

a way to reach minorities: multicultural awareness

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Introduction

Multicultural awareness, or simply the awareness of cultures other than the Anglo-American culture, appears to be an important part of our Extension Workers Creed. The creed begins with and includes the following lines:

I believe in people and their hopes, their aspirations,
and their faith; in their right to make their own plans and
arrive at their own decisions; . . .

I believe in intellectual freedom to search for and present
the truth without bias and with courteous tolerance toward
the views of others.

As we in Extension work with racial minority populations and different ethnic and religious groups, many of us have become conscious of the great diversity of cultural beliefs, values, and practices that exist among our audience. Without awareness and knowledge of these cultural differences, Extension professionals and other human service organizations may unintentionally, and perhaps inappropriately, impose our cultural beliefs and practices on clientele with different cultural aspirations.

This article provides a multicultural framework to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our Extension programming and practices with different racial minority audiences.

Multicultural Framework

One of the challenges of developing effective multicultural awareness programs is to find a clear and realistic

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Program Challenge approach to studying a subject as complex as culture. Based primarily on the research of the anthropologists Clyde and Florence Kluckhohn,¹ we define culture simply as a way of life for a group of people. This culture consists of the people's beliefs, values, and practices.

We have adapted the research of Milton Gordon,² Harry Kitano,³ and Louis Wirth⁴ on the process of acculturation and assimilation. From these works, we've developed a multicultural framework that can be used to identify three basic intercultural lifestyles practiced by different racial and ethnic groups in the United States. This multicultural framework is extensively documented by sociological and anthropological research and supported by our Extension experiences with four different racial minority groups in the United States: Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, and Asians.

Three Intercultural Lifestyles

In our multicultural framework, we've identified three basic intercultural lifestyles practiced by racial minorities living in the United States. They are: (1) cultural assimilation, (2) cultural pluralism, and (3) cultural separation. They represent how racial minority groups adapt to the cultural pressures of both their traditional cultural background and the dominant Anglo-American culture.

The Anglo-American culture is Western European and middle-class in orientation. It includes basic beliefs in individualism, the nuclear family concept, equality, science, future time orientation, the Protestant work ethic, and English as the basic language.

... an awareness and understanding of these different intercultural lifestyles will help Extension staff work more effectively with the racial minority groups and people in their communities.

In the first basic intercultural lifestyle called *cultural assimilation*, we see the racial minority person becoming almost "totally Americanized" and adopting the beliefs, values, practices, and language of the dominant American culture. This person also tends to reject his/her traditional cultural background and associations with people from that culture.

The second intercultural lifestyle is *cultural pluralism*. A culturally pluralistic person tries to be bicultural and live in both cultural environments. This person will adopt some

of the elements of the dominant American culture, particularly those relating to science, technology, and business. However, this person may want to retain many parts of his/her traditional cultural heritage such as language, extended family patterns, religious beliefs, and social practices.

The third intercultural lifestyle we describe as *cultural separation*. In cultural separation, a person strongly identifies with his/her traditional cultural heritage and rejects the dominant Anglo-American culture and its beliefs, values, and practices.

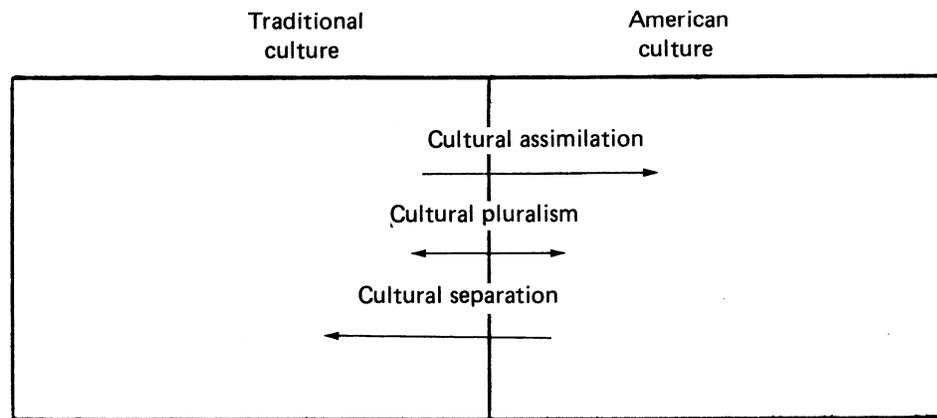


Figure 1. Multicultural framework.

Program Application

We've found that this multicultural framework describing the three basic intercultural lifestyles has been helpful in understanding the needs and aspirations of different racial minority groups and evaluating their interest in Extension programs.

Cultural Assimilation

Our experience with racial minority people who are culturally assimilated shows that most people in this group presently share or are striving toward the dominant Anglo-American belief and value system. This group includes many older racial minority people who were raised in the pre-civil rights era before 1954. We find these people receptive to traditional Extension programs in agriculture, community development, youth, and home economics if barriers aren't present like language, racial prejudice and discrimination, and poverty.

There's a tendency in Extension programming with racial minorities to concentrate our efforts on work with low income families without realizing that the majority of racial

minority people in the United States are *not* below poverty guidelines. We often think of racial minorities as being poor and as candidates for our nontraditional programs like the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program.

We believe, for the culturally assimilated group, that most of our present Extension programs are appropriately designed and conducted and don't need major modifications. Most of the racial minority people we now work with in Extension are in the culturally assimilated group.

*Cultural
Pluralism*

In working with racial minority people who are culturally pluralistic, we must be sensitive to their dual cultural aspirations and background. This group includes many younger racial minority people who have been involved in civil rights activities as well as older racial minority people who were born or raised in another cultural setting. Our research and experience indicates that these people are interested in Extension programs that focus on technical, economic, and consumer skills that would help them in their cultural adjustment.

We believe that many people in this group wouldn't be interested in our traditional Extension programs, such as child development, youth development, family relationships, and food and nutrition, *unless* these Extension programs are modified to reflect the racial minority person's own traditional cultural beliefs, values, and practices.

For example, many of our programs in home economics focus on the nuclear rather than the extended family, reflecting a cultural bias. Looking at our Extension program delivery system, we've found that the use of indigenous staff who share similar racial, cultural, and linguistic characteristics to the clientele group *and* are tolerant of the different intercultural lifestyles are very effective in reaching this group. Retraining Extension staff to work with bicultural audiences is a less effective alternative.

*Cultural
Separation*

Our Extension experience in working with racial minorities who have chosen cultural separation as an intercultural lifestyle has been limited and unsuccessful. We've found many of these racial minority people belong to organizations like the Black Muslims, American Indian Movement (AIM), and other separatist groups.

Most racial minority people in this group are trying to preserve and maintain their traditional cultural heritage and actively resist assimilation into the dominant Anglo-American culture. Extension and its staff are seen as reflecting the beliefs and values of the dominant Anglo-American culture.

The response of these culturally separated groups to our Extension educational outreach efforts ranges from disinterest to open hostility, since it appears we're trying to force our cultural beliefs and values on them. At the present time, we believe that the most appropriate strategy for working with racial minority groups who are culturally separated is to respect their wishes and aspirations not to assimilate them into the Anglo-American culture.

Our first goal with this group would be to establish the credibility of our Extension organization and its programs and services. As a second goal, we suggest major modifications in Extension staff delivery and program services to meet special needs of these racial minority groups. The hiring of Extension staff indigenous to these racial minority groups is essential both for Extension's credibility and direct delivery of programs and services to these audiences.

Summary and Conclusion

This article presents a multicultural framework describing three basic intercultural lifestyles practiced by different racial and ethnic groups in the United States. This multicultural framework should help Extension staff begin to see the cultural diversity that exists in our racial minority populations. We believe that an awareness and understanding of these different intercultural lifestyles will help Extension staff work more effectively with the racial minority groups and people in their communities.

At the present time, most racial minority people participating in Extension committees and programs are from the culturally assimilated group. Most Extension programming is oriented to the interests and needs of racial minority groups moving toward cultural assimilation. Because of similarities in cultural beliefs, values, and practices, the majority of our Extension staff are probably most "comfortable" working with racial minority people in the culturally assimilated category.

Most of our traditional Extension staff and programs aren't reaching the racial minorities who are culturally pluralistic or separated because of cultural and language differences. To reach these two racial minority audiences effectively, Extension needs to retrain existing staff or hire new staff who are bilingual and bicultural.

There's a critical need for the Extension Service to do applied research and identify effective strategies and techniques for reaching these culturally diverse audiences. At the present time, we aren't aware of any state Extension Service currently conducting applied research on working

with racial minority groups who are culturally pluralistic or separatist.

We propose that multicultural awareness should include not only a consciousness of the different intercultural lifestyles being practiced by racial minorities, but also that each staff person understand his/her own cultural beliefs and values. Ask yourself:

- What are my own cultural beliefs and values?
- How do these beliefs and values affect my delivery of educational programs?
- How do I decide in racial minority programming what subject matter is appropriate for these audiences and how do I deliver these programs in the best way?
- Do I believe that all racial minorities should culturally assimilate and adopt the dominant Anglo-American system of beliefs, values, and practices?
- Can I develop a "courteous tolerance" or even sympathetic understanding of different intercultural lifestyles practiced by racial minorities?

Multicultural awareness begins with "know thyself" and can represent the start of an exciting journey. Some preliminary steps you can take include:

1. Be open to other cultural beliefs and practices.
2. Become interested and knowledgeable about a culture other than your own.
3. Develop the minimal ability to get along with people from another culture. This ability begins with an awareness of the etiquette of another culture and appropriate roles you can perform.
4. Take the initiative in becoming acquainted with people who have different cultural backgrounds.

Footnotes

1. Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, *Toward a General Theory of Action* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1951).
2. Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).
3. Harry H. L. Kitano, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Subculture* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976).
4. Louis Wirth, *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*, Ralph Linton, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945).