

Ethnocentric and Ethnorelative

Using Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity you can plot your cultural sensitivity on a spectrum from very unaware, to very aware or “culturally intelligent”. Knowing where we currently fall on this spectrum is important in today’s world because we may interact with people of different cultures on a daily basis, both in our personal and professional lives.

There are two ends of the scale from being Ethnocentric to Ethnorelative. Ethnocentric simply means that you interpret all other cultures through the lens of your own, meaning you compare and contrast everything to your own experience. Think of this like being “self-centered” where everything you do is the standard for others to be judged against.

Ethnorelative is more about being open-minded. Each culture is considered relative to another, but no culture is “right” or “wrong”. With this viewpoint, you would acknowledge and accept the differences, without a comparison of “better or worse”. Let’s look at each point along the scale.

1. Denial – You are disinterested in cultural differences.
2. Defense – You experience your culture as the only good culture. You acknowledge cultural differences but may see them as threatening. You may use stereotypes of other cultures to defend yourself.
3. Minimization – All human beings are similar despite some superficial differences.
4. Acceptance – You recognize and value cultural differences, without judging them. You are curious about different cultures.
5. Adaptation – You experience other cultures by yielding to perceptions and behaviors acceptable to that culture. You intentionally change your behavior to communicate more effectively.
6. Integration – You value a variety of cultures and continuously define your identity in contrast and in conjunction with a number of cultures. You move easily in and out of varying worldviews.

