

Beyond the Melting Pot and Salad Bowl Views of Cultural Diversity: Advancing Cultural Diversity Education of Nutrition Educators

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ABSTRACT

This article outlines how the melting pot and salad bowl views of cultural diversity have influenced the cultural training of nutrition educators and other health professionals. It explores how these views are changing in reaction to the changing demographics and health disparities seen in the US today and how the cultural training of nutrition educators has not kept up with these changing views. Suggestions for how this cultural education could be modified include placing a greater emphasis on both the cultural self-awareness of nutrition educators and the sociopolitical historical factors that influence the cultural orientation of nutrition educators and their clients.

Key Words: cultural competence, nutrition curricula, nutrition education, health disparities (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2016;48:664-668.)

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INTRODUCTION

Diet is a major factor in the prevention and control of chronic health diseases that disproportionately affect minority populations and it contributes to the racial and ethnic health disparities that exist in the US.¹ The diversity of the population in the US is not reflected in the current enrollment of registered dietitians (RD) and there remains a gap in racial group representation between RD providers and the public.^{2,4} Registered dietitians are a major provider of nutrition education, even while nutrition education is provided to the public from other professionals such as governmental and university-based programs. The following section will use demographic data about RDs as an example of a subset of nutrition educators. The [Table](#) provides definitions of terms used within this article.

The membership survey of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND), previously named the American Dietetic Association, showed that 85% of the membership is white whereas 3% is African American, 3% is Hispanic, 4% is Asian, and 0.52% is American Indian/Alaskan or Hawaiian.⁵ Colby and Ortman⁶ reported that about 62 % of the total US population is composed of white people whereas 38% are people of color (PoC), broken down as African American (13.2%), Hispanic (17.4%); Asian (5.4%), and American Indian/Alaskan (2.0%). It is projected that by 2060 the percentage of PoC will increase to 56% of the US population, thereby making PoC a numerical majority⁶; nevertheless, with a projected decline in population to 44%, white people are still projected to comprise the majority of dietitians and interns in the US. This disparity in racial group representation within AND compared with the

general population is not unique to AND, and is seen in other health professions such as nursing, medicine, and psychology.⁷ With increasing numbers of PoC and a comparatively homogeneous population of dietetic, nutrition, and other health professionals, the effectiveness of cultural education will depend on the degree to which the training of health professionals prepares them to be culturally competent and effective in delivering nutrition health education and services in diverse health and community settings.^{2,8} This preparation is greatly influenced by the ways in which cultural diversity is viewed in the US, because these views shape the way in which health professionals are taught to deliver nutrition health education and services to PoC.⁹

CURRENT ISSUE/CONTROVERSY

Over the years, there has been a change in the paradigm used to describe diversity in the US.¹⁰ This paradigm has shifted from the US being viewed as a melting pot, in which PoC are expected to assimilate to the dominant white culture, to one of a salad bowl, in which there is a celebration of people of different cultures who retain their different identities while contributing to the wider society.^{9,10} Both views see the dominant white culture as

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Table. Definition of Cultural Terms Used in Article

Term Used	Definition
White	Non-Hispanic people of European descent
People of color	Non-white people, often called minorities. They include the following groups: people of African descent, Hispanic/Latino/s, Asian, American Indian/Alaska.
Race	Race is a socially constructed form of categorization based on shared phenotypic and cultural traits of people in a certain group.
Melting pot	A paradigm of cultural diversity in which various minority ethnic groups are expected to assimilate to the culture of the dominant group
Salad bowl	A paradigm of cultural diversity in which various groups retain their own, different cultural identities while contributing to a larger society
Culture	The conscious and unconscious content that a group learns, shares, and transmits from generation to generation. It organizes life and helps to interpret existence. ²⁶
Cultural diversity	The range of differences that exist among groups of people with definable and unique cultural backgrounds
Cultural heritage	Human creativity and expressions transmitted from generation to generation in a community. Includes material objects and immaterial elements, eg, traditions, oral history, social practices.
Cultural awareness	The understanding of how one's own culture shapes certain behaviors, beliefs, and assumptions
Ethnic group	A community of people who identify with each other based on cultural, linguistic, and/or ancestral background
Worldview	A theory of the world, used for living in the world; a framework of values and ideas about the world
Power dynamics	The hierarchal structures of influence and power that determine the amount of control that certain groups attain or lack
Sociopolitical forces	The interaction of both social and political entities to influence a greater decision
Minority	A group whose members have significantly less control or power over their lives than do members of a dominant or majority group
Assimilation	The process with which a group's culture is shifted or erased to adopt the culture of the dominant group

the reference culture, or the norm against which the cultures of PoC are measured and often found to be inferior. Today's society is increasingly moving beyond describing and looking at cultural diversity through the melting pot and salad bowl paradigms to the point at which there is a willingness to recognize and acknowledge inequalities among different population groups.¹¹

However, the cultural education of nutrition educators, dietitians, and other health professionals does not appear to have kept pace with this changing view of cultural diversity. It is the author's opinion that the way in which nutrition educators and other health professionals are trained to deliver nutrition health education and services to PoC is still overly influenced by the melting pot and salad bowl views of cultural diversity and has not kept up with changes in how cultural diversity is viewed today. The result of this lag is cultural training that is not able to focus on eliminating the health disparities currently seen in the US. The Institute of Medicine's 2003 report¹² on

"Unequal treatment: confronting racial and ethnic disparities in health care" reported that PoC receive lower-quality health care than do other groups and further stated that evidence of stereotyping and biases, by health professionals, is what contributes to this lower quality of health care. This claim called serious attention to the training of nutrition and health educators.

DISCUSSION

Melting Pot and Salad Bowl Views of Cultural Diversity

During much of the 20th century, the melting pot view of cultural diversity, also referred to as cultural assimilation, was characterized as the cultural differences of immigrants being metaphorically placed into a big pot (the US) where they are melted or blended together, resulting in 1 culture and lifestyle for everyone.¹⁰ The desired outcome, in this view of cultural diversity, would be for PoC to give up their cultural values and norms and

adopt those of the dominant white culture; the assumption is that white cultural values and norms are superior to those of PoC.^{10,13}

As the demographic and cultural landscape of the US changed to one that was more pluralistic, the view of cultural diversity changed to that of the tossed salad or salad bowl. This view centers on the analogy of different salad ingredients maintaining their different shapes, colors, and taste, all of which contribute to an appealing nutritious salad. People of different cultures (the different salad ingredients) are encouraged to maintain their own cultural patterns and retain their different identities while contributing to the wider society.

The Influence of the Melting Pot and Salad Bowl Views on Cultural Education

In the melting pot view of cultural diversity, health professionals' role, and even responsibility, is to encourage

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