Teaching Chapter 9

***DIVERSITY*:**

**Learning About & From Human Differences**

Key Instructional *Goals* of this Chapter

This chapter is designed to develop student awareness of: (a) the true meaning of the word “diversity”; (b) the multiple forms or dimensions of diversity (both visible and invisible), (c) the misuses or abuses of diversity (prejudice and discrimination), and (d) the multiple advantages or benefits of diversity (for the individual and the nation).

Key Points to Emphasize When Discussing this Chapter

**There’s a lot more to diversity than meets the eye, i.e., diversity comes in multiple**

**forms and varieties, some of which may be *hidden or invisible*.**

Refer students to the diversity spectrum on p. 216 to identify sources of diversity that might not be apparent at first glance. The particular forms of diversity you emphasize in your class may depend on the particular composition of your student body and your current campus climate.

**Point out that the category of “race” is not genetic, but socially constructed.**

Humans have simply elected to categorize themselves socially by skin color; the Census Bureau could just as easily decide to categorize people into groups on the basis of their hair color, eye color, body shape, body size, etc. and use these categories in its annual statistical report.

**To appreciate human diversity is not to depreciate our commonality (humanity) and our individuality.**

Though there may be cultural diversity across different human groups, members of these different groups also have many characteristics in common because they are also members of the same living species: Homo sapiens. Furthermore, differences among individuals *within* a cultural group are greater than the average differences *between* cultural groups. For example, individuals from diverse ethnic groups share many common characteristics as a result of being citizens of the same country, persons of the same gender, or members of the same generation.

**There is more to the concept of diversity than social justice and political rights.**

Although one major goal of appreciating diversity education is to promote more equitable treatment of all people and reduce prejudice or discrimination toward particular groups of people, diversity is also a *learning* experience that strengthens one’s education, career preparation, citizenship, and leadership potential in a democratic nation. Simply stated, we learn more from experiencing diversity than we do from experiencing similarity or familiarity.

**Be sure students understand and appreciate that diversity involves:**

(a) *acknowledging* differences—being aware of them,

(b) *accommodating* differences—interacting with them in a fair, non-prejudicial or discriminative way, and

(c) *cultivating* differences—capitalizing on them to promote learning and personal development.

**Be sure students understand that becoming aware of their biases and prejudices is a *learning* experience; not a “guilt trip.”**

This is an important point to make because introducing the topic of diversity may immediately trigger a defensive reaction among some students in the majority group, perhaps based on the anticipation that you’re going to “guilt” them or their ancestors. Although there are many well-documented cases of overt prejudice and blatant discrimination that are clearly unethical, illegal, and punishable, there are also more subtle instances of prejudice and discrimination that take place without conscious awareness or malicious intent. Some of these unconscious prejudicial tendencies may be rooted in our evolutionary history, and to become aware of them involves a deeper understanding of our biological, anthropological, and psychosocial roots. Thus, diversity awareness and appreciation is not just an exercise in “political correctness;” it is a form of learning that can be as intellectually challenging, thought-provoking, and self-illuminating as learning any other scholarly subject.

Instructional Strategies for Promoting Diversity Awareness & Appreciation

Perhaps more than any other unit of the text, the instructional goals of this chapter cannot be realized without use of interactive, student-centered pedagogy. The goals of diversity education involve attitudinal and behavioral change, which research repeatedly shows are unlikely to be achieved via lectures (Bligh, 2000). The effectiveness of diversity education depends more on the *process* of enabling students to directly experience and appreciate human differences, and less on the content of lectures delivered by authority figures about why students should value differences. “Lectures are relatively ineffective for teaching values associated with subject matter. Sermons rarely convince agnostics, but they give solidarity to the faithful. Similarly, lectures are ineffective in changing people’s values, but they may reinforce those that are already accepted” (Bligh, 2000, p. 12).

Fortunately, the same learner-centered instructional alternatives to the lecture method that promote students’ active involvement and higher-level thinking also promote their awareness and appreciation of diversity. In particular, the following student-centered strategies may be especially effective for realizing the goals of diversity education.

**Allow students an opportunity to *share their personal histories.***

To appreciate diverse cultural experiences, students must first hear about them, and ideally, they should hear about them from people who’ve actually had different experiences. One way to enable students to capitalize on the diverse experiences of other students in class is to ask them to write a short, autobiographical story about their personal journeys. To give your students direction and focus for this writing assignment, they could relate their personal stories to such topics as: (a) turning points in their life, (b) prior experiences they’ve had or decisions they’ve made that continue to affect them (positively or negatively), and (c) role models or sources of inspiration they’ve encountered in their life.

Students could then share their written histories in small, intentionally formed groups comprised of members from diverse backgrounds. Allowing students from a variety of students to share their stories may enable them to see that others have had very different personal journeys and that some have managed to overcome major obstacles to get where they are now.

In addition to (or in lieu of) sharing their stories in person, stories may be shared *online*. Sometimes, the absence of eye contact during online communication can reduce student fear or embarrassment about sharing personal information on sensitive subjects. The absence of face-to-face contact can also provide reticent students with a greater sense of privacy or anonymity, which may allow them to share personal information in a less defensive and more forthright manner.

**Have students bring to class an *artifact* of their cultural background (e.g., food,**

**clothing, music, art), and ask them to briefly describe its role or significance in their**

**life.**

This may serve as a non-threatening, nonverbal way to initiate discussion of students’ personal stories and cultural experiences.

**Invite *guest speakers* or a *guest panel* to represent diverse perspectives.**

For example, international students or students who have studied abroad could be asked to come to class and share their cross-cultural perspectives. To increase student engagement in the process, have your students come to class with one or two questions to ask the speakers, perhaps based on the dimensions of culture identified on p. 170 of the text. (You could hold students accountable for preparing questions by collecting them before or after class).

**Capitalize on diversity-education speakers in your *local community*.**

For example, to promote student awareness and tolerance of groups with alternative sexual orientation and lifestyles, you could invite a panel of representatives from a chapter of the *Parent and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)*. This is an international organization that has almost 300 chapters in the United States, including at least one in every state. The organization consists of “parents, families and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons” and their goal is to “celebrate diversity and envision a society that embraces everyone, including those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.” (To locate a chapter of PFLAG in your geographical area, go to: <http://www.pflag.org/Find_a_Chapter.68.0.html>)

Trained panelists from this organization typically speak briefly about their experiences and then field questions from the audience. To ensure that your students give forethought and afterthought to this classroom visit, have them construct one or two questions to ask the panelists in advance of their presentation. After the presentation, have your students write a one-minute paper to assess how they felt about the experience, what they learned from it, and what unanswered questions they may still have about it.

**Construct assignments that ask your students to *interview* members of the campus**

**community (students, faculty, or staff) who come from diverse backgrounds.**

Students could use the dimensions of culture cited in chapter 6 (p. 186) to develop questions to ask their interviewees. This practice ensures that students who may not otherwise interact because of their different cultural backgrounds will have at least one interpersonal contact, which, in turn, may increase the likelihood that they’ll have subsequent contact.

**Require or give extra-credit *assignments* for students to engage in *co-curricular***

**experiences relating to diversity awareness.**

These assignments could coincide with already-scheduled national weeks or months that are designated for appreciation of diverse groups, such as Black History Month, Women’s History Week, Latin Heritage Month, and Asian American Month.

**Require or allow extra-credit opportunities for student to engage in *service-learning***

**experiences that bring them in contact with people from diverse groups.**

Studies show that participation in service-learning experiences results in greater-than- predicted changes in students’ levels of racial tolerance and appreciation (Astin, 2000). Service-learning experiences may also enable students to experience forms of diversity that may are more available outside the college community than within it.

Students who become involved in service to the local community might also be encouraged to invite diverse members from the community whom they’ve met outside of the college community to visit class as guest speakers or panelists.

**Convey *high expectations* for student engagement among students of all groups.**

There is evidence that female students and students from minority racial or ethnic groups tend to be sent messages of lower expectations in college classrooms than do males and non-minority students. The following recommendations are offered as instructional strategies for decreasing the likelihood that such messages are unwittingly communicated to female and minority students, and to convey equally-high expectations for all students.

\* Learn your students’ *names* as quickly as possible.

For example, schedule instructor-student conferences with your students outside of class during the early weeks of the term. This will help you learn your students’ names quickly and establish initial personal rapport with your class, which can provide the social and emotional foundation for promoting students’ subsequent participation in class. “High expectations are communicated as instructors learn students’ names and call on them by name” (Forsyth and McMillan 1991, p. 58). (See Exhibit B for specific strategies designed to facilitate learning and memory of student names.)

\* In addition to learning who your students are, learn something *about them*. For example, the questions included on the “Student Information Sheet” (Exhibit 2) can be used to learn more about your students on the first day of class (e.g., their backgrounds, goals, and interests). The student-information sheet can be used to initiate individual conversations with you students, which, in turn, may increase their willingness to contribute their experiences in class. The Student Information Sheet can also be a valuable tool for helping you identify forms of diversity that may not be clearly visible (e.g., students’ geographical background, current living situation, or whether they are first-generation college students). You can then capitalize on this information to create heterogeneous learning groups that expose students to these “invisible” forms of diversity.

\* Make a conscious attempt to elicit involvement among students from diverse groups by use of *effective questioning techniques*, such as posing *open-ended* questions that invite a diversity of responses and stimulate divergent thinking. (For more detailed information about effective questioning strategies, see material relating to the “interactive lecture” in Section I of this manual.)

\* During class discussions, intentionally seek responses from members of diverse groups whose ideas have yet to be heard (e.g., I haven’t heard the perspective of females on this issue. May I ask some of the women in class to share their ideas?).

\* Report the perspectives shared by members of diverse groups on writing assignments, such as one-minute papers written in class or reflection papers written in response to co-curricular experiences. (Naturally, permission should be sought from any student whose written comments you’d like to share with the class.)

***Intentionally* form small-discussion groups of students from *diverse* backgrounds.**

Create heterogeneous groups comprised of students with different demographic or cultural characteristics, such as: (a) ethnicity/race (e.g., Anglo-American and under-represented students), (b) national citizenship (e.g., domestic and international students), or (c) age (e.g., traditionally-aged and adult re-entry students). This practice implements two cardinal recommendations for effectively promoting critical thinking, namely: (a) students should “collaborate to ‘stretch’ their understanding by encountering divergent views” (Kurfiss, 1988, p. 2), and (b) instructors should intentionally create an “atmosphere of disequilibrium so that students can change, rework, or reconstruct their thinking processes” (Meyers, 1986, p. 14).

Forming heterogeneous discussion groups is also an effective way to convert social constructivist theory into pedagogical practice by enabling individual students to build (“construct”) knowledge through social interactions that enable them to converse with, and learn from, others whose diverse perspectives differ significantly from their own.

One caveat should be heeded when forming small learning groups with diverse composition: Do not spread out individual students from under-represented populations across groups in a way that isolates them from one another. For instance, if there are four international students in your class, it may be tempting to distribute them so that each one of them is a member of a different group in order to maximize the diversity of the learning groups. However, it may be more advisable to place these four international students in only two groups, one pair per group, because they may feel more comfortable contributing their ideas if there’s at least one other international student in the group with them. In subsequent group discussions, new groups can be formed in such a fashion that majority students who were not exposed to an international students’ perspective in their previous group experiences may be grouped with a pair of international students.

**Use *cooperative learning* strategies that convert group work into teamwork by:**

**(a) intentionally forming learning groups of *diverse composition*,**

**(b) assigning *interdependent roles* to team members, and**

**(c) having learning teams pursue a *shared goal* that eventuates in the creation of**

**a *single, collectively-generated* *work product*.**

(See Appendix E for specific, detailed information on how to implement these key features of cooperative learning.)

The relevance of cooperative learning for promoting multicultural appreciation and reducing racial prejudice is strongly suggested by experimental research in social psychology, which indicates that inter-group contact that occurs under the conditions of cooperative learning serves to decrease racial prejudice and increase interracial friendships among (a) elementary and secondary school students (Aronson, 1978; Slavin, 1980), (b) college students (Worchel, 1979), and (c) workers in industrial organizations (Blake & Mouton, 1979). There’s also evidence that students of color may benefit more from cooperative learning than White students (Posner & Markstein, 1994).

Furthermore, by creating learning teams of diverse membership, cooperative learning has the potential to capitalize on the rising demographic wave of student diversity, allowing instructors to access and harness its educational power by intentionally exposing students to diverse perspectives within the supportive social context of a small collaborative-learning group.

**When discussing diversity, don’t forget to encourage your students to look for patterns of human *unity* that transcend group differences.**

Visible human differences are readily detectable and attention-grabbing, so discussing these differences can often heighten students’ focus on human differences and divert their attention from the commonalities they may share. Without attention to the unity that exists amidst diversity, repeated attempts to promote discussion of diversity may inadvertently promote divisiveness between groups. In fact, some research indicates that when diversity education initiatives focus on differences alone, disenfranchised groups are likely to feel even more isolated (Smith, 1997). To minimize this risk, remind students that whenever they discuss their diversity, they should also dig deep to uncover their commonality. In fact, it may be advisable to have students begin their discussions of diversity by identifying common themes before launching them into a discussion of their differences. For example, before beginning a discussion of cultural differences, students might first discuss the common elements of all cultures (e.g., language, family, artistic expression, rituals). The initial identification of similarities may serve to help defuse divisiveness and provide a common ground upon which a non-defensive discussion of diversity can be subsequently built. Focal points that that may be used to build a common ground of universal human themes include: (a) dimensions of culture (found on p. 170 of the text), (b) elements of the whole person (pp. 40-41), and/or (c) the broadening perspectives of a liberal arts education (p. 46).

The following instructional strategies may also be effective for realizing the twin objectives of appreciating human differences (diversity) while embracing our commonalities (humanity).

\* Create *heterogeneous* discussion groups comprised of students with different demographic characteristics, and at the conclusion of these discussions, build in reflection time for students to think about both the dimensions of diversity and patterns of unity that emerged during the group process. Students could write a one-minute paper designed specifically to promote reflection on both the differences and similarities in the experiences that were reported during the group’s discussion. For example, students may record their written reflections to such questions as:

(a) What major *differences* in perspectives did you detect among group members during your discussion? (b) What major *similarities* in viewpoints or background experiences did all group members share? (c) Were there particular topics or issues raised during your discussion that proved equally important or relevant to all members of your group?

\* Form *homogeneous* groups with students who share the same demographic characteristic (e.g., same-gender groups or same-race/ethnicity groups), and have them share their personal views or experiences with respect to a diversity-related issue (e.g., how prevalent they think prejudice and discrimination is). Ask groups to record their main ideas and have representatives from each group form a panel to report their group’s ideas and respond to questions from the audience. You can serve as a moderator whose role is to identify *key differences and common themes* that emerge across different groups. Or, the role of moderator may be assumed by a student who is not on the panel.

\* *Before* launching groups into collaborative learning tasks, have them engage in a *team-building* exercise that give them time to “warm up” to each other and provides a social foundation for group cohesiveness. For instance: (a) have groups participate in an *icebreaker* activity when they are first formed (e.g., one that involves learning each other’s names and sharing personal information) or (b) have groups engage in an activity that promotes *team identity* (e.g., team photo, team name, team symbol, team mascot, team cheer, or a team handshake). The educational objective of such team-building activities is to create a sense of unity or solidarity among group members, and to instill an esprit de corps that helps teammates feel more comfortable with subsequent group work that may require them to adopt different viewpoints, express disagreement with each other, and reach consensus in an open (non-defensive) fashion.

The following practices are offered as additional strategies for promoting team-building among learning groups:

*Team Portrait*

Teammates answer a few questions about themselves individually (e.g., questions relating to their academic major, career interests, or personal interests). Teammates then convene and integrate their personal information into a composite team portrait or profile, which may be depicted in narrative or visual-spatial form—e.g., an emblem, mascot, or coat of arms (Ellis, 1996).

*Team Vision Statement*

A variation of the above team-building procedure, in which teammates write individual statements about what they hope their team experience will be like, then unite to integrate these individual vision statements into a single team-vision statement (Silberman, 1998).

*Three-Step Interview* (Kagan, 1992)

Steps:

1. Four-member teams sub-divide into pairs and one member interviews the other.

2. Partners reverse roles whereby the previous interviewer becomes the interviewee and vice

versa.

3. Each team member shares the interview information obtained from her partner with other

members of the team.

This procedure can function as an effective team-building experience because group members from diverse cultures often discover that they do share some interests and background experiences. Attention to these commonalities can be intentionally promoted by adding a step after the partners interview each other, which explicitly asks them to identify their common interests or experiences.

**Ask students to complete a *self-assessment* instrument (e.g., learning style inventory or personality profile), then have them form a *line* according to their individual scores, or have them move to different sections of the room based on their different profiles.**

This practice can visibly demonstrate to students how members of diverse student populations can be quite similar with respect to their learning styles or personality profiles, which may enable them to see (literally) how individual similarities can often overshadow group differences.

**Form heterogeneousgroups of students who differ with respect to one particular demographic characteristic, but who are similar with respect to another (e.g., students of the same gender who differ with respect to their race, ethnicity, or age).**

This practice serves to increase student awareness that members of different groups can, at the same time, be members of the same group—with similar experiences, needs, and concerns. The following procedures may be used to ensure equal participation among all group members on this task (or any other group-learning task)

*“Talking Chips”*

Steps:

1. Each team member is given a symbolic “talking chip” (e.g., a checker, coin, or playing card)

and is instructed to place the chip in the center of the team’s workspace when he or she makes

an individual verbal contribution to the team’s discussion.

2. Teammates can speak in any order, but they cannot speak again until all chips are in the

center—an indication that every team member has spoken.

3. After all chips have been placed in the center, team members retrieve their respective chips for

a second round of discussion, which follows the same rules of equal participation (Kagan,

1992).

Additional Exercises & Assignments

**Ask your class to list the five most important *events* or *people* in history.**

It’s likely that the events and people named by your students will be disproportionately American, occasionally European, but rarely African, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American. You can use these lists as stepping stones for discussing what Americans know, how they got to know it, and the limitations of their knowledge of other cultural perspectives.

**Extension of the “Diversity Spectrum” Exercise (p. 216 of the text)**

Step 1. Students select one group they identify with, and from 2-4 member groups comprised of

other students who identify themselves as a member of the same group.

Step 2. Each group lists things that they never want to hear said again about their group and one

thing that they would like to hear said about their group.

Step 3. In round-robin fashion, each group shares one item from both lists and continues to do so

until all groups have reported all items from both lists.

**Extension or Variation of Exercise 9.1 (p. 236 of the text)**

Ask your students to respond to the following questions:

1. In what way(s) do you think others might stereotype you based on any of your group

memberships?

2. Do you think you act or behave in any way that reinforces or contradicts this stereotype?

3. If you detect others holding this stereotypical view of you, does it affect how you act or react

to them when they are present?

4. If you find someone treating you according to this stereotype, do you typically approach or

confront that person about it?

**“Personal Experience with Prejudice” Exercise**

Ask your students to share any personal experiences they may have had in which they were offended by prejudice or discrimination. You might use the following three-step procedure for implementing this recommendation.

1. Have students form 2- to 4-member groups, and ask individual members to share any personal

experience they may have had that involved being offended by prejudice or discrimination.

2. After each group member has shared a personal experience, other members of the group

brainstorm what they would have done to defend the offended person if they were there at the

time the offensive act occurred.

3. Ask the groups to report one of the personal stories shared by a member of their group, as well

as the responses of other group members about how they would have defended the offended

person.

Note: This third step could be enacted as a role play. Research suggests that role plays are excellent ways to promote attitudinal change, particularly with respect diversity issues (Bligh, 2000).

**Have your students complete one of the *Hidden Bias Tests* at the following website:**

https:implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/emo/selectastest.html

This site contains self-assessment inventories for bias with respect to gender, age, Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, religious denominations, sexual orientation, disabilities, and body weight. Thus, you can have students take a test for bias on whatever form(s) of diversity you deem most relevant to your course or campus.

After they complete their self-assessments, have students reflect on their results by writing a short reflection paper in response to such questions as: (a) Did you think the assessment results were accurate or valid? (b) Were the results surprising or predictable? (c) What do you think best accounts for, or explains your results?

Rather than discussing students’ individual scores, it may be better to report an average score for your class and the score range (highest and lowest score). This would enable students to see how their individual bias score compares with their classmates, and it would allow you to use the composite results as a stimulus or springboard for class discussion—without asking students to disclose their individual scores in class..

**Case Study**

***Hate Crime: Homophobic Murder***

October 7, 1998  
 Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old freshman at the University of Wyoming was fatally attacked a few hours after he had attended a campus meeting to plan events for Gay Awareness Week. Shepard, 21, was lured from a downtown Laramie bar, then was beaten, bound, and tied to a wooden fence post in the foothills outside of Laramie. As he lay there bleeding and begging for his life, his attackers left him lying in near-freezing temperatures.

Several hours after the attack, another student passing by on a mountain bike found the comatose Shepard, initially mistaking the nearly lifeless body for a “scarecrow or a dummy set there for Halloween jokes.” Shepard had been hit in the head at least 18 times with the butt of a .357-caliber Magnum. He was also bruised on the backs of his hands, which he used to try to protect the blows to his head and to his groin—where he had been kicked repeatedly. Officers testified that Shepard’s face was caked with blood, except for places where it had been partially washed clean by tears. They said his wrists were bound so tightly, a sheriff’s deputy had trouble cutting him free. He never regained consciousness and the University of Wyoming freshman died five days later in a Colorado hospital.

The attackers, Aaron James McKinney and Russell Henderson, both 21, were later apprehended. They lured Matthew Shepard out of a campus bar on October 7 and took him to a remote area outside Laramie. He was targeted because he was gay. McKinney and Henderson first befriended Shepard by telling him they were gay and they wanted to get “better acquainted.” As they drove away in McKinney’s truck, McKinney pulled a handgun and said “We’re not gay, and you’re jacked.” Before savagely beating Matthew Shepard with a pistol butt, one of his tormentors taunted him, saying, “It’s Gay Awareness Week.”

Explaining the violence, McKinney told his girlfriend, Kristin Price, “Well, you know how I feel about gays.” When questioning McKinney about the incident, a police detective said that he repeatedly referred to Shepard as “queer” and “faggot.” McKinney admitted that Matthew did not hit on him or make advances in the Fireside Bar before they abducted him.

McKinney was given two life sentences for killing Matthew Shepard. McKinney had faced the possibility of being sentenced to death by lethal injection, but Shepard’s parents agreed to accept two life terms in prison for their son’s killer. Prosecutor Cal Rerucha said he wanted to seek the death penalty, but Shepard’s family wanted to show tolerance. The other attacker, Russell Henderson, pleaded guilty to murder and kidnapping charges and is serving two consecutive life sentences in a Wyoming prison.

“Matthew Shepard was frail and small and if anyone was born to be a victim in this case it was Matthew Shepard,” Albany County District Attorney Cal Rerucha told jurors in his closing arguments.

(Source: The Story of Matthew’s Murder, Retrieved August 16, 2007 from [http://community-2.webtv.net/Wildheart/TheStrory of Matthews/](http://community-2.webtv.net/Wildheart/TheStrory%20of%20Matthews/))

*Discussion Questions*

1. Why or how do you think the attackers developed such an intense hatred of gay men?

2. What, if anything, could have been done to prevent the attackers’ hatred toward gays

from developing in the first place?

3. What do you think the appropriate sentence should have been for this crime? Why?

4. Do you think the attackers could ever be successfully rehabilitated, educated, or treated

for their homophobia?

5. Do you predict that hate crimes toward gay males is likely to decrease, remain the

same, or increase in the future? Why?

6. Do you think that there are more hate crimes committed against homosexual men or

homosexual women? If you think there is a difference, what do you think accounts for

it?

Additional Material for Possible Use in Lectures or Reading Assignments Excised from the First Edition of the Textbook

Diversity & Democracy

As a democratic nation, the United States was built on the foundation of individual rights and freedom of opportunity, which are guaranteed by its constitution. Let us not forget that the United States is a nation that's been built and developed by members of diverse immigrant groups, many of whom left their native countries to escape different forms of prejudice and discrimination, and to experience the freedom of equal opportunity in America (Levine, 1996). Prejudice and discrimination threatens the political stability and survival of the America (or any democratic nation) because it can lead to violation of personal rights and social injustice.

"Americanism is a question of principles, of idealism, of character: it is not a matter of birthplace or creed or line of descent."

—Theodore Roosevelt, American soldier, president, and Nobel Prize winner

**Remember: Diversity and democracy go hand-in-hand; by appreciating the former, you preserve the latter.**

Developing Intercultural Competence

To be successful in a nation that's becoming increasingly diverse and in a world characterized by increasing global interdependence, it's necessary that college graduates possess “intercultural competence”—the ability to understand cultural differences and to interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds (Pope et al., 2005). Just as learning from the different academic fields comprising the liberal arts opens your mind to multiple perspectives, so does experience with people from different cultural backgrounds. Gaining experience with people with diverse cultures serves to expand your world view and stretches your perspective; it liberates you from viewing the world through the narrow lens of only one culture—your own.

Causes of Prejudice and Discrimination

What causes people to become prejudiced in the first place? There’s no single, simple answer to this questions. However, research points to the following seven factors as playing a major role in the origin and development of prejudice:

1. Favoring familiarity and fearing the unknown or unfamiliar.

2. Using selective perception and selective memory.

3. Mentally categorizing people into “in” groups and “out” groups

4. Perceiving individual members of other groups as being more alike than members of our own

group.

5. Majority group members’ attitudes being more strongly influenced by negative behaviors

exhibited by members of minority groups than by members of the majority group.

6. Rationalizing prejudice and discrimination as justifiable.

7. Strengthening individual self-esteem through group membership and group identity.

Each of these contributing causes of prejudiced will be examined in succession.

**1. Favoring Familiarity and Fearing the Unknown or Unfamiliar**

Studies show that when humans encounter something unfamiliar or uncommon, they tend to automatically experience feelings of discomfort or anxiety. In contrast, what’s familiar is perceived as less threatening, more acceptable, and better liked (Zajonc, 2001).

“See that man over there?

Yes.

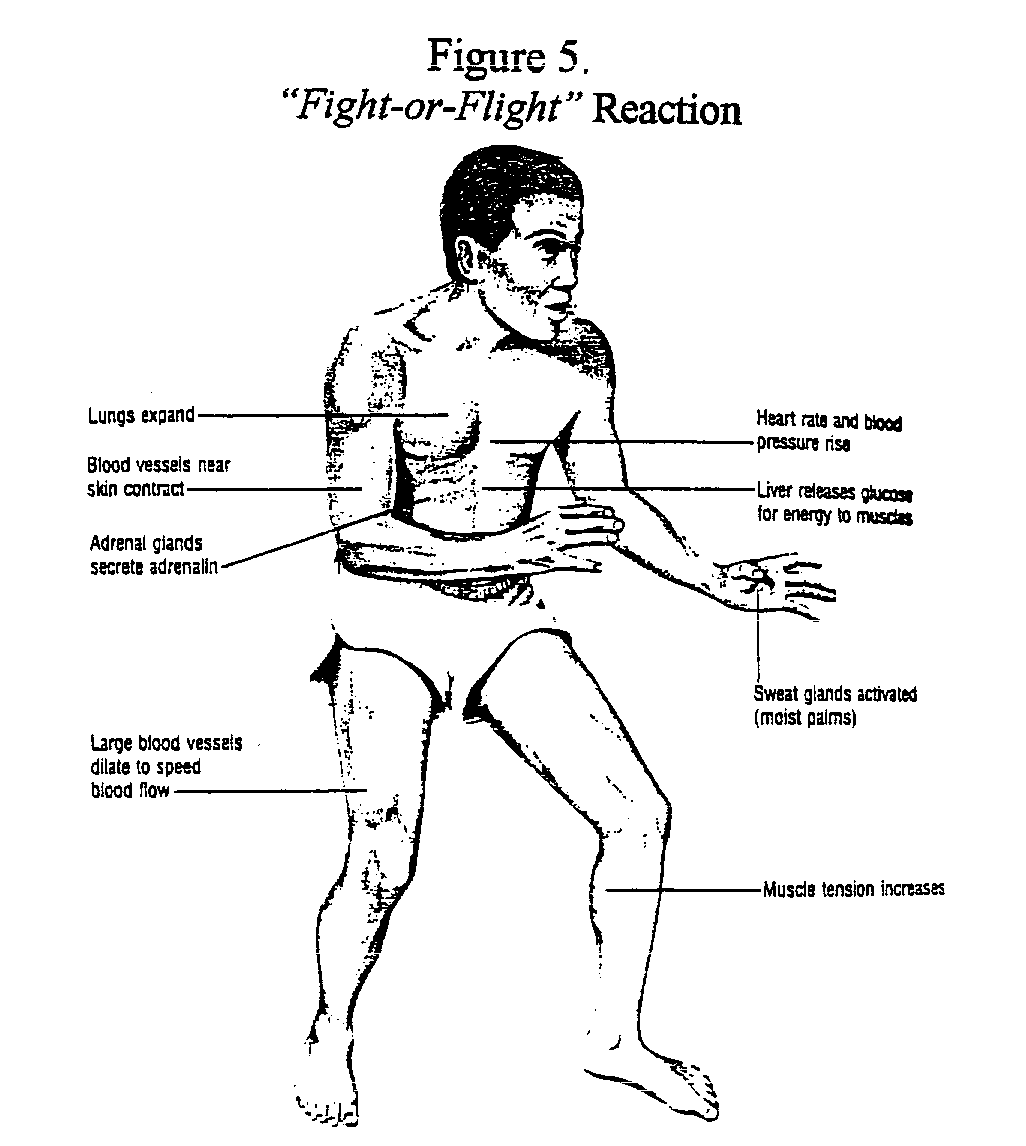
Well, I hate him.

But you don't know him.

That’s why I hate him.”

—Gordon Allport, social psychologist, *The Nature of Prejudice*

This automatic apprehensive reaction to the unfamiliar is likely to be “wired into” the human body because it played an important role in the survival and evolution of the human species. In our primitive past, when we encountered strangers, it was to our advantage to react with feelings of anxiety and a rush of adrenaline because those strangers may have been potential predators capable of harming us (or devouring us). Scholars refer to this reaction as the “fight or flight” response. (See the Figure 5, below)



When primitive humans encountered members of strange or unfamiliar groups, an automatic “fight or flight” survival response kicked in, providing a rush of anxiety and adrenaline to prepare them to fight or run away from these potential predators.

The evolutionary, fight-or-flight is a likely explanation for why human infants between about 8 and 18 months of life experience “stranger anxiety”--they react with fear when they see a stranger—i.e., they cry, their heart beat accelerates, and they breathe at a faster rate (Papalia & Olds, 1990).

The tendency to fear the unknown or unfamiliar can contribute to the development of prejudice by causing us to be on guard when encountering members of other groups that are

unfamiliar or appear to be very different than us (Aronson, et al., 2005). Being aware of this deeply-rooted tendency is an important first step toward preventing it from growing into a prejudice. Although we may not be able to completely control our initial, subconscious biological reaction to the unfamiliar, we can recognize it and consciously block it from influencing our attitudes or behavior toward others who appear different than we are.

Furthermore, research in psychology reveals that the emotional threat associated with the unfamiliar has a powerful effect on human judgment and decision-making; we form judgments almost instantaneously (within 40 milliseconds) of others whom we perceive to be emotionally threatening (Bar, Neta, & Linz. 2006). However, as humans gain more exposure to somebody or something that’s initially unfamiliar, it become more familiar and more likely to be perceived *positively* and judged *favorably*. The effect of familiarity is so powerful that it has become an established principle of human behavior, referred to by social psychologists as the “familiarity principle”—i.e., what’s more familiar is likely to be perceived more positively (Zajonc, 1968, 1970).

The strong influence of familiarity on human judgment may help explain why negative pre-judgments (prejudice) can quickly develop toward members of minority groups who are less common or familiar to members of the majority group. We need to remain aware of this tendency and consciously combat its tendency to bias our judgment of others whose physical features or cultural characteristics are unfamiliar to us.

**2. Using Selective Perception & Selective Memory**

Once prejudice has been formed, it can remain intact and resistant to change because the biased people tend to perceive what they *expect* to perceive, and fail to see events or facts that contradict their bias. This psychological process is known as *selective perception* (Hugenberg & Bodenhausen, 2003). Have you ever noticed how fans rooting for their favorite sports team tend to focus on and “see” the calls or decisions of referees that go against their own team, but don’t notice and don’t get upset about calls that go against the other team? This is a classic, everyday example of selective perception. It could be said that selective perception changes the process of “seeing is believing” into “believing is seeing.” This can result in the prejudiced person paying attention to information that’s consistent with the prejudice and “seeing” information that supports or reinforces it while ignoring or overlooking information that contradicts it.

Furthermore, selective perception is often accompanied by *selective memory*—the tendency to remember information that’s consistent with the prejudice, but forget information that’s inconsistent with it or contradicts it (Judd et al., 1991). The complementary processes of selective perception and selective memory often operate *unconsciously*; thus, prejudiced people are may not even be aware that they’re using these biased mental processes, or how these processes are working to preserve and perpetuate their prejudice (Baron, Byrne, & Brauscombe, 2006).

**3. Mentally Categorizing People into “In Groups” and "Out Groups”**

Humans tend to group other humans into mental categories, probably for the purpose of making their complex social world a little simpler and easier to handle (Jones, 1990). Although the tendency to categorize individuals into groups can help us make sense of, and keep track of our social world, it can also lead to stereotyping that blinds us from seeing the uniqueness of individuals within groups. Categorizing people into groups can result in the creation of *in*-groups (“us”) and *out*-groups (“them”). In-group versus out-group categorization can lead to *ethnocentrism*—the tendency to view one’s own cultural group (in group) to be central or normal, while other cultural groups (out groups) as seen as marginal or outside the norm. Ethnocentrism, in turn, can lead to prejudice and discrimination toward cultures that differ or deviate from the norm (the usual or customary) because their difference is misinterpreted as being “abnormal,” i.e., unacceptable or deficient (National Council for the Social Sciences, 2001).

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**We must consciously remind ourselves that there’s a distinction between being different and being deficient.**

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**4. Perceiving Individual Members of Other Groups as Being More Alike than**

**Members of Our Own Group**

Research in the field of social psychology shows that we tend to perceive individuals from different (less familiar) groups as more alike in attitudes and behavior than individuals within our own (familiar) group (Baron, Byrne, & Brauscombe, 2006). For instance, studies show that members of a particular age group tend to perceive people in older age groups as being more alike in their attitudes and beliefs than members of their own age group (Linville, Fischer, & Salovey, 1989).

This tendency may stem from the fact that we have more experience with members of our own group, thus we have more opportunities to observe and interact with a wide variety of individuals within our group. In contrast, we have fewer interactions with people from other groups, so we have fewer personal experiences with a wide a variety of individuals within those groups—which may lead us to conclude that the range of individual differences among them is narrower, i.e., they’re more alike in attitudes and behavior than we are.

Lack of contact with individuals from other racial groups can even lead to difficulties recognizing the personal identities of individuals within the segregated group. Studies show that humans recognize faces of members of their own race better than members of other racial groups—a phenomenon known as "own-race bias" (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2007). This bias isn’t genetic or inborn because it doesn’t occur when members of different races have frequent contact with each other (Sangrigoli, et al., 2005). However, when people see faces of individuals from racial groups with whom they’ve had little contact or experience, they fail to detect subtle differences in their personal features that physically distinguish one member from another group. Apparently, what happens is that the specific physical features that distinguish individual members of the racial group are overlooked because the viewer's attention is drawn more to the general physical features associated with their overall race--e.g., Asian eyes or African lips; thus, it appears that “they all look alike.” (Levin, 2000)

Such overgeneralization is so extreme that it has resulted in false convictions and imprisonment of innocent members of racial minority groups who eye-witnesses from majority groups “identified” as committing a crime. However, later DNA testing proved they were innocent and the crime was committed by a different member of the same racial group (Ramsey & Frank, 2007). This error is dramatically illustrated in the case of Lenell Geter, an African-American engineer who spent over a year of a life sentence in prison for a crime he didn’t commit. Four of five non-black witnesses misidentified him for another black man who actually committed the crime and was later apprehended.

This tendency to see individuals of other racial groups as being all alike physically is paralleled by the tendency to view members of other racial and cultural groups as being alike in their attitudes and behavior, which can lead to stereotyping. Even if an individual member of the group does not fit the group stereotype, research shows that individual exceptions are likely to be dismissed as an “exception to the rule,” or as an exception that “proves” the general rule (Aronson, et al., 2005).

**5. Majority Group Members' Attitudes being More Strongly Influenced by**

**Negative Behaviors Exhibited by Members of Minority Groups than by**

**Members of the Majority Group**

Studies show that if negative or unacceptable behavior occurs at the same rate among members of both a majority and minority group (e.g., the rate of criminal behavior in both groups is 10 percent), members of the majority group are more likely to develop negative attitudes (prejudice) toward the minority group than their own group (Baron, Byrne, & Brauscombe, 2006). For example, it’s been found that whites in the United States tend to underestimate the crime rate of white men and overestimate the crime rates of African-American men (Hamilton & Sherman, 1989). One possible explanation for this estimation error is that since minorities are more likely to be seen as different or distinctive, their behavior is more likely to stand out in the minds of majority group members; therefore, it’s more likely to be retained in their brain and influence their attitudes (McArthur & Friedman, 1980).

Although prejudices held by majority groups toward minority groups have led to the most extreme forms of discrimination and domination (Baron, Byrne, & Brauscombe, 2006), any group can become a target for prejudice. Members of a minority group can also be prejudiced toward the majority group, as illustrated by the following comments made by a student of color: “My friend said that he ‘hates white people because they try to dominate people of color.’ I, on the other hand, feel differently. One should not blame all white people for the mistakes and prejudiced acts that white people have made” (Nagda, Gurin & Johnson (2005, p. 102).

**6. Rationalizing Prejudice and Discrimination as Justifiable**

Rationalization may be described as a psychological strategy people use to explain or justify personal behavior that’s clearly irrational or unethical. For example, one of the key constitutional principles established by America’s founding fathers that all men are created equal and have an equal right to pursue happiness. However, at the American constitution was written, slavery was legal and an institutionalized part of the colonial economy. Our nation’s first president, George Washington, “owned” more than 300 slaves at the time of his death (Fritz, 1997). Because slavery is clearly an irrational contradiction to the constitutional ideal of equal rights for all humans, the idea of different “human races” was introduced to justify the fact that not all humans were the same (equal) and those of darker color could be treated unequally—i.e., they could be enslaved. Thus, the United States become the first slave system in the world that was based on color. The same rationalization was used to justify extermination of American Indians, forced take over Mexican land, and exclusion of Asian immigrants (California Newsreel, 2003)

**7. Strengthening Individual Self-Esteem through Group Membership and**

**Group Identity**

Our personal identity is shaped strongly by the group(s) to which we belong, as is self-esteem—how we feel about ourselves. If individuals think that the group they belong to is superior, it enables them to feel better about themselves (Tafjel, 1982). The reasoning goes something like this: “My group is superior, and since I’m a member of that group, I’m superior.” Self-image building through group identification is even more likely to occur when an individual’s self-esteem is threatened by personal frustration or failure. When this happens, the person whose self-esteem has been lowered can boost it by putting down members of another group (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), or by making them the “scapegoat” for their personal problems or failures (Gemmil, 1989). For example, they may conclude: “If it weren’t for ‘them,’ we’d be a lot better off.”

Probably the most extreme example of “scape­goating” in human history took place in Nazi Germany, where Jews were blamed for the country’s economic problems and became targets of the Holocaust. Studies show that when people feel a greater sense of personal threat, frustration or loss (e.g., when the economy is down and unemployment is up), prejudice and discrimination tend to escalate (Aronson, et al., 2005).

*Personal Experience*

One of the best attended student events that ever took place at my college was a presentation made by a guest speaker named Floyd Cochran—a former member and recruiter for “Aryan Nation” (a white- supremacist hate group). Cochran quite the hate and went on to became a nationally known civil-rights activist and educator. He still tours the country, speaking out against racist organizations and hate crimes at high schools and universities. After giving his talk on my campus, he asked the jam-packed room if they had any questions. Nobody raised a hand, probably because the audience was so large and the topic so sensitive. As a faculty member, I thought that maybe if I broke the ice and asked a question, then students would feel comfortable doing the same. I asked Cochran the following question: “Based on your experience with veteran group members and new members you recruited, what would you say was the most common reason why people become members of hate groups in the first place?” Without pause, he immediately stated that most members of his hate group had been personally successful, had poor self-images, and a number of them came from dysfunctional families where their need for social acceptance was never met. Cochran’s answer provided a perfect illustration of how extreme prejudice can stem from an attempt to strengthen one’s self-image and self-esteem through identification with a “superior” group.

*--Joe Cuseo*

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Snapshot Summary

Tips for Teamwork:

Forming Successful Collaborative- Learning Groups with Diverse Students

1. **Intentionally form diverse learning teams comprised of individuals with different cultural backgrounds**

**and life experiences.**

Research consistently shows that we learn more from people who are different from us than we do from

people who are similar to us. Thus, the best learning teams to join or form are those comprised of people who are

dissimilar to you, or who have characteristics that are not very familiar to you. Ideal teammates are individuals

who are different than you in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, race, culture or geographic backgrounds, learning

styles, and personality characteristics. Such variety brings different life experiences, styles of thinking, and

learning strategies to your team, which not only enriches its diversity, but its productivity as well. If you team-up

only with friends or classmates whose lifestyles and experiences are similar to your own, it can actually impair

your team’s performance. Your similar experiences can cause your learning than to get off track and onto topics

that have nothing to do with the learning task (for example, what you did last weekend or what you’re planning

to do next weekend).

2. **Teamwork should take place in a *warm, friendly setting*.**

The ambience or atmosphere in which group work takes place can influence the nature and quality of

interaction among team members. People are more likely to work openly and collaboratively when they are in an

environment that is conducive to relationship building. For example, a living room or a lounge area would

provide a warmer and friendlier atmosphere than a sterile classroom.

3. **Before beginning your work task, allow some social "warm up" time for teammates to get to know one**

**another on a *personal* level.**

Teammates need to feel comfortable with each other before they can feel comfortable about sharing their

personal thoughts and viewpoints, particularly if the team is comprised of individuals from diverse and

unfamiliar cultures. Before tackling the learning task, teammates should informally interact to learn each other’s

names, backgrounds, and interests.

4. **Teammates should pursue a *common goal***.

To help your team identify and work toward a common goal, plan to have your work culminate in a single,

*unified work product* that all teammates contribute to developing (e.g., a single sheet of answers to questions,

a list or chart of specific ideas, an outline or idea map). Identifying a well-defined final product will help keep

your team focused on the same goal and moving in the same direction; and when the work product is finished, it

will serve as visible evidence of the teammates’ joint effort and united accomplishment.

5. **Teammates should have *equal opportunity* and *personal responsibility* for contributing something concrete**

**to the team’s final product.**

Each member of the team should have an equal opportunity to participate during group work and should be

responsible for contributing something of equal importance to the team’s final product, such as a particular

portion of course content or unit of information (e.g., a book chapter or course topic). Teammates could also

contribute a different form of thinking to the team’s final product (e.g., application, synthesis, or evaluation).

Such division of labor ensures that each teammate is an active participant and individually accountable.

“We are born for cooperation, as are the feet, the hands, the eyelids, and the upper and lower jaws."

—Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor, 161-180 A.D.

6. **Teammates should work *interdependently*—they should depend on or rely upon each other to achieve their**

**common goal (final product).**

Similar to a sports team, each member of the collaborative learning group has a *specific role* to play. For

instance, each teammate could assume a functional role, such as: (a) manager—who assures that the team

stays focused on their goal and doesn’t get off track, (b) moderator—who ensures that all members have equal

opportunity to contribute, (c) summarizer—who keeps track of what the team has accomplished and what still

remains to be done, or (d) recorder—who is responsible for maintaining a written record of the team’s ideas and

progress.

Teammates may assume the role of contributing a different *perspective* to the final product, such as the

perspective of time (e.g., historical, contemporary, and futuristic), place (e.g., local, national, and international)

and person (e.g., social, emotional, and physical). Or, teammates may assume the role of contributing

perspectives of different academic discipline (field of study), such as Philosophy, Psychology, and Economics.

When teammates assume specific, complementary roles such as these, each teammate becomes an integral

member of the team whose work is essential for the team to reach its goal (a complete final product). In addition,

when teammates have identifiable roles to fulfill, they develop a clearer sense of personal responsibility to the

team and can be held individually accountable for doing their fair share of the work.

7. **Learning teams should occasionally divide into *smaller subgroups* (e.g., as pairs or trios) so that**

**teammates get an opportunity to work with each other on a more personal level.**

The smaller the group size, the greater the degree of participation, involvement, and depth of interaction among

group members. For example, working pairs provides maximum opportunity for involvement because each

member must either speaking or listening at the same time. (It's hard to get lost in a group of two.) If multiple

opportunities are created for different team members to work together in small groups, everyone has at least one

opportunity to work closely every other member of the team. Small group size can also promote diversity

appreciation by allowing each team member to experience working at a personal level with an individual from a

minority racial or ethnic group that is not represented in large numbers on campus. Research shows that when

contact between individuals from diverse groups takes place under in the context of teamwork, in which all

members are working toward a common goal with equal individual opportunity to participate and help the team

achieve its goal, a win-win scenario is created: Learning and appreciation of diversity are both strengthened,

while at the same time, prejudice is weakened.

TEAM = Together Everyone Achieves More

—Author Unknown

References: Amir (1969); Allport (1979); Aronson, Wilson, & Akert (2005); Cook (1984); Sherif et al. (1961); and Wilder (1984).

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