to justify political and socioeconomic discrimination.** On this basis, many anthropologists therefore argue that even if one could validly classify humans into "races", one should not.*

Diamond concludes with **"The last thing we need now is to continue codifying all those different appearances into an arbitrary system of racial classification."** (Diamond, J. 1994, p. 1).

"White" also seems to mean "normative" or "non-minority." Why? If one examines recent federal reports from many of the most authoritative sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control, one finds that each "minority" group is identified in terms of ethnicity; the majority group, in contrast, is identified by skin color.

If one views "whites" as one more ethnic group, instead of the "normative" group, then the proper term would be "Anglo American" or "European American." One therefore has to ask, "Do key policy makers not recognize that Anglo Americans are also an ethnic group, not just the normative group for the culture?"

Why would one group be identified by skin color and every other group in terms of ethnicity or geographic origin?

If the ethnicity and geographic origins of Anglo Americans are unnoticed, taken for granted, and invisible, then we can understand why an older term, referring solely to skin color, has been maintained. Unfortunately, this practice only serves to maintain a lack of cultural awareness.

A noted national expert on multicultural communication, Carlos Cortes, asked a number of experienced trainers in multicultural communication to divide themselves into groups by ethnicity. The "white" participants (other than those who were Jewish) said they did not know where to go because they 'weren't really a part of any ethnic group.' Dr. Cortes says this is what happens every time he requests a group to divide itself this way (Cortes, C., 1997).

Anglo Americans rarely understand that they also are an ethnic/cultural group.

Cortes also pointed out that this phenomenon is one of the central barriers to intercultural communication in the U.S. If a group does not understand that it is an ethnic group, what is their alternative concept of themselves? Do they unconsciously consider themselves the "human norm" group, in contrast to others, who are "culturally different?"

Skin color is not a useful classification. It does not predict behaviors or values. In contrast, knowing a person's ethnicity can help improve communication, the foundation for effective collaboration.

A compelling argument against the use of "white" to describe the majority in the United States is from the pioneering study of A. G. Greenwald and M. R. Banaji (1995) in which an assessment was made of the terms "white" and "black" in reference to people. They found strong bias associating the term "white" with what is desirable and good in people (by persons who consider themselves "white") compared to bias against the word "black." For a personal experience with bias, the reader can take this assessment online. It is available at http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/02.html

For more information on why skin color or race should not be used as a way of defining groups, see *Geometer of Race* (Gould, 1994), which provides a history of the development of our current classification system for human races.

Given all the reasons mentioned above, the authors therefore prefer the ethnic term "Anglo Americans" or "European Americans" to refer to the majority population. The term "Anglo Americans" is commonly used and understood as referring to persons who are not ethnic minorities. However, it literally refers to people of English origin or descent, so it is not inclusive. The term "European American" is preferred by many specialists in multicultural communication, but is not yet common in everyday language. It is not even included in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (1993). In addition, "European American" can also refer to citizens who are immigrants, such as those who have recently arrived from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The term "Anglo American" was also chosen to help clarify the invisible privilege associated with this ethnic group in comparison to others. We found that this invisible privilege, and an associated lack of cultural awareness, is a central barrier to effective multicultural collaboration.

McIntosh (1988) outlines the invisible nature of "white" privilege. Included in her article are forty-six questions Anglo Americans can ask themselves. Answers to those questions serve to raise the reader's consciousness of unearned privilege.

We had difficulty with the term "Collaboration" also. The Multnomah County Strategic Plan (1998) defines collaboration as "a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship between two or more entities for the purpose of increased outcomes, enhancing the probability of greater achievements together than separately." Although the Plan was designed by people with cross-cultural experience, the definition subtly supports Anglo American values more than the values

of some ethnic minorities. For example, "greater achievement" may not be a central reason for many ethnic minorities to agree to collaborate; rather, ethnic minorities may meet primarily to form a foundation for trust, at least initially.

In addition, we found that ethnic minorities tend not to use the term "collaboration." In fact, we were advised by community leaders not to use the term because its use would indicate we had an Anglo American perspective. This document will use the expression "multicultural collaboration" to mean "effective communication across ethnic communities, created by adapting to the expectations, communication styles, and values of the participants. The purpose of that communication is to work together and build trust."

While the word "respect" never arose among the Anglo American mainstream agency representatives we interviewed as an issue that affected collaboration, it was perhaps the central term each of the ethnic minority communities focused on as the problem. Being treated disrespectfully by agency staff was seen as a central barrier to collaboration by the ethnic minorities.

"Respectful" interaction includes treating others in a way that supports their feeling of being valued as individuals and as members of their cultures.

The words "ethnic," "culture," "cultural sensitivity," and "cultural competence" are used throughout this document. Please see the Glossary at the end of this document for definitions of these terms.

We have used the expression "ethnic minority communities" to refer to minority individuals or cultures. We are defining "ethnic minority community" as those persons who share membership within a group because of history, values, expectations, social experience, religion, nationality, language, traditions, culture, communication styles, self-identification, and/or physical appearance. Individuals are often identified as members of an ethnic group solely because of their appearance and/or dialect, but this is not a sufficient basis for establishing ethnicity.

A person's ethnicity is a combination of

- 1. self definition**
- 2. shared values**
- 3. shared norms for behavior**
- 4. group acceptance**

If any of these four elements are missing, the individual should not be considered an adequate or appropriate representative for that ethnic group.

For example, individuals could be chosen to represent "persons of color" because of their appearance, but they may not identify with, associate with persons from, or operate according to the values of, the ethnic minority they appear to represent. They may have assimilated Anglo American cultural values, despite the fact they may sometimes experience discrimination from that culture.

Although persons may be discriminated against because they appear to be an ethnic minority, experiencing discrimination does not translate into an ability to represent the values of the minority group.

The following chapters provide a framework for understanding and adapting to diversity in communication. They can assist in avoiding barriers to trust that are invisible and ethnically

based. The comparison may also permit better diagnosis of where trust has been violated in the past, so an appropriate mending of the relationships can begin.

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Stages of Intercultural Sensitivity

Purpose and Need

Our nation has evolved from a period in the 1800's, when racial discrimination was written into our laws, to a period in the 1960's and 1970's in which such discrimination was declared illegal. During the 1960's and 1970's, it may have been acceptable to say: "I treat everyone the same." This was considered a fair and liberal way of treating others. However, this stance has certain limitations; it assumes that sameness equals fairness, an assumption that only holds true if the values and norms of people involved in an interaction are similar. An outline of the process individuals go through to move beyond this assumption of similarity is provided in the work of Milton Bennett, who authored the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. According to his model, such a statement places the speaker in an early stage of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993).

In the '80's and 90's organizations have attempted to go beyond mere discrimination issues and even "celebrate diversity." However, celebration of diversity falls far short of what is needed for effective collaboration between mainstream agencies and ethnic minority communities. For organizations or individuals to move beyond "celebration" to a real ability to work appropriately with cultural differences requires a planned sequence of development.

Bennett describes six stages of development in intercultural sensitivity. The stages provide a good framework for determining how to work with and improve the capacity for intercultural sensitivity and collaboration. Some of his stages of "cultural sensitivity" include behaviors or adaptations that are included under the definition of "cultural competence."

1. Bennett refers to the first stage of the model as "**denial**." It means that people in this stage are unaware of cultural difference. If mainstream agency staff are in this stage of intercultural sensitivity, a huge problem can be expected in the delivery of education, health, and social services for ethnic minorities, a gap that does currently exist when these groups are compared to Anglo Americans. The task for staff at this first stage of intercultural sensitivity is to recognize cultural differences that are escape their notice.

2. Whereas in the first stage we do not "see" cultural differences, in the second stage of cultural competence we do perceive cultural differences; however, differences from ourselves or the norms of our group are labeled very negatively. They are experienced as a threat to the centrality and "rightness" of our own value system. Bennett calls this stage "**defense**."

If staff of mainstream agencies achieve the second level of intercultural sensitivity, they still fail to communicate effectively with ethnic minorities. If they cannot communicate effectively, they cannot perform the more complex task of collaborating effectively. The task in the second level of cultural sensitivity is to recognize and to become more tolerant of differences and to see basic similarities among people of different cultures. However, little improvement in services can be expected if staff are below the third level of intercultural sensitivity.

3. In the third stage of intercultural sensitivity, **minimization**, we try to avoid stereotypes and even appreciate differences in language and culture. However, we still view many of our own values as universal, rather than viewing them simply as part of our own ethnicity. The task at the third level of intercultural sensitivity is to learn more about our own culture and to avoid projecting that culture or people's experience.

This stage is particularly difficult to pass through when one cultural group has vast and unrecognized privileges when compared to other groups. This problem is so invisible that persons in mainstream agencies are often mystified when representatives of ethnic minorities consistently withdraw from collaborative activities.

4. A reasonable goal for many mainstream agencies is to ensure that all staff achieve at least the fourth developmental level in intercultural sensitivity. The fourth stage in Bennett's model requires us to be able to shift perspective, while still maintaining our commitments to values. The task in this stage is to understand that the same behavior can have different meanings in different cultures. The comparisons that follow in the Toolkit can be particularly helpful for staff of mainstream agencies to improve their intercultural sensitivity in this stage of development. In order for collaboration to be successful long term, this stage of intercultural sensitivity must be reached by the participants of the collaborative process. Bennett calls this stage "**acceptance.**"

5. The fifth stage of intercultural sensitivity, **adaptation**, may allow the person to function in a bicultural capacity. In this stage, a person is able to take the perspective of another culture and operate successfully within that culture. This ability usually develops in a two-part sequence. It requires that the person have enough about his or her own culture and a second culture to allow a mental shift into the value system of the other culture, and an evaluation of behavior based on its norms, not the norms of the first individual's culture of origin. This is referred to as "**cognitive adaptation.**" The more advanced form of adaptation is "**behavioral adaptation,**" in which the person can produce behaviors appropriate to the norms of the second culture. Persons serving as liaisons between a mainstream agency and an ethnic minority group need to be at this level of intercultural sensitivity.

6. In the sixth stage, the person can shift perspectives and frames of reference from one culture to another in a natural way. They become adept at evaluating any situation from multiple frames of reference. Some representatives in cross-cultural collaboration may reach this level, but most probably will not.

Stage six requires in-depth knowledge of at least two cultures (one's own and another), and the ability to shift easily into the other cultural frame of reference. The task at this level of development is to handle identity issues that emerge from this cultural flexibility. Bennett calls this final stage of intercultural sensitivity "**integration.**"

In order for a person to be bicultural and operate as a liaison between cultures, it is not sufficient for him or her to be from an ethnic minority. In fact, if a person who looks like a member of an ethnic minority group has adopted Anglo American values and identifies with the mainstream culture, he or she may be a poor choice to represent their culture of origin in collaborative efforts.

Such persons may not be trusted by the ethnic community that they "represent." In addition, if the representatives are assimilated rather than bicultural, they may also want to "correct" some of the behaviors or values or usual behaviors of the ethnic minority culture.

To summarize Bennett's stages of intercultural sensitivity:

Stages of Intercultural Sensitivity

1. **Denial: Does not recognize cultural differences**
2. **Defense: Recognizes some differences, but sees them as negative**
3. **Minimization: Unaware of projection of own cultural values; sees own values as superior**
4. **Acceptance: Shifts perspectives to understand that the same "ordinary" behaviors can have different meanings in different cultures**

5. **Adaptation:** Can evaluate other's behavior from their frame of reference and can ac behavior to fit the norms of a different culture
6. **Integration:** Can shift frame of reference and also deal with resulting identity issue:

The primary goal of the following comparisons is to assist staff with stages 4 and 5 of interc sensitivity, since development to this level is necessary for successful cross-cultural collaboration.

- The comparisons should help staff identify themselves on a continuum for each variable, and understand from this that their value system represents one cultural perspective among many. This may help persons with Anglo American values and communication styles to see those value styles more clearly and in context. Hopefully, it will help Anglo Americans to "see" their own ethnicity.
- The comparisons will also help to identify arenas of difference that can destroy communication collaboration, due to misinterpretation of culturally-based behaviors.
- The comparisons should help to clarify individual differences, as compared to group differences. Anglo Americans and others participating in a collaborative process should go through the chart and circle their own positions on each continuum. Virtually everyone who does this exercise will find they have many behaviors and values similar to those typical of their own ethnic group, perhaps some that fit more typically in others.

To know that a person comes from a certain ethnic background does not tell us where they are in terms of values or behaviors; rather, it alerts us to possible arenas of miscommunication. We can then observe more carefully to see where that individual fits on a continuum of values compared to his or her ethnic group.

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How to Use Comparisons of Cultural Patterns

One of the stated core values of United States culture is respect for individual and group differences. As a country we have often fallen short of this value, yet our nation's ethical base and the changing ethnic makeup of our population demand we seek new ways to ensure that "valuing diversity" becomes more than a catch-phrase. Given the depth and complexity of problems facing our nation and world today, we must find ways for leaders in public and private organizations to create work environments where all individuals can feel valued. All will then be encouraged to contribute as much as they can to the solutions we desperately need.

Many leaders in public services, in business, and in education environments are committed to this and genuinely want to see it happen, yet are continually disappointed in their efforts to create inclusive, relevant services and/or work environments. This is an absolutely necessary, watershed area of expertise for current and future leaders. The expectations of public service and the maintenance of profitability for private enterprises will increasingly depend on a leaders' ability to become **proficient in cross-cultural skills, assess** culturally different employees accurately, **design and implement programs** relevant to many communities, and **model these skills** for subordinates. The cost of failure in this area will be far too high for leaders to choose to ignore cultural competency as an essential area of expertise.

One of the reasons a multicultural work environment has been difficult to create and sustain is that most individuals are unaware of the differing sets of communication assumptions, attributions, and especially behaviors that are normative in various cultures. This document attempts to remedy the lack of practical instruction in this area.

We do not provide a "checklist" for how to deal with members of culture X, Y, or Z. This is overly simplistic and patronizing to everyone. We do provide information in some practical areas of cultural difference. We emphasize norms, assumptions, and behaviors that often lead to misunderstanding and failure in attempts to collaborate and develop trusting and comfortable cross-cultural alliances.

Degree of Difference and Trust

It may be surprising to find that it is not the degree of difference between two ethnic groups that causes a loss of trust or even hostilities. Events in Kosovo, the Middle East, and Rwanda attest to the fact that extreme hostilities, based on ethnic differences, can emerge even when the differences between warring ethnic groups are slight when compared to the degree of difference between those two groups and both groups' differences from other cultures. An example of large differences **NOT** leading to problems could be African Americans and Native Americans. These groups have large differences in communication style, but a generally high level of comfort and liking for each other, and a long history of forming alliances.

It is not the degree of difference between groups that causes harm. Rather, it is the lack of skill in identifying breaches of trust based on ethnic differences and the lack of skill in restoring trust once it is broken.

It is beyond the scope of this project to explain how trust can be restored across ethnic

groups, but creating guidelines and training in this area would be a logical next step in the development of cross-cultural collaboration research.

Adaptation and Individual Difference

Within each of the federally defined "ethnic" groups in the U.S., there are critical communication-related areas that can serve as major sources of misunderstanding and misattribution of intent. Following is a short outline of some of the common areas of cross-cultural communication differences between major ethnic groups in the U.S.: African Americans, Asian Americans, Anglo or European Americans, Hispanic Americans/Latinos, and Native Americans.

All members of non-majority culture groups can be conceptualized as living on a continuum of adaptation to or assimilation into the dominant culture. The continuum can be graphed like this:



1. Persons living in total assimilation have adapted to the thinking patterns, values, family structures, hierarchies of perception, communication patterns, and forms of recreation of the dominant culture. They manifest communication behaviors that do not match the usual pattern for members of their cultural group.
2. Persons with little cultural adaptation maintain the traditional patterns of their culture of origin; their behavior and assumptions will more closely match the behaviors specified below for their cultural group.
3. Most members of a culture will fall somewhere in the middle of the continuum. Often their behaviors at work and in public settings will reflect the dominant-culture pattern. This does not mean, however, that their assumptions and internal reactions to communicative behavior that violates their group's norms will have changed. A member of a non-dominant culture may have a continual source of extra workplace stress due to constant violations of their expectations and norms for interaction, and the ongoing need to consciously adapt and "fit" their behavior to an alien pattern.
4. Depending on a culture's pattern of communication, individuals may not let you know when their expectations or norms have been violated or when they are offended, or at least they may not let you know in a way easy for you to perceive or understand, given the norms of your culture.
5. Becoming more aware of the norms for interaction in one's own culture is a most difficult task, because such norms are internalized very early and become an unconscious component of our expectations of and behavior with others. It is a very crucial task, because only through making these norms conscious can we begin to adapt our behavior to the expectations of the groups or co-workers we are attempting to collaborate with, or at least lessen our tendency to misattribute meanings and motivations to others based on our own cultural norms.
6. Comparisons of cultural value systems are not meant to **stereotype** individuals; rather, they are meant to provide **generalizations**, valid observations about a **group** of people, from which we can discuss cultural difference and likely areas of miscommunication.

Next Chapter

Communication Patterns and Assumptions

First Chapter

Executive Summary and List of Chapters

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Communication Patterns and Assumptions of Differing Cultural Groups in the United States

(Adapted from Elliott, C. E. (1999). Cross-Cultural Communication Styles, pre-publication Masters thesis)

African American Communication Patterns

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1999), African Americans comprise 13 percent of the U.S. population.

Animation/emotion: Communication seen as authentic is generally passionate and animated. Communication that is presented in a neutral or objective way is seen as less credible, and the motives of the speaker may be questioned. The assumption is that if you believe something, you will advocate for it. Truth is established through argument and debate. "Conversational style is provocative and challenging, and the intensity is focused on the validity of the ideas being discussed" (Kochman 1981 pp. 30-31). Effective teachers of African American students are often found "...displaying emotion to garner student respect" (Delpit, 1995, p. 142). African Americans tend to perceive greater emotional intensity when rating the expressions of others (Matsumoto, 1993).

Directness/indirectness: Generally directly facing and talking with the person with whom you have an issue or problem is preferred. Someone who won't face you directly shows his or her claim or problem to be invalid; the assumption is that anyone with a legitimate problem would come to the other person directly. A lack of response to a **general** accusation or allegation by someone is viewed as an indication of innocence. The internal attitude of an innocent person is "I know they aren't talking about me, so I don't have to respond." (Kochman 1981 p.90). Responding to a general accusation shows that the "mark hit home." A direct accusation will usually bring a direct denial and a request to confront the person making the allegation.

In terms of romance, men and often women will usually state directly whether they are interested in a potential relationship. Ignoring or acting subtly disinterested is not interpreted as a sign of disinterest from a woman; it may be seen as a rude or arrogant response (Kochman 1981).

Teachers are often expected to show they care by "...controlling the class; exhibiting personal power; establishing meaningful personal relationships;.... pushing students to achieve the (class) standard; and holding the attention of the students by incorporating African-American interactional styles in their teaching" (Delpit, 1995, p. 142).

Eye contact: Tends to be quite direct and prolonged when speaking, less so when listening. This is the opposite of the dominant-culture pattern in which the speaker tends to look away from the listener and the listener looks directly at the speaker. The overall **amount** of eye contact is not different from dominant-culture patterns; it is **when** the eye contact occurs that differs (Johnson, 1971, p. 17).

Gestures: Frequent and sometimes large gestures are normative. The expressiveness of the communication is what is valued, and if the gestures increase expressiveness they are seen as enhancing communication. (V. Valdez, September 1998, personal communication).

Identity orientation: Traditionally, African Americans have a more collateral orientation than European Americans (Nichols 1986, management training session). Self is viewed and decisions are made within the context of the group and by assessing how the action will affect others in the collateral identity group.

Turn taking and pause time: Turns are taken when the speaker is moved to speak; urgency, status, and the ability to command attention from others determines speaking order. The right to continue speaking is granted by others depending on how well the speaker's idea is being accepted (Kochman 1981 pp. 34). Responses from others are usually made at the end of **each** of the speaker's points, and this is not felt to be an interruption of the speaker (Kochman 1981 pp.26-27). Turn taking in dyads is also regulated by non-verbal cues that differ markedly from those of the dominant culture. These include: hand gestures, postural shifts which mirror the conversational partner, intonation drop, tempo slowing, and lessening of intensity. The change in gaze direction employed in the dominant culture is often not used (LaFrance & Mayo, 1975, pp. 7-8).

Pause time is often brief; people in groups may interrupt or speak on the ends of other's sentences.

Space: Research on use of space among African Americans is mixed. Some studies indicate that, in race-matched pairs, black children will stand closer to each other during conversation than white children do. Other research has shown that African American adults employ a greater public distance from each other (LaFrance & Mayo, 1978, pp. 79-80).

Time: Linear time is not internalized to the extent it is in the dominant society. Being a more relationship-oriented culture, African Americans tend to be more relaxed in this regard—"The right time is when we get there." Anger from others at being late is often met with puzzlement—"I'm here now, let's get started" is a common response to this kind of situation (Nichols 1986).

Touch: Among friends, African Americans employ more physical touch than European Americans do (LaFrance & Mayo, 1978, pp. 80-81) and less than that usually seen among people of Latin or Arab cultures. African Americans tend to touch children more often and for greater lengths of time than do European-Americans (Coles, 1971).

Vocal patterns: Black English contains a wide range of both volume and pitch within its acceptable pattern. The voice can range from a very quiet, deep sound to very loud and high-pitched, and all may be considered appropriate. Expressiveness and compatibility with the speaking situation is what determines whether the pitch and tone are "correct" (Olquin, 1995). There is not a fixed, relatively narrow range, as is the case in some other cultures.

Native American Communication Patterns

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1999), 2.2 million persons were classified as American Indians or Alaska Natives in 1994. (Approximately 1.5% of the U.S. population).

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