

## **Milton J. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)**

The DMIS describes the perspectives and behaviors in the face of cultural difference, and outlines a "continuum" of increasing cultural awareness, understanding, and adjustment (22). This chart of personal growth includes ethnocentric stages and ethnorelative stages.

### **Ethnocentric stages:**

Ethnocentrism assumes that "the worldview of one's own culture is central to all reality" (30).

#### **DENIAL of cultural difference:**

1. Isolation: I live isolated in my homogeneous group, and I am uninterested in experiencing difference.
2. Separation: I intentionally separate myself from cultural difference to protect my own worldview.

#### **DEFENSE against cultural difference:**

The world is organized into "us and them." My own culture is obviously the best, which is why

1. Denigration: I denigrate other cultures.
2. Superiority: My culture is superior to other cultures
3. Reversal: My adopted culture is superior to my own original cultural. I went native.

#### **MINIMIZATION of cultural difference:**

1. Physical Universalism: We humans have all the same physical characteristics: we must eat, procreate, and die. These common biological features dictate behavior that is basically recognizable across cultures.
2. Transcendent Universalism: Whether we know it or not, deep down all humans share basically the same universal values. I assume that elements of my own cultural worldview are experienced as universal.

Danger: cultural differences are often trivialized or romanticized.

### **Ethnorelative stages:**

Ethnorelativism supposes that "cultures can only be understood relative to one another, and that particular behavior can only be understood within a cultural context" (46).

#### **ACCEPTANCE of cultural difference:**

I recognize and accept the fact that my own culture is just one of a number of equally complex worldviews. Therefore, I accept

1. Respect for Behavioral Difference: all behavior
2. Respect for Value Difference: that all values and beliefs exist in a cultural context.

I am curious and respectful toward cultural difference.

**ADAPTATION to cultural difference:**

1. Empathy: I have developed enough intercultural communication skills to be able to adapt to difference and consciously shift, through empathy, into another perspective, into another cultural frame of reference. I can also act in culturally appropriate ways in the other culture.
2. Pluralism: I understand that difference must always be understood within the context of the relevant culture. I have internalized more than one worldview.

**INTEGRATION of cultural difference:**

1. Contextual Evaluation: I am able to manipulate multiple cultural frames of reference in my evaluation of a situation. I am conscious of myself as a chooser of alternatives.
2. Constructive Marginality: My identity is not primarily based on any one culture. I am a constant creator of my own reality.

Bibliography

Bennett, Milton J. "Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity." Education for the Intercultural Experience. Ed. R.M. Paige. 2nd edition. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1993. 21-71.