2.3: Myths About Culture

Myth 1, Essentialism: It is possible to learn all there is to know about a culture by studying its traditions, beliefs, practices, and attitudes.

Truth: It is nearly impossible to reduce the essential and distinguishing features of any culture or cultural group to descriptive statements or lists of characteristics.

Myth 2, Overgeneralization: Cultural practices and beliefs apply in the same way to all members of a cultural group.

Truth: Cultures are dynamic and constantly evolving in response to such factors as environmental conditions, new challenges, technology, and acculturative pressures resulting from close encounters with other cultural groups. Cultures that are in proximity borrow from and are influenced by one another.

Myth 3, Assumption of stability: Cultures are static, constant, and stable.

Truth: The shared system of beliefs, morals, values, attitudes, practices, roles, artifacts, symbols, and language that make up a culture are adaptive, dynamic, and in constant flux in response to changes in the social context. Cultures change in response to strains, opportunities, and altered social landscapes. Learning and relearning must take place continually.

Myth 4, Single-culture assumption: Within a home and family, a single culture predominates.

Truth: Within in a single family there may be blending of several distinct cultures and ethnic identities. This means that individuals living with a single family may reflect not one, but several cultural traditions. [28]