

APPROACHES TO DIFFERENCE

This resource describes varying ways in which people and organizations approach racial/ethnic, gender, and other forms of difference. This is by no means a comprehensive list, and the categories below are not static or mutually exclusive.

Exclusionary Approach

- Either proactively or inadvertently reinforces exclusion, disempowerment, marginalization, and/or discrimination of people of color, LGBTQQI people, and/or women and/or other marginalized groups of people.
- Requires those groups to assimilate to norms defined by dominant groups, if they are to participate at all
- Tries to maintain the status quo for the dominant group

Colorblind Approach

- Dismisses significance of race, ethnicity, and racial and ethnic difference
- Thinks that not seeing race, ethnicity, or 'color' is equivalent to not being racist
- Asserts that everyone is 'on the same playing field,' and has equal access to opportunity and advancement based on merit

Multicultural Approach

- Encourages tolerance and conflict-free diversity, often highlight achievements as a way to downplay systemic or structural barriers and inequalities
- Highlights cultural life, cultural expression, cuisine, dress
- Downplays "race" in favor of talking about and celebrating "culture"

Cultural Competency Approach

- Focuses attention on valuing unique worldviews of different communities
- Advocates that people and groups develop their capacity or ability to work effectively across difference by growing culture-specific awareness and knowledge
- Sees understanding an individual's culture as a skill that can be acquired
- May rely on generalizations around cultural identity as a means to understanding whole groups/communities. Increasing one's access to these groups/communities is a primary goal

Diversity Approach

- An emphasis on embracing differences without acknowledging structural barriers, power dynamics, or areas of privilege
- Focused on the *representation* of difference (i.e. number counting) as opposed to a culture of inclusion or addressing issues of inequity
- Tokensim and superficial approaches heavily relied on

Social Justice Approach

- Acknowledges systems of oppression and structural/institutional barriers based on racial, ethnic, gender, cultural, class, and other differences
- Understands race, gender, and other aspects of identity to be socially constructed, tied to complex histories, and playing significant roles in how resources and power are distributed
- Acknowledges the existence of privilege (advantages, access, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of marginalized groups), and the opportunity to challenge oppression from a place of privilege--as an ally
- Committed to an ongoing process of self-education and coalition-building in order to create open and supportive environments and takes collective, collaborative action for systemic change

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