

**Valuing Cultural Diversity:
Research and Policy
Questions**

Fostering Cultural Diversity: Problems of Access and Ethnic Boundary Maintenance¹

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Abstract: This presentation explores theoretical reasons for the underutilization of services, discusses types and problems of access which may be both inadvertent and institutionalized, and discusses policy implications of this work. Data suggest that individuals from distinct ethnic populations, particularly Hispanic, African-American, and Native American, tend to underutilize social and human service programs available to them.

A basic premise of this paper is that one of our shared hopes as service and recreational opportunity providers is that we hope and struggle to find ways to make our programs and our services more accessible and open to underrepresented ethnic populations such as Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans. What most providers to date have found is that making programs more accessible is much more complex than previously believed. To simply provide the opportunity and the program is not enough. Very specific strategies have to be developed to ensure that programs are available and relevant to the diverse populations we wish to serve. This paper outlines some of the reasons previously identified for underutilization of programs by ethnic populations and discusses several problems regarding the issues of access. In addition, it is suggested that what is needed is a true culture change within our organizations; that is, there needs to be a major shift in the ways we think about diversity and the ways in which we attempt to understand the needs of those we serve.

Underutilization

Current data suggests that ethnic groups, and here I refer specifically to Hispanics, African-Americans, and Native Americans, tend to underutilize most social service programs available to them. From essential services, including health care, family services, and economic programs, a general pattern of underutilization occurs. One of the most often cited predictive models utilized in the social service research area which provides one approach to understanding underutilization patterns is that suggested by Anderson and Newman (1973). Anderson and Newman (1973) suggest that the use of social services, which here we might define as programs available for public consumption, can be predicted from an analysis of predisposing factors, enabling factors, and the need factor. The model is based on the premise that individuals will vary in their "propensity" to use social services and that this propensity is the result of a very complex set of interrelationships between these sets of factors. The predisposing factor includes such variables as sex, age,

ethnicity, education, marital status, and attitudes including, for example, level of perceived discrimination. The enabling factor refers to "the conditions and situations which make services more or less accessible to persons predisposed to use them" (Starret, Wright, Mindel, and van Tran 1989). Thus, variables such as transportation, service availability and accessibility, knowledge of program availability, and income are important variables in predicting use. Finally, the individual must recognize and/or perceive a need for the services available; the service must be seen as relevant and meaningful. They (Starrett and Decker 1984) found the following patterns: (1) that utilization patterns were very low among the diverse Hispanic populations studied (i.e., Cuban, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican), (2) heterogeneity of pattern by group was prevalent, (3) the best direct predictors of service utilization were need and knowledge of program availability, and (4) of the 19 predisposing factors analyzed, only ethnicity proved to have a direct effect on utilization. The model suggested by Anderson and Newman (1973) is a heuristic conceptualization of how we might discuss the issues related to utilization. Their model may serve as a starting point to discuss the complexity and the multiple dimensionality of the relationship between ethnicity, accessibility, need, and "discretionary service utilization" (Starret and Decker 1984).

Ethnicity

Perhaps the most striking, yet absolutely logical aspect of the Anderson/Newman model, is that they move us beyond the simple descriptive relationships between ethnicity and, for our purposes, recreational activity patterns. Their model's strength is that it includes important dimensions of program accessibility and need. But with any such model, we must ask ourselves what is meant by ethnicity. On the one hand, we can reduce it, as is frequently done, to a single descriptive variable—such as the infamous—"please check one box below." Thus, we might attempt to identify patterned differences between Blacks, Hispanics, and other ethnic populations. But, as many writers have pointed out, this approach ignores the tremendous amount of variability within groups. The term Hispanic, as one example, may include Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Mexican-Americans. And, each group can be characterized by differences in history, family structure, social, and political developments. To assume that each of these rather generic labels captures any essence of culture is indeed dangerous. Moreover, embedded within "ethnicity" are a host of other variables which often remain implicit, including different emphases on family networks, social groups, values, attitudes, meanings, and behaviors. And, yet, it is only on rare occasions in our research that we ask relevant questions about such topics. Instead, we link recreational activ-

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ity behaviors and preferences with ethnic labels and assume that we have captured an understanding of ethnicity. I offer these points as potential springboards for further discussion:

1. Single indicators of "ethnicity" oversimplify the very complex essence of culture which we may be trying to capture.
2. Similarity in form or type of activity shared by several groups does not mean similarity in content, meaning, and function.
3. Variability between ethnic groups may be as large as variability within a group. For example, the Navajo system of values and meanings may be quite distinct from Apache, Zuni, and a multitude of other "Native American" populations.
4. Relatedly, variability within a particular ethnic group may be as much a function of age, gender, income, and education as a function of culture.
5. And, studies which identify differences between the activity patterns between groups are, at best, descriptive of that and nothing more. They explain nothing of culture.

With regard to ethnicity, there is one other major point which I would like to raise, one that is not addressed in the Anderson and Newman (1973) model. We know from the work of many anthropologists (Barth 1969, Eidheim 1969) that ethnicity, and issues of ethnic identity, are heightened when members of different groups come into contact with one another. As Barth (1969) indicates in his work on ethnic boundary maintenance, one's ethnic identity is not really an issue within a group. It really only becomes an issue when groups come into contact with one another; when there are points of intercultural contact, some of which may become problematic. Ethnicity and ethnic boundary maintenance is, therefore, a social construction that is constantly negotiated and renegotiated as groups come into contact with one another. This point is driven home quite poignantly in recent research in the area of cultural or "ethnic" tourism and its impact on the Native American culture. In 1989, Evans-Pritchard published a piece entitled, "How 'They' See 'Us,' " and more recently, Laxson (1991) published a piece entitled, "How 'We' See 'Them' " The essence of both of these pieces was to study the nature of images and stereotypes developed by particular Native Americans of White tourists, and the same images which White tourists have of Native American groups. What both found, using triangulated qualitative methods, was that each group developed strategies and conceptual maps to help them "deal" with the other. Images of the romanticized "Noble Savage," "the primitive," the "object of culture," "the social problem" were just as prevalent among the White tourists as were the images of the "greedy," "pushy," "camera-carrying" Anglo among the Indians who had to deal with the tourist. The most troubling aspect of what both researchers found was that the types of superficial intercultural contacts which result from such industry, more often than not, reinforce ethnic stereotypes rather than reduce them. It is very possible that those very things which we feel might help foster intercultural

understanding may, in fact, serve to reinforce the stereotypes which we wish to eradicate.

Accessibility

One of the central components of the Anderson and Newman model is the enabling factor, that is, to what extent are programs available and accessible to those we serve? At one level we can talk about enabling factors that relate to the potential participants' life situation. Do they have transportation? Do they have the resources necessary to use the programs? Do they live near our resources and facilities? But, at a second level, and Anderson and Newman do not really go into this, is to what extent are our programs really accessible to those we hope to serve; to what extent are we really part of the enabling process? Here the focus shifts from what "they are like," to what opportunities "we really provide." Work on the dimensionality of access is described in work by Penchansky and Thomas (1981). These researchers suggest that there are five distinct dimensions to access including: (1) availability or the relationship between the nature and volume of existing resources and services available to meet the user's needs, (2) accessibility or the "relationship between the location of supply and the location of clients," (3) accommodation or the degree to which "the supply of resources are organized to accept clients," (4) affordability or the real and perceived cost and worth to the client, and (5) acceptability or "the relationship of clients' attitudes about personal and practice characteristics of providers to the actual characteristics of actual providers, as well as to the providers' attitudes about acceptable personal characteristics of clients" (p. 128-129). This latter dimension is pertinent, that is, what messages do we send through our programs and policies about our willingness to serve culturally diverse populations. And, what are the perceptions of those we hope to serve about "us"?

This means that at one level, we have to focus not only on those we serve, but on those we do not serve as well. We must identify the attitudes and needs, both perceived and real, of those who underutilize our programs and resources and talk to them about how we might better serve their needs. And more importantly, we have to shift our focus at some point in the equation to ourselves. That is, we have to ask ourselves, what are the potential boundaries and barriers which we, from an institutional perspective, put up, both consciously and unconsciously, that keep our programs from being truly accessible? To what extent do our personnel, our policies, and our programs really value diversity, or to what extent do we foster intercultural boundary maintenance? To what extent do we foster institutional "shared stereotypes"? To answer these questions will take a great deal of institutional introspection. And, we begin to ask ourselves where the system we have created has faltered in the process of reaching out. If our goal is to make our programs truly accessible to a more diverse audience, we cannot continue to focus only on the nature of our constituents, but must focus carefully on our organizational culture and how we can build bridges and break down boundaries (Allison 1988).

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