

# You, Me and Them: Reaching for Common Ground

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A booklet about cultural diversity, tolerance and ways to think about people from other cultures. It's all very important because sometimes it's hard interacting with people who look and talk differently. I mean, we're all unique and without diversity it would be boring around here. Remember now, you can only eat so many of the same plain brown M&M's. Know what I mean?

I am the inferior of any man whose rights I trample under foot. Men are not superior by reasons of the accidents of race and color. They are superior who have the best heart—the best brain. The superior man....stands erect by bending over the fallen. He rises by lifting others.

Robert Green Ingersoll

Few people can be happy unless they hate some other person, nation or creed.

Bertrand Russell

No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive

Mahatma Gandhi



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## Our Diverse Society

Undoubtedly, our society is very diverse and we need to acknowledge that this diversity can be used as a strength. If you were born and socialized in our society, you learned and internalized the cultural values and view of the world from our mainstream cultural program. The concern with this situation is that as children, we don't have opportunities to question and challenge the cultural assumptions, beliefs and perspectives we are taught by adults in our lives.

What makes us diverse? Human beings are diverse when it comes to realizing all the different identities each of us possesses based on:

Religion	Educational level	Race	Residence	Gender	
Age		Values	Culture	Language	Political
Affiliation					

## The Important Terms I Need to Know

Diversity is an understanding that there are many differences between people and we need to recognize and include others with different ways of thinking.

Cultural Diversity refers to the differences in ethnic, racial, religious and individual characteristics of people in the world.

Cultural Competence is the ability of people to interact respectfully with people of other cultures, classes, races and ethnic backgrounds in dignified ways.

Ethnocentrism refers to an individual that believes his/her culture is the right culture. This individual asserts that he/she is culturally and personally superior to others.

Cultural Relativity refers to the understanding that each culture is unique and can only be evaluated based on their own culture bound values.

Stereotype consists of assigning a label and behavior characteristics to a group of people and ignoring the reality that the label may not apply to others in the group; a stereotype is a simplified, rigid image of what other people in a group are like.

Prejudice is a fixed attitude, usually unfavorable (not nice) about an individual which is usually not based on an actual experience; prejudice occurs when we make a prejudgment or an opinion about someone without evidence; in general, people who are prejudiced about a group of people can be expected to be prejudiced against others.

Bias is a conscious or unconscious preference about an individual

Discrimination is actual behavior, which is unfavorable toward a certain individual or group.

Social Inequality is an outcome of social differentiation; the interesting questions here refer to what distinctions are made, why these distinctions are made and what are the consequences of these distinctions for the individuals involved?

## What is Socialization

Socialization refers to an interactive process whereby individuals learn some of the values, attitudes and beliefs of the culture or society they are members of. The socialization process occurs throughout life and the following are considered agents of socialization:

Family as socialization agent:

In our society the family is considered the child's first reference group. Parents are given the responsibility of inculcating in their children the values and norms to operate in the world.

### **School as socialization agent:**

The function of schools is to create responsible, obedient, achievement oriented students through the use of various rewards and negative consequences such as grades. Children learn the following from school:

- \* valuing democracy, achievement, the benefits of self-discipline and hard work
- \* how to function effectively as members of an institution
- \* how to be respectful and obey authorities other than their parents

### **What Are the Core Values?**

Citizenship – honoring our country's democratic values; helping create equal opportunity

Cooperation – making efforts to work together to achieve goals

Fairness – knowing how to treat others equally, respectfully and with dignity

Integrity – resisting coercion from others to do the wrong thing; asserting your belief system

Kindness – being thoughtful, empathetic, and caring for others

Respect – treating others kindly and gently; being nice and decent

Responsibility – holding yourself accountable for your behavior

### **How Do Americans See Themselves?**

Americans are used to enjoying things that are probably luxuries in our countries.

Americans can be competitive and we admire people who achieve success through hard work.

Americans tend to place value and importance on looking, acting and feeling younger.

Most American families are nuclear, consisting of parents and their children.

Americans are accustomed to freedom of choice and expression.

Americans enjoy their independence and they want to make their own decisions.

Americans tend to be achievement oriented.

## **Culture Bound Values for the Asian, Hispanic and White North American**

Family: for the Asian and Hispanic culture family is usually more important; for the White North American individual is usually more important

Time: for the Asian culture time is not specific and for the Hispanic culture time is vague; for the White North American time is precise.

Achievement: for the Asian culture one achieves for honor of the family or society; for the Hispanic culture achievement is less important and being relationship minded is valued

Emotion: for the Asian culture individual emotions are de-emphasized; for the Hispanic culture emotional expression is encouraged; for the White North American culture gender role stereotyping influences emotion: males shouldn't be tender or sensitive and females should be sensitive, empathic and not display anger.

Self-Sacrifice: for the Asian culture self-sacrifice is expected; for the Hispanic culture self-sacrifice is acceptable; for the White North American culture self-sacrifice is not necessarily honored

## **Parental Behaviors That Promote Development of Prejudicial Behavior in Children**

- \* parents not discussing at home racial issues emerging in society, comments heard or social/racial injustice observed on television and parents not discussing these events with their children
- \* parents not having friends from differing racial and cultural groups
- \* parents not exposing/enabling their children to interact with children from different races or cultures
- \* parents not engaging their children in discussions about the positive aspects and uniqueness of individuals from other cultures

## **The Early Formation of Racial and Prejudicial Attitudes**

Intolerant and prejudicial views primarily result from the following sources:

- \* the tendency for human beings to be ethnocentric; to assert their cultural and personal superiority over other cultures
- \* a lack of interaction with other cultures
- \* the human tendency to categorize information into compartments

Between the ages of three and four children recognize their racial and cultural backgrounds. At age three they understand that their skin color is stable and will not change. By age seven or eight children can differentiate between race and culture groups and categorize individuals based on physical differences. Research demonstrates that Caucasian children between the ages of four and seven consistently show a preference to interact with children from the same race or culture group and they tend to hold negative or unfavorable attitudes toward children of other racial/culture groups.

## **Affirming Our Racial and Cultural Identities**

All of us want to feel good about our racial and cultural identities; to feel positively about ourselves. If we cannot feel positively about our cultural and racial identities, we experience shame resulting from the

unfavorable reactions received from others. In contrast, children must be encouraged to accept and celebrate their differences so they can develop a positive self-image and self-concept—to be proud of their ethnic/cultural affiliation.

### **The Tendency to Over-Emphasize and Value Sameness**

If you were born and raised in mainstream American society, one of the effects of your cultural and socialization experience is to value sameness as representing success and doing the right thing. To free yourself up from this habitual way of thinking, you need to redefine what your measure of success and what doing the right things are. We engage in dualistic thinking when everyone honors sameness—so we need to begin thinking diversely because dualistic thinking restricts how we view others and differences in culture.

### **What is Culture?**

Culture refers to a group of people who share characteristics such as language, religion/spirituality, knowledge, beliefs, values, food and eating habits, dress and appearance. Norms are social rules that everyone in the culture needs to obey and conform to so everyone can get along together nicely.

Think about this ....      What culture do I belong to?  
    How do cultures differ from each other?  
    Are some cultures better than others or are they just different and no culture  
    is superior to any other culture?

### **What is a Cultural Assumption?**

All human beings, regardless of their ethnic and culture groups hold assumptions about others; some are simple and some more complex. These assumptions allow us to interact and communicate with each other. The members of a certain society are united and bonded through the sharing of cultural assumptions. The potential problems that emerge are when cultural assumptions about other cultures begin to direct and limit further thinking about the culture being observed.

For example , one could form an inaccurate assumption about an individual from another culture, and it could lead to inaccurate conclusions made about that individual. In this situation, the individual holding the assumption may not be aware he/she is making an assumption about the individual's behavior. So, the only way to modify our assumption of the individual is to check it against reality by educating ourselves about the culture in question or interacting with individuals from the observed culture and modifying our cultural assumption in the process of knowing the individual from the culture.

### **Avoid Ethnocentric Thinking**

Ethnocentric individuals believe that their culture is the right culture and all other cultures are wrong. These individuals boldly assert that they are culturally and personally superior to others, and they tend to divide the world into "us" and "them."

### **What is Tolerance?**

Tolerance is more than the ability to tolerate what we don't like. It is developing the capacity to be interested in the ideas, thoughts, and behavior of others who are not like us in appearance, dress, customs

and language. Actually, tolerance is letting other individuals be who they want to be. It starts with us being comfortable and accepting of other individuals having the right to be what they want to be.

Remember, we have an automatic expectation; a sort of tendency to expect other individuals to behave like us because we prefer familiarity over unfamiliarity. So, we must accept that other individuals will not behave like us, that they will behave as they desire and we should not resent this reality or prevent them from behaving as they like.

You must recognize that everyone is capable of tolerance; capable of showing the capacity for tolerance. Tolerance has more to do with feelings than thoughts; with actions than opinions and it can be taught to others through our actions.

For us to be tolerant, we must have the courage to see things differently; to redefine our perceptions of individuals and be willing to abandon our secure, comfortable perceptions of others and deal with what we truly see in others. Being tolerant requires we begin to think and feel differently; to withhold judgment instead of jumping to conclusions, to modify our thoughts based on new information about others.

### **The Origins of Prejudice and Intolerance**

Children raised in families where consistent discipline and love was lacking, in addition to experiencing poor moral guidance can become adults who are fearful, insecure, distrustful, anxious and self-centered.

In contrast, children raised in families with plenty of love, consistent discipline and where moral guidance was developed tend to become more tolerant and less prejudicial. As adults, they will be open-minded and compassionate.

### **How Children Can Develop Negative Racial/Ethnic Attitudes About Others**

The following are parental behaviors that promote negative racial thoughts in children:

- \* parents not discussing issues related to racism, prejudice or discrimination at home
- \* parents not having friends from different racial and ethnic groups
- \* parents not allowing their children opportunities to interact with children from different racial and ethnic groups
- \* parents not explaining the positive attributes of individuals from different racial and ethnic groups

The following are school experiences that promote negative racial thoughts in children:

- \* having a school administration and student population that is not culturally diverse
- \* a culture in the school reflected by one value system such as white, mainstream American

The following is the role the media plays in the formation of negative thoughts about minorities in children:

- \* portraying minorities in stereotypical roles
- \* not portraying minorities in positive images; not offering minorities leading roles on shows

### **Our Human Tendency to Categorize and Generalize**

Our brain helps us process information quickly and efficiently but the problem arises when we do the following:



- \* get in the habit of categorizing new information
- \* tend to generalize and arrive at conclusions based on limited information and evidence
- \* prefer seeing familiarity over unfamiliarity
- \* exhibit a tendency to rank ourselves and others based on certain criteria
- \* search for conformity within our social groups

To further simplify our world, our brain tends to categorize information, people and situations, especially when we don't have sufficient information about an individual. As a result, our mind makes easy and sweeping generalizations based on what we already know and not on new information we need to take into account to better understand others.

With regard to familiarity, human beings like to hold on to familiar attitudes because they make us secure. So, it's no surprise that human beings enjoy associating with individuals who are familiar to them—such as individuals who speak our language and who look like us.

### **What Does Cultural Competency Mean?**

Cultural competency refers to the ability of individuals to interact respectfully to individuals from all cultures, classes, races and ethnic backgrounds. By doing so, we affirm and value the cultural components of different people and treat them with dignity.

### **What is Awareness?**

Awareness consists of the following:

- \* Being culturally savvy
- \* Being able to recognize differences between racial and cultural groups
- \* Having the capacity to recognize one's own personal biases and stereotypes
- \* Acknowledging the effects of one's own cultural program on their thinking

### **What Are Some Common Patterns of Cultural Differences?**

The following list includes some differences in constructs among cultures:

- \* cultures have different communication styles
- \* different views of conflict; in some cultures conflict is acceptable and positive; in others it is avoided
- \* different attitudes toward doing tasks
- \* different views on sharing emotions; in some cultures it's not acceptable to be open emotionally and in others it is more acceptable to disclose emotions

### **How to Value Cultural Differences**

1. First we need to admit to ourselves that cultural differences do exist and they can be used as an opportunity to learn more about how other people live in the world.
2. We need to identify and remove our biases and stereotypes about others.
3. Realize how our cultural upbringing has affected how we understand others.
4. Try to change and be more comfortable with and accepting of cultural differences.
5. Realizing that cultural differences represents an opportunity to enrich your life.
6. Understanding that sameness does not have to refer to everyone; that everyone does not have to behave like you

## Steps we Need to Take to Value Cultural Differences

- Step 1 Be aware that other culture groups that live differently than us do exist
- Step 2 Understand and admit that culture is a complex process
- Step 3 Accept and respect the reality of cultural differences
- Step 4 Appreciate how other cultures live differently than you; you can learn things from them
- Step 5 Become accustomed to pushing your cultural boundaries
- Step 6 Work toward the achieving the common good

## Lets Look at Your Action Plan

An action plan is a strategy of how you're going to achieve a goal you've set for yourself. So, since we've been discussing the importance of respecting and understanding people from other cultures, and realizing that no culture is better than another, our action plan should inform us of how to achieve this worthwhile goal.

The following are the steps of our action plan and your task is to describe how you'll accomplish each task:

1. Be aware of your cultural assumptions and biases about people from other cultures.
2. Respect the individuality of a person from another culture.
3. Be interested in learning more about other cultures.
4. Recognize that your culture is no better or worse than any other culture.
5. You should strive for "inclusion" where your attitude is "Let's take the best of a variety of ways"
6. You should recognize the diversity in you; thereby making it easier to identify the diversity in others.

## What's in it For Me if I Respect and Learn About Other Cultures?

1. By learning about other cultures, such as their language, customs, and faith our lives are enriched because we discover more about what the wonderful world has to offer to us.
2. We undoubtedly also come to challenge our own cultural assumptions about how we do things.

From an existential perspective—regarding feeling lonely and alienated, we feel less alienated and lonely by understanding other cultures. If we stop stereotyping and creating binary images of others based on an "Us-Them" formula we stop distancing ourselves from others. Remember, as human beings all of us desire genuine human contact and we want to belong.

## Cross Cultural Communication Styles and Comparing Cultural Norms

Speech

Asian American: speak softly  
White/Caucasian: speak louder  
Black: speak with affect

## Communication and Language

White: Explicit, direct communication; emphasis on content; meaning in words

Non-white and other cultures: implicit, indirect communication; meaning attained around words

## Dress

White: A wide range in dress expression; dress for success

Non-white and other cultures: Dress can display one's position, prestige, wealth

## Food

White: Eating is essential; sometimes fast food is necessary and driven by sense of hurry

Non-white and other cultures: Eating experiences more as a social experience; time to talk

## Time

White: Time is precise, linear and exact; time is money

Non-white and other cultures: Time is relative; flowing, time used to enjoy others and relationship oriented

## Values

White: Individualism and me oriented, independent

Non-white and other cultures: Collectivism; group orientation

## Work

White: The emphasis is on tasks ' rewarded for achievement, work has intrinsic value, merit based

Non-white and other cultures: Relationships are important, rewards earned for seniority

## Beliefs and Attitude

White: Egalitarian based, challenge authority, individuals control their destiny

Non-white and other cultures: Hierarchical based, respect for authority, one accepts his/her destiny

## **Monochronic and Polychronic Cultures**

Western cultures tend to be monochronic and Asian cultures are polychronic

### Monochronic

Do one thing at a time, concentrate on one job, take time commitments seriously, driven by a sense of urgency, adhere seriously to schedules and a plan, are concerned about not disturbing others, honor privacy, show respect for private property, seldom borrow or lend

### Polychronic

Do many things at once, are distractible and don't mind interruptions, don't adhere seriously to time schedules, time flows, are more committed to people and relationships than task oriented, change plans frequently, borrow and lend easily.

## Specific Culture Bound Values for Asian, Hispanic, White and African-American

### Family

Asian: Family is more important than the individual  
Hispanic: Family is more important than the individual  
White: Individual is more important than the family  
African American: Individual is more important than the family

### Time

Asian: Time is not always specific  
Hispanic: Time is vague/relative  
White: Time is precise  
African American: Time is precise

### Achievement

Asian: Achieve for honor of family, class or society  
Hispanic: Relationship oriented rather than task oriented  
White: Task oriented for personal emotional/material rewards  
African American: Task oriented for personal emotional/material rewards

### Emotion

Asian: Emotions downplayed for group cohesiveness  
Hispanic: Emotional expression important  
White: Certain emotions downplayed for each gender; men shouldn't be sensitive, tender and women shouldn't express angry or strong  
African American: Certain emotions downplayed for each gender; men shouldn't be sensitive, tender and women shouldn't be angry or strong

### Sacrifice

Asian: Self-sacrifice is important and expected  
Hispanic: Self-sacrifice is good  
White: Self-sacrifice is unhealthy and unnecessary  
African American: Self-sacrifice is unhealthy and unnecessary

### Authority

Asian: Authority is obeyed and respected  
Hispanic: Authority is respected and seldom challenged  
White: Authority is often open to questioning and can be worked around sometimes  
African American: Authority is often open to questioning and can be worked around sometimes

## Strategies for Generating Ethnic Pride

- 1) How is your culture similar and different from other ethnic groups?
- 2) In what ways does the literature by your ethnic authors reflect or reveal some of your culture's values, traditions and belief systems?
- 3) How does your ethnic group's music reveal its values, symbols and traditions?

- 4) What symbols, styles, history, and culture bound values are revealed in your culture group's art?
- 5) What does your culture's food reveal about its values and desires?

### **The Universality of Rituals**

A ritual is an established activity or system among a people to observe life cycle events considered special by the culture. Some of these practices are religious/spiritual in nature. And almost all cultures of the world acknowledge life cycle events such as birthdays, birth, baptism, confirmation, coming of age, marriage, anniversaries, graduations and death. Exercise: Ask participants to create a list of life cycle events and how they are celebrated in their culture.

### **Holidays**

Cultures celebrate holidays so we can rest and celebrate a special event in time. We have holidays designating joyous and somber events, in addition to historic events such as our country's day of independence. Further, great leaders and heroes are recognized on their birthdays. The obvious universality of celebrating holidays indicates the human need to interrupt daily living by celebrating or commemorating something.

The following is a list of holidays celebrated in America:

Arbor Day	Independence Day	St. Patrick's Day
Christmas	Labor Day	Thanksgiving Day
Columbus Day	Lincoln's Birthday	Valentine's Day
Easter	Martin Luther King, Jr. 's Birthday	Veteran's Day
Father's Day	Memorial Day	Washington's Birthday
Flag Day	Mother's Day	New Year's Day

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is the name of the holiday?
- 2) Why was it established?
- 3) What does it commemorate?
- 4) Why is it important to celebrate?
- 5) Are any ceremonies part of the celebration?
- 6) Are special events part of it?
- 7) Is a special meal prepared for this holiday?
- 8) Any other special activities for this holiday?

## Managing Diversity in the Workplace

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Managing diversity in the workplace is associated with effective organizational performance. As a result it is every managers responsibility to effectively manage diversity and capitalize on the opportunity to build effective interpersonal and intercultural functioning among diverse employees. Maximizing the use of a diverse employee pool can result in increased innovation and add to the development of an inclusionary environment where employees of varying ethnic groups are acknowledged for their contributions. The literature indicates that the costs associated with poor intercultural functioning of employees results in lost time, opportunities, revenue and the good will of organizations.

Beyond managers understanding the benefits of using diversity as a strength, employees themselves must recognize and be aware of their own responses to diversity and "otherness." Diversity refers to differences in culture, ethnicity, race, gender, able-bodiedness, age, lifestyle, educational background, geographic origin, and religion/spirituality.

In organizations experiencing tension and in-fighting among diverse employees, a host of potential problems can emerge in delivering the company's service or products. The quality of the service or product may also be compromised.

Organizational problems associated with poorly managing cultural diversity in the workplace include:

- 1) Due to high employee turnover revenue is spent on recruiting and training new employees
- 2) Absenteeism may increase
- 3) Discrimination reports may be filed
- 4) Employees may sabotage the socially marginalized employee who is different

### The Inevitability of Diversity

Diversity will emerge in your organization and it is here to stay. You must remember to treat diversity as an asset and not a problem. It becomes a problem when employee attitudes toward diversity arise from their ignorance and fear of interacting with others who look, speak and dress differently than the majority population of employees in the organization.

In general, employees who hold unfavorable attitudes toward different culture and ethnic group employees often display behaviors which are prejudicial, discriminatory or stereotypical.

Definitions:

- 1) Prejudice is a preconceived bias originating from interactions with our family, friends and other sources such as the media. All human beings harbor biases, some of which we are unaware of in daily life. Prejudicial behavior may be driven by one's ethnocentric attitude whereby he/she feels culturally and personally superior to another culture/minority group.
- 2) Stereotyping refers to overgeneralizing from one experience with a member of a certain culture/ethnic group to the entire population of the culture/ethnic group. The individual doing the stereotyping may be doing so from a lack of knowledge. Usually, stereotypes represent cultural assumptions which lack support.

- 3) Discrimination refers to treating individuals differently or unequally resulting in a negative outcome.

#### Strategies for Managing Diverse Relationships in the Work Setting

Before we can effectively recognize, accommodate and treat diversity in healthy ways we must acknowledge the diversity present in each of us. By acknowledging to ourselves that we possess multiple identities it will be easier to observe the multiple identities in others.

- 1) Be observant of changes that occur around you and the workplace; and attempt to accommodate and adapt to these changes.
- 2) Recognize, accept and respect others who look, dress and behave differently than you. Remember that tolerance means allowing others to be who they want to be without penalizing them in an unfavorable way.
- 3) Remember to always think before you speak
- 4) Attempt to be aware of your own counterproductive biases and how they may affect your interactions with others who are different at work. This does not necessarily mean you need to like or agree with everyone—but that you treat others with respect and fairness.
- 5) Listen—especially active listening where you listen with the result of increasing the likelihood of developing trust and confidence in the person you are listening to. Usually, the person you are listening to will cooperate more with you and become less defensive.
- 6) Take time to expose yourself to other cultures by visiting cultural centers and educating yourself about the culture bound values of different cultures.

#### So, How Do You Know if Your Organization is Managing Diversity Well?

The following behaviors generally emerge in organizations that manage diversity effectively:

- 1) Employees from all culture and ethnic groups voluntarily offer feedback to management
- 2) Work teams composed of diverse individuals effectively cooperate to achieve goals
- 3) Diverse work teams perform at high levels
- 4) Employee policies related to vacation, leave and absenteeism are flexible and fair for all employees.
- 5) At all levels of the organization there exists a diverse staff composition
- 6) Employees from diverse backgrounds are friends
- 7) Employee turnover from all diverse groups is proportionate

### **Potential Barriers to Accepting Diversity in the Classroom**

The likelihood of barriers to accepting diversity to surface in instructors usually derives from their homogeneous backgrounds. The barriers that prevent instructors from accepting the diversity in their classrooms include the following:

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| 1. Prejudice      | Prejudice refers to an unjustified, unfavorable or negative attitude toward an individual because of his/her membership in a certain culture or race group; it can be race based (racism), gender based (sexism), age based (ageism) or ethnic based (ethnocentrism). |
| 2. Stereotype     | Stereotype refers to a set of beliefs or ideas about a group which is generally applied to all members of that certain group. A stereotype can be negative or unfavorable.  |
| 3. Discrimination | Discrimination occurs when one bars an individual from joining an organization because of his/her membership in a certain culture, race or other group.   |

4. Ethnocentrism      Ethnocentrism refers to a tendency to consider one's group or culture as culturally superior to others.

### **Strategies for Minimizing Miscommunication with Diverse Student Backgrounds**

1. Instructors must educate themselves about different races and culture groups through reading and broadening their experiences.
2. Avoid forming opinions about others based on limited interactions or observations such as one's dress, language, or mannerisms.
3. Instructors should avoid using adjectives that highlight particular groups and suggest that an individual is the exception; the "female physician" or "black doctor"

As instructors we need to respond to the spectrum of diversity in our students through interactions that are mutually beneficial. Instructors who are culturally proficient will convey to students that they are knowledgeable about their culture group and how their culture bound values influence their perceptions of the world. The cultural imperative for instructors is to prepare students for what to expect from the multicultural, pluralistic world of employment.

Instructors should create a learning environment that caters to more than the dominant, mainstream American value system. For example, instructors must be aware that in America, individual achievement orientation is valued in contrast to group orientation and achievement in the Asian and Hispanic culture. In addition, the American culture bound value of competition is not honored among other culture groups. Cooperation and an emphasis on nurturing role relationships is valued over competition in other cultures.

Instructors must understand and accept that before their students can benefit from their interactions, they must feel appreciated and recognized as unique individuals possessing cultural variables which include a distinct language, faith, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender and age.

### What Diverse Students Expect From Instructors

1. Younger and Older Students
  - Respect for their life experiences at both spectrums: young and older, both groups want to be taken seriously and to be challenged by the coursework and instructors, that older adults are committed to lifelong learning and to be sought out as carriers of history and wisdom.
2. Females
  - Desire to be acknowledged as equals to males, to be treated with respect, equal access to resources, to have their success in school and work be attributed to their ability.
3. Males
  - Want to be supported, treated with respect, access to resources.
4. Individuals of Color
  - To be valued as unique individuals who are members of a certain ethnic or race group, and as capable of making contributions to the learning environment, to be supported by Caucasians, to be treated with respect and to establish honest, open relationships with others, to not be stereotyped or type cast.
5. Differently Abled/Challenged Individuals
  - To be valued for what abilities they possess rather than their disabilities, to be challenged by their instructors and the coursework, and to be included and not isolated from the process



### Common Stereotypic Labels Attached to Distinct Groups

Young Employees	wet behind ears, lack respect for tradition, lack experience, cannot be trusted, aren't disciplined or responsible.
Older Adult Employees	less motivated to work, deadwood, typically resist change and adapting, are finished learning, slow coming around.
Women	aren't serious about their careers, emotionally labile, less competent, expressive
Men	think they know it all, macho, suppress their feelings, suppress their feelings
African-Americans	are good athletes but not good students; aren't very motivated.
American-Indians	cannot be trusted, consume too much alcohol, not interested in education.
Asian-Americans	want to control America, are all intelligent, all have same cultural heritage
Hispanics	all from same cultural heritage, the men are macho and women subservient, Emotional, lazy and have large families who live together

## Alright Hank, Put the One Plain, Green M&M with the Plain, Red M&Ms

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How would you like to be a plain, Green M&M mixed into a bag filled with plain, Red M&M's? You probably wouldn't appreciate being in this situation. Why? Maybe it's because of the anticipatory anxiety you'd experience in the presence of the plain, Red M&M's. Certainly you'd feel like a minority in the majority population. Actually, you'd also probably experience social marginality. How do you like that fancy term? Yes, you'd be socially marginalized.

Now, I realize we're talking about plain M&M's and not human beings. But, indulge me and allow me to use this metaphor to illustrate important concepts about tolerance. Everyone desires to be treated with fairness, respect and dignity. These core values can be virtues. If we're able to honor these core values then all human beings are valuable and no one is personally or culturally superior to anyone. We have a term for this phenomenon of people asserting they are personally and culturally superior to others. It's called ethnocentrism. All human beings deserve respect and to be treated with dignity, regardless of what country in the world they're from, how they worship and how they behave. You see, for other human beings to be happy and feel secure they need you, and you need to treat other human beings they way you want to be treated. The last thing is you are responsible for your behavior. But don't worry, everyone behaves irresponsibly at times because we all make poor choices and it isn't a perfect world with perfect people.

Alright, so can we agree that being a tolerant individual means you have to allow others to behave in their own unique ways? You see, it begins with you being comfortable and accepting of others being what they want to be. As you know, we have a tendency to expect other people to behave like us because as human beings we prefer familiarity over unfamiliarity. We like our familiar attitudes. Know what I mean? Think about why the one, plain, green M&M was being socially marginalized/ It's because the other plain, red M&M's treated him/her differently based on his/her green color. The plain, green M&M looked different on the exterior, and the plain, red M&M's preferred to interact with a more familiar looking plain, red M&M. This situation illustrates how we prefer to be around others who look, talk and dress like us. The important thing to realize is that we need to accept that others will not always behave like us, look or talk like us and we shouldn't ignore this reality. We need to let others behave in their own ways.

To accept and not resent the reality that other people have a right to act their way requires that we show an interest in the ideas, thoughts and behaviors of others who are not like us in appearance, dress and language. We need to develop the capacity for tolerance to be interested in other ways of living. Remember, everyone has the capacity for tolerance because we're born with it. Children are not born bigoted. And no you don't need psychotherapy to develop tolerance. It's got very little to do with uncovering and working through unresolved conflicts or dependency needs from early childhood. Developing tolerance means having to change how you think and feel about others. It's a conscious thing. You do however need to have the courage to perceive things differently, to redefine or modify our perceptions of others. Doing so will move you outside of your comfort zone—push your cultural boundaries. It means withholding judgment, working with new information about others and sitting with some uncertainty until we have enough evidence to remove the uncertainty.

So, if you're interested in becoming more tolerant, start with doing your own cultural self-assessment. It's just a fancy way of saying you need to explore within yourself your biases and assumptions about other people who look and behave differently than you. Think of times you made a pre-judgments, jumped to conclusions without sufficient information or evidence, and what you based your conclusions on. If you don't identify your cultural assumptions you're at risk for converting your biases or stereotypes into more harmful prejudicial behavior and discrimination. Well, I hope this article helps you to become more aware of how you can practice tolerance and be more culturally competent.

## Culture and the American Character

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Well, I think there's lots to be thankful for living in America and I'll try to explain it in this very brief historical-developmental piece. Let's start with defining culture as a shared system of symbolic knowledge where behavior is patterned from speech (language) and where predictable behavior patterns are established to nurture cultural stability (a fancy way of saying getting along with each other), in the form of cultural codes for social life, role expectations and social norms all for the purpose of creating predictability and survivability of the culture. Culture emerges because people want to survive and live together on cooperative terms. How about we call culture a social glue for now. The goal of social organization and cooperative behavior is to reduce the incidence of unpredictability in behavior of a culture and its people. We can discuss it also in terms of reducing uncertainty in behavior of a people which reduces social disorganization. Culture also creates social expectations among a group of people. Rules, social norms and values surface to increase conformity and unity. Culture is a social bond that creates consistency in thought and action.

Cultures also evolve—meaning they develop new and more efficient functional methods of survival. It's an end product of civilizations that have survived for thousands of years. I need to remind you that human beings are the only species that communicate using higher order abstraction and a symbolic language. Remember, cultures survive because most members behave predictably, which serves to create a safe environment for people to pursue comfortable living. The use of language or speech communication results in thought, religion, art, science, government and social institutions. For a culture to survive it needs to transmit cultural elements such as social organization, art, play, economic organizations, religion, science, technology, language and social control.

So, what are the fundamental assumptions of the American culture? Self-governance is one of the assumptions posited early on by the colonists. The colonists were suspicious of the theocracies, monarchies or other forms of rule that threatened the rights of individuals and their liberty. What is liberty? Liberty is freedom from despotic rule. We enjoy religious freedom; meaning we can find G-d in our way and we have political freedom, physical freedom and freedom of speech. Ever wonder why some cultures don't survive? It's probably because members of the culture could not transmit culture bound values—they weren't open to exploring and interacting with other cultures to examine how other social systems function and bring vitality to their members or they were conquered by other cultures.

Historically our culture's roots began with the colonist's focus on liberty. The early colonists agreed that self-governance was a cultural value that resulted in the writing of the constitution and Declaration of Independence. The Civil War reflected a pivotal period in our history and culture because it represented a war about individual rights. Essentially, our country was divided around the issue of slavery and natural rights. What is the one core value of American culture? It is "natural right" and the shared belief that everyone belongs. On the flip side, the pursuit of happiness through self-reliance and the belief that one should pursue his/her own destiny can lead one to be emotionally detached from his/her social institutions. The other concern and natural outcome related to our culture's emphasis on individual rights and achievement is the belief in "rugged individualism" where one makes it on his/her own. A few authors label this phenomenon as a "culture of narcissism" or preoccupation with the "private self" which interferes with our desires to deepen our involvement in the lives of others.

Do we have a national identity? We must realize that our national identity shifts from time to time depending on changes in the political climate and social conditions. During WWII, America was strongly united against the forces of fascism and Nazism. Our national identity was strong and unswerving. Today, our national identity can be perceived as fragmented by partisan politics about the war, the differing views about the causes of our social ills and other controversial social problems.

## America in a Nutshell

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Undoubtedly America has the largest and greatest diversity in terms of racial, ethnic, cultural and religious than any country in the world. Do you agree? I think it's a nice, big bag of mixed chocolate M&M's. The following are the various culture groups and where they first settled in America:

Native Americans in North America	Spanish in the Southwest
British in New England	Dutch in New York
Germans in Pennsylvania	

These immigrant groups came to America knowing they would work hard, in addition to realizing they could direct and control their destiny. For immigrants America represented a land of abundant resources and opportunity. Remember now, a culture is defined as the total elements that characterize a group of people, such as mores, traditions and beliefs, language, in addition to values, food and eating habits, dress, knowledge, religion or spirituality. The family plays a very important role in teaching the child how to see the world; and the family gives the child a social role in the family. Schools are responsible for creating responsible students, to teach democratic principles, citizenship, achievement, self-discipline and how to obey authority figures.

### Is It About Material Wealth?

I think making it in America can be expressed as "going from rags to riches." I know you've heard this slogan before reading it here. Unfortunately material wealth has become a value in America. Not all Americans, however are driven to achieve material wealth; meaning it's not the primary driving force in their lives. Materialism simply means assigning high value to material possessions because it shows one's social status and success. I guess it depends on what each individual defines as success. Most of the time hard, disciplined work is the price we pay for material success. In America there is a tendency to think that differences in material possession reflects a difference in abilities. Do you agree? I think this is faulty thinking. In other words, just because I'm not interested in attaining material possessions doesn't mean I don't have the ability to do so. I may be very successful and possess lots of ability however I'm not interested in showing my success through owning luxurious cars or living in a multi-million dollar home.

### Diversity

Lets define diversity as pluralism: meaning differences. This list shows the many dimensions Americans can express their differences:

Religion, job title, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, educational level, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, smoker/nonsmoker, married, divorces, widowed, athlete or non-athlete.

Think about this: Do Americans see diversity as a strength—a phenomenon that has the potential to enrich our lives and learn more about our special and unique life-ways? I think one of the greatest elements about

America is the limited power of government and church, thereby eliminating any notions of an ideology that may be consistent with an aristocracy or autocratic government. America allows us our individualism, to be free and control our own destiny without government interference. I put it like this: Americans are self-directed and self-determined. I suppose this only applies to you if you are goal directed and your behavior is purposeful.

Now, the only potential problem with enjoying individual freedom is the potential for us to become too individualistic where an overemphasis is placed on self-reliance and our lives become less meaningful

because we tend to isolate ourselves from the larger community. We don't want to be detached from our community and institutions that we would normally be anchored to such as our church, synagogue, mosque, cultural centers and other organizations. In the end the concern is the following: The more free we are the more we're at risk for being alienated, lonely and bored. What do you think? I think we need to be interested in reaching out to others and integrating into our communities. So in conclusion, individualism can create alienation from self and society and it can result in an over-importance on being self-contained and self-sufficient.

### **Equality of Opportunity**

The idea of equality of opportunity doesn't mean we're all equal; it means we all have an equal chance to succeed and lead satisfying lives in America. I suppose an exception is if you're born into a wealthy family and you inherit wealth and prestige. An individual in this situation enjoys what we call ascribed status—in comparison to someone who earned wealth and prestige through hard work, what we'll define as achieved status. The reason everyone in America has an equal chance to make it is because we're free of political, social and religious control by institutions. In other countries, one's place in the community may be determined by his/her social class, ethnicity or political affiliation.

### **The Socialization Experience in Mainstream America**

You need to remember that all of us who were born and socialized within a distinct, mainstream culture of a society did not have an opportunity to question or challenge the cultural assumptions and expectations our parents inculcated in us. In addition, we were reinforced for obeying and honoring certain values, beliefs and customs of our culture. As a result, we experienced a sort of cultural program, a structured program of cultural understanding in our socialization process in childhood. Interestingly, we came to accept the cultural assumptions of our society and internalized the values, norms and conventions of our society. In the end, we're at risk for developing a sort of monocultural view.

## The Meaning of Culture

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**Culture** is what members of a certain society share, things like beliefs, values, norms, language, art, music, and even material objects the culture produces. Things like Pepto Bismol, condensers, U-Joints, and antibacterial soap are examples of material objects. Other objects include forklifts, a drill press, anvil, and brussel sprouts. These are things needed by people to sustain their cultures.

Now, **cultural objects** and **artifacts** develop as a result of a culture using technology. These items fulfill a human purpose. Think about it. Could you and I live without Motrin, pacemakers, or U-Joints? Culture is everything that human beings create together, including their society and the institutions to create social order. How do you like that? Without social order little would be possible. Imagine living in a society with no social order. You could walk into your favorite thrift shop and pick out all the clothes and other hot items you desperately need and not pay for them. Without social order lots would be possible because the norms guiding our behavior are absent. Sociologists call this kind of social condition *anomie*.

How about the shared belief that individuals who jeopardize our safety should be separated from the general population by being incarcerated? Or, that to continue paying rent or mortgage you need to hold a job? Keeping a job is called job stability.

### Language

A healthy, functioning society emerges when all of its members act on the elements of shared understanding to get on with the day-to-day living. As a result, acceptable patterns of behavior are established. Think of culture as a group of people living in a natural setting, communicating with each other in comprehensible ways. Through **language** we create shared symbols, knowledge, and the foundations of a society. Without language none of this would be possible. Animals communicate by certain sounds and gestures, and you and I communicate using symbolic language. The only reason we can communicate with each other is because we speak the same language. We have a shared understanding of our language that enables us to effectively communicate most of the time. Language enables us to communicate our thoughts and feelings.

### Types of Subcultures

A subculture can arise in a dominant society or culture. A subculture emerges when a group of people agrees to their own set of norms, values and beliefs, which are different from the dominant culture. You see, the subculture still shares certain elements of the dominant culture, but it has its own identity and little community. Religious groups like the Amish can be considered a subculture. The Hare Krishna is another religious subculture quite distinct in the way they dress; wearing robes, beads and shaving their heads. They also don't eat meat, which isn't so bad. Adolescents are a subculture because of the unique way they dress, talk, and behave. There are **deviant subcultures** such as terrorist groups, criminals and gangs. Obviously these groups' norms and values are unacceptable to the dominant culture. For starters, these deviant cultures don't treat all life as sacred.

### Knowledge, Beliefs and Values

The other elements of a culture are knowledge, beliefs and values. **Knowledge** refers to statements or theories that come from empirical evidence. Examples of widely established and commonly accepted statements that represent knowledge would be that there's gravity on earth or that human beings are mortal. How about that Einstein was a genius? So, cultural knowledge refers to those statements that are well known and shared by most everyone in the culture.

**Beliefs** are statements that aren't necessarily verifiable and cannot be proven to be true because they are commonly referred to as conventional wisdom. **Conventional wisdom** means that we accept the statement without questioning its truthfulness.

How about the belief that there is an all-loving, merciful, and forgiving G-d that created human beings? Now, I know this is controversial, but I'm only using it as an example of a belief some people espouse. Let's add that the institution of religion is a belief. So, you should pretty much know by now that beliefs are ideas that are subjective and unverifiable. You like that word unverifiable? It means the belief's truthfulness can't be scientifically tested because there hasn't been a credible sighting of G-d lately. But then again, there are lots of people claiming to have seen and talked to G-d.

**Values** are very strongly held beliefs that typically originate from morality. Examples of values are justice, fairness, compassion, equality, openness, sharing, cooperation, and respect. The problem with values is that not everyone in a culture agrees on what is and isn't a value. For example, I know that for some people in our culture, getting ahead is valued. There is nothing wrong with that value. I refer to this value as part of the American dream that promotes and rewards achievement orientation. Interestingly, there are other cultures where competition and achievement orientation is discouraged and not valued. In other cultures, pursuing spiritual enlightenment is valued. Some cultures pursue harmony and balance in nature. I think you'll agree with me that ending someone's life against his or her will is immoral because all of us value life. In our mainstream, American culture, life is treated as sacred. However, sadly enough, there's always a potential for people in the same culture to not honor this value.

In our culture, values are sometimes expressed through proverbs. Here are a few examples of proverbs and the values they're supposed to reflect: Cleanliness is next to G-dliness (Cleanliness); You've made your bed, now lie in it (Responsibility, Personal Choices); Early to bed, early to rise (Diligence, Persistence); It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game (Good sportsmanship).

Now let's now discuss specific cultural values for the Hispanic, Asian and mainstream Caucasian, American culture. I'll list the value and how it is treated in each of the cultures.

**Individual versus Family:** In the Asian and Hispanic cultures, the family is emphasized more than the individual. In modern American culture, the individual is often emphasized more than the family. Individualism honors the uniqueness of each individual in his/her search for meaning in life. In contemporary mainstream Caucasian culture, individualism is usually expressed as achievement orientation motivated by self-interest, rather than a desire for collective involvement. Collective involvement is just a fancy way of saying the emphasis is on family and community instead of on the individual.

**Time:** For Asians, time is usually not specific and tends to flow like a stream. In the Hispanic culture time is vague and relative. In contemporary mainstream Caucasian culture time, is usually treated as precise and is divided into chunks, like hour by hour, which represents opportunities to produce something or to earn money. As you know, we thrive on using time efficiently to complete tasks.

### **Individualism and Expressive Individualism**

Individualism originated in Western civilization in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Individualism holds that life is sacred, and that human beings should be treated with dignity. Individualism also considers human beings as more important than society. Now, expressive individualism refers to the unique expression of an individual's feelings and thoughts. Expressive individualism most likely had its origins in the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. **Romanticism** was a movement that rejected the scientific approach with its focus on reason and scientific inquiry to improve the human condition. The scientific approach generated a body of knowledge, which was used to understand the workings of our world. In other words, science was the primary method for human beings to control their destiny. However, science

relied heavily on the use of our intellect and reason to dominate nature, making us overly confident that science was the only acceptable kind of knowledge.

**Expressive individualism** is about the basic goodness of human beings, and it stresses and emphasizes our emotional life, creativity, and imagination. It's about trusting your intuition on things in the world. In comparison to science, expressive individualism could lead to intuitive knowledge by de-emphasizing the importance of using our intellect and reason to understand our world. It focuses on how self-reflection can generate self-discovery.

Self-reflection just means sitting and thinking about things. Expressive individualism nurtures self-realization, self-growth, and self-actualization. I wonder if these three concepts mean the same thing? What do you think?

One can argue that our culture focuses too much on how we feel and on nourishing the growth of our true self. I'm not sure about this. I've got to think more about it, and I'll get back to you later. All right, I'll think and discuss it with you now. Expressive individualism may deceptively encourage human beings to become too self-sufficient and self-reliant. It may encourage a pursuit of too much individual fulfillment and discourage individuals from making more serious connections to others, to society and to social institutions. One final thought for you to ponder. Is it possible for human beings to develop their genuine selves as they distance themselves from their cultural and social connections? By cultural and social connections I mean attachments to cultural and institutional anchors such as churches, synagogues, schools and colleges, museums, and cultural arts centers.

### Why We Need Each Other to Feel Good About Ourselves

The incredibly important thing to remember as you begin your cultural assessment is that all human beings are valuable. You and I have never been, and will not ever be, culturally or personally superior to any other human being. That's pretty much it on this matter.

You also need to realize that all human beings deserve to be treated with respect and dignity; regardless of what country they were born in, their race, culture, how they worship and their life ways. In order for you to experience happiness in your life you need others. You're probably aware that you need others to feel good about yourself.

The last important thing to remember is that your culture is no better or worse than any other culture. To accept this assertion you have to acknowledge that cultural differences are not bad. Remember the term *cultural relativity*? It means that what works for one culture may not work for another. It's just that we're so accustomed and culturally programmed to value and reinforce like behavior in our culture. In our culture, there is a phenomenon called **sameness**. It means we all like to behave in similar ways and we value sameness in others. This expectation of sameness is a powerful one to break because, in our society, we are constantly being reinforced for achieving similar things, such as earning exceptional grades, promotions, and other achievements. For example, most Americans lead linear lives.



## Linear Thinking

**Linear** comes from the word *line* and it means plotting life events on a line to understand when life-cycle events occur. For example, this view identifies specific events in life, such as when we're supposed to start kindergarten, graduate from high school and college, start a career, get married, have children, begin enjoying gefilte fish and lox, and when to start using topical ointments. All of these life-cycle events were observed by researchers studying normal human development. This linear view was developed after researchers studied millions of people like you doing things in life.

The linear view is prescriptive, meaning it shows us how life needs to unfold.

So what's good about this linear perspective? Well, it certainly does relate to diversity. If everyone in this society is culturally programmed and reinforced for valuing sameness, for achieving the same life-cycle events, then there's less interest in attaining different life-cycle experiences. It just strengthens our convictions that we're doing the culturally right thing if everyone else is doing what we're doing. I'm not saying you shouldn't go to college, not get married or establish job stability because everyone else is doing these life-cycle things. Just be aware of which life experiences you're pursuing, why you're achieving them and what accomplishing them means for you at that time in your wonderful life. Isn't it nice to be innocently following your bliss? We really need to be aware of how often our behavior is influenced by what others are doing.

Let's finish tolerance. **Tolerance** means respecting the individuality of each person you interact with in your life. You certainly have the capacity to respect individuals. It means you'll take time to educate yourself about other cultures. Start by asking questions or reading material about other cultures. To understand how other cultures orient themselves to the world, you have to start with understanding their culture-bound values. I really enjoy learning about other cultures and how they orient themselves to the world. I know how I orient myself to the world. Do you know how you orient yourself to your world? Ever wonder how caterpillars orient themselves to their world? I think they'd have to orient themselves to their world twice in their lives. Once as a caterpillar and once as a butterfly. Just an interesting observation, again

Let me ask you something. Have you ever heard of the term "**socialization?**" Actually, it's just another one of those fancy, expensive words in my fund of knowledge that I use to impress you. You know what? You've experienced socialization and it accounts in a strong way for who you pretty much are today. If you are a human being who experienced human contact since you began your dash; you know, inhaling, exhaling and interacting with other human beings, then you've undergone socialization. Think about all of the agents that made you who you are today, and consider them as part of a continuous journey toward becoming your true, authentic self. You like that? Well, that's socialization. It's about the agents that influenced your development into the undeniably unique, loving, competent, respectful human being that you are.

## Agents of Socialization

So, what are agents of socialization? **Agents of socialization** refers to individuals and institutions that shaped your development, such as mom and dad, siblings, peers, school, and the media. These agents are part of the socialization process. Life is one long socialization process..

### Primary and Secondary Socialization

Mom and dad raising you is called **primary socialization**. Enlisting in any branch of the armed services represents **secondary socialization**. Attending law school or a police academy are other examples of secondary socialization experiences. You could even call marriage a secondary socialization experience. All I want to say about marriage is that it's an institution based on romantic love. If you think about how we

select our marital partners in Western culture, you'll realize we pretty much choose our mates based on homogamy. **Homogamy** is a fancy word referring to the tendency for people who share similar social characteristics to marry each other.

In a marriage, you assume specific, nicely defined roles and the duties assigned to these roles need to be satisfied in order for you to experience marital bliss. It's about getting socialized into different roles and their duties. I'm in an **egalitarian marriage**, meaning there's lots of gender equality, power equality, voice equality, trust, openness, and, well... that's about it..

Now that you know about the agents of socialization, let's discuss how they influenced your development into the wonderful human being that you are today. You know, socialization starts the moment you enter the world. Labor and delivery. Your mom labored and you were delivered to the world. I guess you don't remember much about the joy associated with this experience. I hope your parents remember the joy associated with this experience. Don't feel bad, most people don't remember much about the first day their social life began. Actually, most of us don't recall anything about the first day of our life. Anyway, after everyone welcomes you to our wonderful world, the socialization process steadily begins to unfold.

**Socialization** refers to the way your mom and dad raised you beginning on day one. I know that healthy socialization begins with mom and dad holding you lots, cuddling you, responding to your needs, such as changing your diapers and feeding you when you got hungry. It's a pretty predictable schedule early on and it's your parent's responsibility to create this safe, trusting, familiar, responsive, and anticipatory-like environment. Oh yeah, your parents also needed to tell you they loved you. Hopefully your parents tell you they love you now. What more validation do you need that you're an intelligent, worthwhile, loved and valued human being?

Let's discuss **acceptance**. Acceptance more than conveys welcome to the club or the neighborhood. If I'm comfortable interacting with you in my club then it expresses my approval of you. For our purposes, we need to discuss how acceptance relates to cultural diversity. Remember, if you look like me, dress like me, and talk like me, then I'll be more likely to accept you. However, if you don't, I'll be less likely to accept you based on some differences that shows your otherness, such as your physical features.

## Self-Acceptance and Self-Esteem

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Before we discuss acceptance of others, we need to examine *self-acceptance*, you know, accepting yourself for who you are and what you're all about. *Self-esteem*, as it relates to culture, enables you to perceive yourself and others as important and valuable people. You won't be uncomfortable sharing with others how you feel about them, and you'll be interested in pursuing lasting and meaningful relationships with people. I suspect that you'll also feel equal to others; meaning you won't feel culturally or personally superior or inferior to others. Even if you perceive differences in abilities, you won't attribute the differences to race. This means you're a mature individual. Period.

### The Importance of Belonging

Everybody has a need to *belong*; to simply and innocently belong. It was John Donne who said, "No man is an island, entire of itself." All human beings have a need to belong. I think belongingness is biologically based, meaning we have an instinct to belong to groups. The reason it's so important is because it gives us recognition, security, an identity, and, I suppose, friendship. I feel incomplete as a human being if I don't belong to something or other. Belonging is also about being a part of a larger community of people who acknowledge, accept, and respect you and your contributions to their group.

We can start by agreeing we all belong to our society. You want to reduce it further? All right, you belong to your family of origin

Do me a favor and think about the different groups you belong to. If you work, you belong to your work group, department, or the organization. If you're a college student you belong to the undergraduate or graduate club. And if you've got a circle of friends, you belong to this group. I'm sure you belong to a few groups. *Belonging* usually begins with your immediate family, followed by your extended family, and ending with your community, state, country and well, let' see now, your world.

### Belonging to Groups

Let's discuss groups. Groups didn't accidentally surface one day in our culture for no reason. The phenomenon of groups resulted from man's desire to join others interested in achieving a common goal. How's that sound? Human beings probably realized they couldn't achieve certain personal goals by themselves. So, groups were created to allow individual group members to pursue interdependent goals and to satisfy individual needs. Example: This club I'm a member of motivates me to train and stay fit for life. There is a lot of mutual influence in the group, too. I strongly believe that each of us in the group influences each other in a positive way. We hold each other accountable to train each morning. It's called *interpersonal influence*.

We need to now discuss *group norms*. All groups have norms to guide the behavior of the group members. Norms are the policies and rules agreed to by group members to facilitate acceptable behavior and the desired attitude of members in the group. The agreed upon norms of the group function to maintain *internal consistency*, such as consistent behavior among group members. Norms help group members better predict and anticipate how other members will behave.

## Social Differentiation and Social Class

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***Social differentiation*** refers to how people differ across certain variables. It's about how we define and distinguish between categories, such as age, gender and race, which are pretty objective. However, it gets more subjective when we try to assign individuals to categories such as socioeconomic class and political affiliation

What about ***social class***? I think it's difficult trying to assign someone to a social class. I just know that about three to five percent of the people living in the United States are in the upper class. About 40 to 50 percent are in the middle class, 30 to 40 percent in the working class and 15 to 20 percent in the lower socioeconomic class. I'm in the upper class because of the car I drive. How do you determine what social class you belong to? Sociologists believe that social stratification arose after observing that human beings can be ranked according to many levels. Sadly enough, in contemporary society human beings are unequal due to genetic and environmental factors influencing our development. Some of us end up receiving unequal treatment when it comes to enjoying social privileges.

I believe some human beings have an insatiable desire for things, and I think, regardless of how much human beings possess, some always want more. My explanation for this behavior is that these valued objects have enduring status value. Individuals who obtain status symbols like to keep them, and desire to continue inheriting big, fancy expensive items that display their social status. Thus, our system of ***stratification*** evaluates people on factors such as wealth, power and prestige. You know, social class is synonymous with socioeconomic status. I've included a brief description of each of these factors.

### **Wealth**

In our Western society, we generally rank people with money and material possessions higher on the scale. These possessions include their impressive homes, the community they live in, number and kinds of cars, their expensive clothes, watches and jewelry. Value is placed on wealth and expensive possessions and the people owning these expensive materials need you to know it so you can admire them and their possessions. The term status symbol was created to describe these items. The thing is, you may not ever meet these individuals, so they will simply display their social class to you by what they drive or where they live.

### **Power**

Individuals can also be ranked according to how much power they possess. Power is the ability of one individual or group to impact or change the behavior of another individual or group. Not surprisingly, power is often associated with wealth, which means that wealthy people have power. The important thing to know, however, is that power is not distributed equally in society. Only a few people in our society have power.

### **Prestige**

What do you think prestige refers to? What is and isn't prestige is subjectively determined and refers to an individual who enjoys a special distinction or reputation in society. It may mean prestige in occupation--such as certain occupations having high prestige compared to occupations with low prestige. Occupations with high prestige include being a Supreme Court justice, physician, college professor, and well, lawyers. Occupations with low prestige are shoe shiners, garbage collectors, janitors, and security workers.

The unfortunate, unavoidable reality is that social differentiation leads to ***social inequality***. Remember the categories that were created based on personal, biological and physical differences? Well, individuals in society created a ranking system to classify these differences. The problem, however, with this ranking

system is in the social meaning individuals assign to the ranked characteristics. What worries me is what we do with the social meaning associated with being African-American, Asian, and Hispanic, affluent or living in poverty, young or old. I know about these social meanings and the effects they have on individuals being ranked. Imagine people's race determining where they are ranked in the system. It sounds unfair to me. The assumption one makes when ranking others based on race is that an individual's behavior is determined by their physical characteristics.

Do me a favor right now and ask yourself this question: "What accounts for social differentiation in our society?" Think about whether our innate makeup accounts for the observed differences in abilities between human beings. In other words, we begin with exploring whether an individual's innate abilities, such as being intelligent or a really good problem solver, enable him or her to lead a more satisfying life. The competing theory suggests that social differentiation and social inequality isn't a result of an individual's innate makeup, but rather a function of how he/she is affected by institutions in society. For example, according to structural theory, social differentiation and social inequality results from how our society is structured or how some institutions function. **Structural explanations** for why social inequality occurs may be related to how capitalism operates as an economic system resulting in unequal education, blocked access to resources or other problems related to social and economic conditions. So, political and economic factors may account for the pervasive patterns that sustain social inequality and institutional forms of discrimination against minorities. The problem now is how some institutions may be serving individuals differentially.

Cultures exist because people are interested in getting their social, psychological, spiritual, and physical needs met. It's about a group of people making sincere commitments to cooperate with each other in a social setting. I've pretty much concluded that for a culture to survive, its members must establish the institution of marriage and religion. The rules and norms guiding acceptable and unacceptable behavior need to be enforced through some institution, such as law enforcement, the judicial system and the penal system. See, there needs to be institutions in society to guide conformity and obedience.

### "This Is Me Portrait"

Each one of us belongs to many cultural groups which reflects our multiple identities, ethnicity, age group, and social groups. Undoubtedly, these cultural and social groups reflect and shape our values. Take a moment and draw the symbols or pictures that represent or reflect your cultural identity with each of the groups you identify with in your life below:

“Me and My Sources of Cultural Programming”

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

List the sources of your cultural programming, including institutions and experiences which have influenced your development into the unique human being that you are; to what degree have these experiences shaped your multiple identities and which have been most important to your development?

Sources of Cultural Programming: (for example: school, your religious affiliation, culture, parents)

1) Cultural Program:

\_\_\_\_\_

Influence:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) Cultural Program:

\_\_\_\_\_

Influence:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3) Cultural Program:

\_\_\_\_\_

Influence:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4) Cultural Program:

\_\_\_\_\_

Influence:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5) Cultural Program:

\_\_\_\_\_

Influence:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### “Cultural Perceptions”

Name of the person you are making cultural\ethnic assumptions about: \_\_\_\_\_

For this activity you must select a partner that you don't know well, or who you would like to know better. Use the questions below to write your perceptions about your partner. After you are done read your responses to your partner to check how accurate they are.

1. Country of origin:
2. Language (s) spoken:
3. Interests or hobbies:
4. Favorite foods:
5. The person's culture/ethnic group:
6. Type of music preferred:
7. Leisure activities he/she enjoys:
8. Books the person enjoys reading:
9. Pet (s) if any, or favorite animals:
10. Religion/faith of this person”





