



CULTURAL COMPETENCY UPDATE

...a newsletter to address cultural issues that enable us to effectively work in cross cultural situations.

American Culture

Traditions and Customs of the United States

Tim White

Behavioral Health Advocate

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Being close to our Thanksgiving Holiday I thought I would talk about our culture and traditions right here at home.

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North American culture encompasses the customs and traditions of the United States. "Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things," says a noted anthropologist.

The United States is the third largest country in the world with a population of more than 320 million (2015), according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Because of this, the United States is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. Nearly every region of the world has influenced American culture, as it is a country of immigrants, most notably the English who colonized the country beginning in the early 1600s. U.S. culture has also been shaped by the cultures of Native Americans, Latin Americans, Africans and Asians.

It used to be that the United States was sometimes described as a "melting pot" in which different cultures have contributed their own distinct "flavors" to American culture. Just as cultures from around the world have influenced American culture, today American culture influences the world. The term Western culture often refers broadly to the cultures of the United States and Europe.

The way people "melt" in the United States differs. "Different groups of immigrants integrate in different ways," "For example, in the United States, Catholic Spanish-speaking communities might keep their language and other cultural family traditions, but are integrated in the urban community and have embraced the American way of life in many other ways."

Today the trend is toward multiculturalism, not assimilation. The old "melting pot" metaphor is giving way to new metaphors such as "salad bowl" and "mosaic", mixtures of various ingredients that keep their individual characteristics. Immigrant populations within the United States are not being blended together in one "pot", but rather they are transforming American Society into a truly multicultural mosaic.

The Northeast, South, Midwest, Southeast and Western regions of the United States all have distinct traditions and customs. Here is a brief overview of the culture of the United States.

Language

There is no official language of the United States, according to the U.S. government. While almost every language in the world is spoken in the United States, Spanish, Chinese, French and German are among the most frequently spoken non-English languages. Ninety percent of the U.S. population speaks and understands at least some English, and most official business is conducted in English. The U.S. Census Bureau (2015) estimates that more than 300 languages are spoken in the United States.

Religion

Nearly every known religion is practiced in the United States, which was founded on the basis of religious freedom. About 83 percent of Americans identify themselves as Christians, according to an ABC poll (2015), while 13 percent replied that they had no religion at all. Another poll in 2012 reported similar findings. It also found that Judaism is the second most-identified religious affiliation, at about 1.7 percent of the population. Only 0.6 percent of respondents identified as Muslim.

BHRS Cultural Competence, Equity and Social Justice Committee meets on the 2nd Monday of each month from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. in the Martin Conference Room, 830 Scenic Drive



American style

Clothing styles vary by social status, region, occupation and climate. Jeans, sneakers, baseball caps, cowboy hats and boots are some items of clothing that are closely associated with Americans. Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Michael Kors and Victoria Secret are some well-known American brands. American fashion is widely influenced by celebrities and the media, and fashion sales equal around \$200 billion per year, according to a paper published by Harvard University.

American food

American cuisine has been influenced by Europeans and Native Americans in its early history. Today, there are a number of foods that are commonly identified as American, such as hamburgers, hot dogs, potato chips, macaroni and cheese, and meat loaf and of course Turkey. "As American as apple pie" has come to mean something that is authentically American. There are also styles of cooking and types of foods that are specific to a region. Southern-style cooking is often called "American comfort food" and includes dishes such as fried chicken, collard greens, black-eyed peas and corn bread. Tex-Mex, popular in Texas and the Southwest, is a blend of Spanish and Mexican cooking styles and includes items such as chili and burritos and relies heavily on shredded cheese and beans. Jerky, dried meats that are served as snacks, is also a food that was created in the United States, according to NPR.

The Arts

The United States is widely known around the world as a leader in mass media production, including television and movies. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, the United States comprises one-third of the worldwide media and entertainment industry. The television broadcasting industry took hold in the United States in the early 1950s, and American television programs are now shown around the world. The United States also has a vibrant movie industry, centered in Hollywood, California, and American movies are popular worldwide. The U.S. film industry earned \$31 billion in revenues in 2013, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. The United States arts culture extends beyond movies and television shows, though. New York is home to Broadway, and Americans have a rich theatrical history. American folk art is an artistic style and is identified with quilts and other hand-crafted items. American music is very diverse with many, many styles, including rhythm and blues, blues, jazz, gospel, country and western, bluegrass, rock 'n' roll, hip hop and rising in popularity is the intercity sound of Rap.

Sports

The United States is a sports-minded country, with millions of fans who follow football, baseball, basketball and hockey, among other sports. Baseball, which was developed in colonial America and became an organized sport in the mid-1800s, is known as America's favorite pastime, although its popularity has been eclipsed by football for the past three decades, according to the Harris Poll and the international sport of soccer is rising in popularity in America.

American holidays

Many holidays are celebrated only in the United States. Americans celebrate their independence from Britain on July 4. Memorial Day, celebrated on the last Monday in May, honors those who have died in military service. Labor Day, observed on the first Monday in September, celebrates country's workforce. Thanksgiving, another distinctive American holiday, falls on the fourth Thursday in November and dates back to colonial times to celebrate the harvest. Presidents' Day, marking the birthdays of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, is a federal holiday that occurs on the third Monday in February. The contributions of veterans are honored on Veterans' Day, observed on Nov. 11. The contributions of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. are remembered on the third Monday in January. **Excerpts from a story written by Kim Ann Zimmermann**

Highlights of October Cultural Competency, Equity and Social Justice Committee (CCESJC) Meeting



Diversity Week-Recap

BHRS celebrated Diversity Week October 3rd -7th. Staff shared how their teams celebrated:

- Josie's' Place Drop In Center displayed story boards and had consumers involved. Staff, volunteers and consumers shared stories.
- PEI staff brought different artifacts to share and provided cultural aspects.
- Modesto Recovery Services displayed story boards and were invited to have their display at Dia De Los Muertos at Gallo for the Peer Recovery Art Project.
- Turlock Recovery Services displayed story boards and staff brought artifacts to share. Consumers wrote on cut out hands what ethnicity they represented and hands were pin to the diversity tree in the lobby.
- The CEO's office selected BHRS the winner of the Dionicio Cruz award for Diversity Week.

CCESJC Moving Forward

Starting next year this committee will select volunteers from the committee to visit the different sites within BHRS. A questionnaire will be developed and the volunteers will view the sites and determine if the site feels welcoming to visitors; does the site have pictures or magazines that are culturally diverse? Feedback will be provided to the sites.

Stigma Reduction Exercise

The committee participated in a Stigma Reduction Exercise. Individuals broke into groups and were asked to write or draw: What does Stigma look like? The following were some examples of the exercise:

- A drawing of a brick wall with writing on the bricks for example: mental health, separation, race and gender.
- Erroneous perceptions that consumers who receive methadone services are still drug users.

At the end the question was asked: What does it look like when there's no stigma? Feedback: Harmony, love, compassion, understanding, respect, humanity and peace.

**If you have questions or suggestions regarding Cultural Competency, please e-mail:
Abraham Andres, aandres@stanbhhs.org
Jorge Fernandez, jfernandez@gvhc.org**