



15 Cross-Cultural Issues in Health Psychology

Chapter Summary

Shifting demographics in the US and Canada have spurred increased focus on cultural issues in health psychology training, research, and clinical work. While race denotes a biological basis for some difference, ethnicity accounts for the subjectivity of self-report in group identification, and culture focuses on shared ideologies.

Researchers have emphasized the importance of incorporating culture into a biopsychosocial framework to help explain health disparities in the general population. Indigenous and African-American populations are at particular risk for experiencing several negative health outcomes. It must be stressed that health disparities are not a consequence of group membership or ethnicity; rather, they are the result of a chain of events and other determinants of health, such as socio-economic status, racial discrimination, healthcare access and treatment quality, and health behaviour, all of which can be influenced by acculturation.

When considering the influence of culture on mental disorders that may be co-morbid with physical disorders, differing cross-cultural symptom presentations may be relevant. It is also important to consider the literature on psychological therapies with different cultural groups and cultural competence in clinical work.

Essay Topics

1. What are the effects of acculturation on immigrant populations? (pp. 341–342)
2. What are some of the significant health disparities in North America? (pp. 335–341)

3. What are the similarities and differences among alternative and complimentary medical systems? (pp. 332–334)
4. What does it mean for a practitioner to be culturally competent? What impact does this have on the care of diverse populations? (pp. 344–346).

Weblinks

<https://nccih.nih.gov/>

The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) provides information on policies and guidelines, medicinal herbs, and research results.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tw-N1psSjGc>

This video explores how Traditional Chinese Medicine works by explaining the importance of the balance between yin and yang.

<https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency>

APA fact sheets and website on cultural competency

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPq_Rg9OmVI

In this short lecture, Dr Suzanne Bronheim of Georgetown University examines the health belief model and describes how cultural factors are related to each of the elements of the model.

<https://www.kidsnewtocanada.ca/culture/influence>

A guide for health professionals working with immigrant and refugee children and youth

Glossary

Acculturation A socio-cultural process that occurs when people relocate to another culture wherein they adapt to and take on characteristics (i.e., behavioural, belief, and lifestyle) of the “new” second culture via continual contact.

Cultural competence Having the required training, experience, and qualifications to provide care to clients from different cultural backgrounds by acknowledging the importance of culture at multiple levels, being sensitive to differences in cultural dynamics, and adapting services to meet the client’s culturally unique needs.

Culture A set of values, ideals, beliefs, and assumptions about life shared among a particular group of people and transmitted generationally, rarely with implicit instruction.

Culture-bound syndromes A recurrent pattern of abnormal behaviour and experience, specifically in relation to a local culture/community that may or may not be linked to a recognized category of mental disorders (e.g., anxiety disorders).

Determinants of health The range of personal, socioeconomic, and environmental factors that determine the health status of people or groups of people. Government agencies often prioritize sets of determinants within a healthcare platform.

Ethnicity Subjectively identifying with a group by accepting group customs and practices from one's culture of origin in conjunction with a feeling of belonging.

Hofstede's value dimensions of culture A framework of five cultural dimensions that may vary across cultures including: individualism–collectivism; power distance; uncertainty avoidance; masculinity–femininity; and Confucian dynamism (long- vs short-term orientation).

Postcolonial theory Literary and cultural theory that attempts to understand the process and problems stemming from European colonization and its effects. It is often noted that historical texts represent the perspectives of the colonizers with little acknowledgement of the experiences of those who were colonized.

Race A term intended to capture differences in biological substrates based on physical characteristics such as skin colour and hair type. However, the term is contentious, given current understandings of genetics.