

Seven Fallacies about Culture in “Cultural Competence”

The following seven fallacies often characterize representations of culture in the conceptualization of cultural competence:

1. *Culture is fixed, knowable, and certain.* Such approaches rely on comparison and classification based on beliefs, customs, and material artifacts.
2. *Culture members necessarily share in a common collective identity associated with a given culture.* The premise is that a given society or social group has a given culture, with the consequence of placing individuals in broad categories.
3. *The concept of cultural identity is synonymous with a given set of characteristics.* This conceptualization overlooks the intersectionality of dimensions of social identity.
4. *All cultures have equal status and access to power and privilege in society.* Dominant cultures affect norms, assumptions, attitudes and behaviors of what is right and accepted.
5. *Cultural identities are not influenced by existing contexts, including political, structural, economic, and power-based realities.* Cultures are shaped by power relations and both macro-forces such as institutional systems, legal and governmental regulations, as well as micro-interactions among individuals and groups.
6. *Culture is disassociated by society from physical attributes.* Society tends to make the physical “cultural” such as by viewing members of a given racial group as having the same culture.
7. *Membership in a cultural group is fixed rather than fluid.* Individuals can leave groups or enter new ones and may have differing relationships with the identity of a given cultural group.