

Cultural Diversity

THINK ABOUT the people in your community. Do you all have the same color skin? Do you all attend the same church? Do you celebrate the same holidays? You probably know people with a wide variety of backgrounds, beliefs, and customs. It is important to recognize and respect those differences. In this unit, you will learn how to recognize cultural diversity. In addition, you will learn why it is important in our world.



Objective:



Explain cultural diversity.

Key Terms:



age

culture

disability

diversity

ethnicity

gender

identity

language

race

religion

sex

sexual orientation

socioeconomic status

Understanding Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity refers to the components that make people unique. Language, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, disabilities, and religion are all part of an individual's cultural diversity.

DEFINING DIVERSITY

Diversity is the condition of being different. **Culture** is the shared values, attitudes, beliefs, and rules of behavior for a group of people. Many categories of cultural diversity exist. Language, race, ethnicity, and gender are components of a person's culture.

Language

Language includes words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them that are used and understood by a community.

Race

Race is the grouping of people based on physical characteristics, including skin color.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is the geographic origin or national identity of a person. A person's physical characteristics (race) may or may not reflect his or her national identity (ethnicity). For example, Alina's parents are from Egypt. However, Alina lives in the United States and calls herself an American. Although her skin color is that of her Egyptian parents and ancestors, her national identity is not based in Egypt. Her race is Egyptian, and her ethnicity is U.S. American. In another example, Carlos is multiracial and chooses to call himself "Cablinasian" to stand for Thai, black, white, and American Indian. Although his race is comprised of four main backgrounds, he ethnically identifies with African Americans.

Gender

Sex is the genetic traits typically associated with being male or female. **Gender** is the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with being male or female. A person's genetic make-up (sex) may or may not reflect behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits (gender).

For example, Lillian has the genetic make-up of a male. In her early twenties, however, Lillian decided to live as a female because that is how she felt most comfortable in society. She wears women's clothing and maintains a role as a female with her family, friends, and in the workplace. Lillian was unable to choose her sex, but she did choose her gender. In another



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Communication Across Cultures

Cultural awareness may help you communicate more effectively. For example, body language, gestures, and expressions may mean different things in various cultures. It is important to be aware of and to appreciate these differences when speaking to a person of a different culture. There are even differences between people of the same culture.

Visit the following website to watch a short video that provides tips for communicating with people of various cultures. Think of at least two ways you could show respect for a person's culture while communicating with that individual.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDvLk7e2Irc>

example, Jesse was genetically born a female and decided to become a man by undergoing a physical sex-change operation. Jesse conducts himself using the gender characteristics of a man through the dress, hairstyle, and actions stereotyped as being male gendered in society.

Sexual orientation is the focus of consistent affectionate interest and includes the following categories: heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status is economic and social factors that describe an individual. Those factors include income, education, and occupation.

Age

Age is a stage of life, generally with similar characteristics.

Disability

Disability is a physical or mental disadvantage or restriction.

Religion

Religion is a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices.

PERSONAL IDENTITY

Identity is a sense of self that includes group and individual identity. As a result, people often base their identities on both individual and group characteristics.

Individual Identity

People can find individual identity in the categories of diversity. For example, Julie is different from her friends because her religious identity is Muslim. Most of Julie's friends are Christian. Julie identifies with her peers because they have many things in common. But because Julie practices a different religion, she has found an individual identity in her beliefs. In another example, Jose is different from his friends because he speaks Spanish at home. Most of his friends speak English in their homes. Although his friends do not understand Spanish, he has found an individual identity through speaking a different language.

Group Identity

People can find group identity in the categories of diversity. For example, Isaiah and his friends are African American by race. Together, they celebrate their ethnicity by listening to the music of African American artists. This practice is part of their group identity as African

Americans. Likewise, Emmanuella has many female friends. She and her female friends find a common interest in volleyball. Engaging in this sport is part of their group identity as women.

DIVERSE CHARACTERISTICS

Some characteristics are visually apparent. People of different races may have different colored skin. It is usually easy to tell a person's gender and approximate age based on their physical appearance. Likewise, some disabilities are easy to spot. For example, a paraplegic person may use a wheelchair.

Other characteristics are not visually apparent. You cannot tell what language a person speaks simply by looking at him or her. Likewise, you cannot necessarily tell a person's ethnicity by appearance. And while gender is often apparent, sex and sexual orientation may not be. Socioeconomic status and age may be difficult to determine as well. Some disabilities, such as cognitive disorders, are not visible.

You can build a better understanding of others' characteristics in several ways. Talk with different people in your classes, during school activities, or at work. Offer to talk about your unique characteristics. Let others know that you value their differences.



FIGURE 1. A disability that requires an individual to use a wheelchair may be visually apparent, but many other disabilities may not be visible.

Summary:



Cultural diversity refers to the components that make people unique. Language, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, disabilities, and religion are all part of an individual's cultural diversity. Identity is a sense of self that includes group and individual identity.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What is diversity?
2. What are some categories of cultural diversity?
3. What is identity, and how can it be expressed?
4. What are two diversity characteristics that are visually apparent?
5. What are two diversity characteristics that are not visually apparent?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



One way to learn more about cultural diversity is to speak to people who are different from you. Interview a few people of different ethnicity, gender, and religion. Ask each person to identify an unfair stereotype about his or her group. Then ask each person to identify what makes him or her proud of that identity. Some diversity characteristics are visually apparent, such as race and gender. Other diversity characteristics are not visually apparent, such as language, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Age and disabilities may be visually apparent in some cases, while not apparent in other cases.

Web Links:



Cultural Diversity

<http://www.indiana.edu/~socialst/diversity.html>

Diversity Activities

<http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/freepubs/pdfs/ui335.pdf>

What Is Cultural Diversity?

http://www.ethnoconnect.com/html/articles_01.html