The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is a theoretical framework used for describing how individuals experience difference and develop intercultural competence. The model consists of five worldview structures: Denial, Defense, Minimisation, Acceptance, and Adaptation. The first one – Denial – is the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as the only real one—that is, that the patterns of beliefs, behaviours, and values that constitute a culture are experienced as unquestionably real or true.

Other cultures are either not noticed at all, or they are construed in rather vague ways. As a result, cultural difference is either not experienced at all, or it is experienced as associated with a kind of undifferentiated other, such as ‘foreigner’ or ‘immigrant’.

The main issue to be resolved at Denial is the tendency to avoid noticing or confronting cultural difference. Individuals at this stage need to attend to the simple existence of other cultures, both globally and domestically.

Ethnocentrism
The experience of one’s own culture as ‘central to reality’. Beliefs and behaviours that people receive in their primary socialisation are unquestioned.

Ethnorelativism
The experience of one’s own beliefs and behaviours as just one organisation of reality among many viable possibilities.

‘AS LONG AS WE SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE, THERE’S NO PROBLEM’

Source: Milton J. Bennett, ‘Towards Ethnorelativism’

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‘EVEN THOUGH I’M SPEAKING THEIR LANGUAGE, THEY’RE STILL RUDE TO ME’

Source: Milton J. Bennett, ‘Towards Ethnorelativism’

Individuals at Denial experience cultural differences as more real than individuals at Denial. However, their experience is often stereotypical, coupled with negative evaluations – the greater the cultural difference, the more negative the evaluation.

Dominant-culture folks are likely to interpret Defense as an attack on their values (often perceived by others as privileges). For example, they may complain that immigrants or other minorities are ‘taking their jobs’.

Individuals from non-dominant cultures may experience Defense as discovering and solidifying a separate cultural identity in contrast to the dominant group. Here, Defense is necessary in the development of non-dominant ethnic identity to counteract the efforts of the dominant group to impose their culture on all members of a society.

A variation of Defense is Reversal, whereby an adopted culture is experienced as superior to the culture of one’s own.

WORD OF THE WEEK
Resfeber
(Swedish noun) You’ve been counting down the days, and now you’re counting down the hours. Your heart knows that it’s going on a journey and you cannot sit still as a result.

Resfeber describes the restless beat of a traveler’s heart before the journey begins, when anxiety and anticipation are tangled together.
The threat associated with cultural differences experienced at Defense is neutralised at Minimisation by subsuming differences into familiar categories. Emphasis is placed on the similarity of people in terms of biological nature and commonality of values.

At Minimisation, individuals expect similarities and they may become insistent about correcting others’ behaviour to match their own expectations; this pertains especially to members of dominant cultures as Minimisation tends to mask recognition of their own culture and the institutional privileges it affords them. For non-dominant culture members, Minimisation can take the form of a strategy to ‘go along to get along’ in order to succeed.

The missing piece in Minimisation, and the issue that needs to be resolved to move into ethnorelativism, is the recognition of one’s own culture. Only when we see that all our beliefs, behaviours, and values are influenced by the particular context in which we were socialised can we fully imagine alternatives to them.

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"ALL THE RACE THAT MATTERS IS THE HUMAN RACE!"

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**WORD OF THE WEEK**

**Gezellig**

(Dutch adjective) Ask any Dutch person and they will tell you about gezellig.

It is something that embodies their warm, welcoming culture, and encompasses all of those things that make you cozy on the inside, like family, good conversations, and hugs.
Acceptance of cultural difference is the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as just one of a number of equally complex world views. By discriminating differences among cultures (including one’s own), and by constructing a kind of self-reflexive perspective, people with this worldview are able to experience others as different from themselves, but equally human.

However, Acceptance does not equal agreement – some cultural practices may be judged negatively – but the judgment is not ethnocentric in the sense of withholding equal humanity.

Rather, different beliefs and values are interpreted with relation to the applicable cultural context, without ascribing ‘goodness’ or ‘badness’ to them. The development opportunity here is to take the perspective of another culture without losing your own perspective. This is the crux of the next stage. In your experience, how do you achieve this?

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Adaptation to cultural difference is the state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behaviour appropriate to that culture. One’s worldview is expanded to include relevant constructs from other cultural worldviews.

People at Adaptation can engage in empathy – the ability to take perspective or shift frame of reference vis-à-vis other cultures. This shift is not merely cognitive; it is a change in the organisation of lived experience, which necessarily includes affect and behaviour. For this reason, people at Adaptation are able to express their alternative cultural experience in culturally appropriate feelings and behaviour.

In an organisation such as NP this ensures that every policy, issue, and action is examined in its cultural context and assessed for its strengths and limitations. At Adaptation, individuals have the ability to facilitate respect for diversity and use it as a resource for multicultural teams.

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TO SOLVE THIS DISPUTE, I’M GOING TO HAVE TO CHANGE MY APPROACH

Source: Milton J. Bennett, ‘Towards Ethnorelativism’

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WORD OF THE WEEK

Ubuntu

Bantu expression ‘I am what I am because of who we all are’.

Ubuntu is the compassion, kindness and humanity that connect us together by sharing ourselves with others and caring for those around us.

A person with Ubuntu has self-assurance that comes from knowing that she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are oppressed.