

Defining and Describing Diversity



Activate Your Thinking

Please complete the following sentence:

When I hear the word “diversity,” the first thoughts that come to mind are . . .

The primary goal of this chapter is to promote your understanding of the meaning of “diversity” and awareness of its multiple forms or dimensions.

The word *diversity* derives from the Latin root “diversus,” meaning various or variation. Thus, human diversity refers to the variety that exists among people who comprise humanity (the human species). As depicted in **Figure 1.1**, the relationship between humanity and diversity is similar to the relationship between

“We are all brothers and sisters. Each face in the rainbow of color that populates our world is precious and special. Each adds to the rich treasure of humanity.”

—Morris Dees, Civil Rights leader and co-founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center

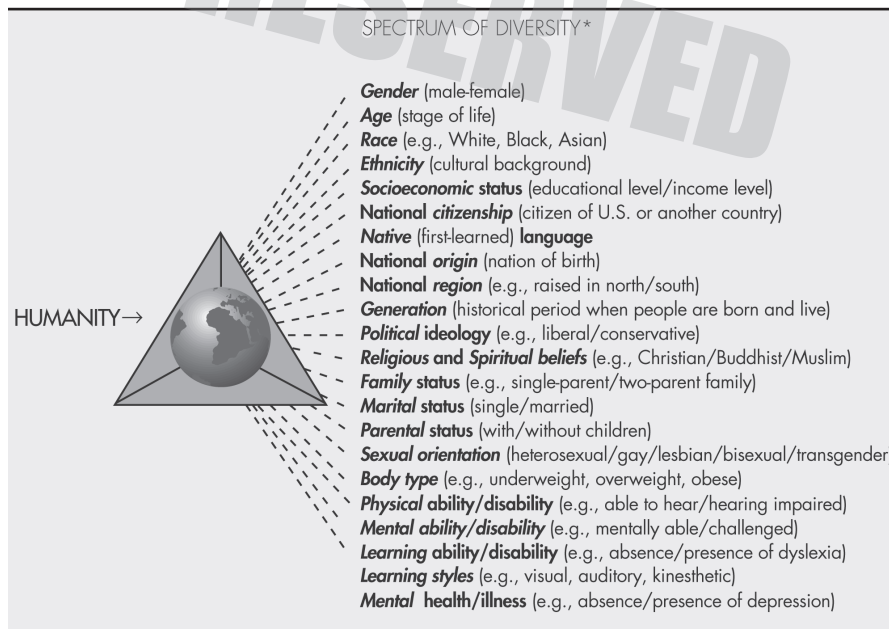


FIGURE 1.1

Humanity and Diversity

**This list represents some of the major dimensions of human diversity; it does not represent a complete list of all possible forms of human diversity. Also, disagreement exists about certain dimensions of diversity (e.g., whether certain groups should be considered races or ethnic groups).*

sunlight and the spectrum of colors. Just as sunlight passing through a prism disperses into all the different groups of colors that comprise the visual spectrum, the human species occupying planet earth are dispersed into a variety of different groups of people that comprise the human spectrum (humanity).

As you can see in **Figure 1.1**, there's a lot more to diversity than meets the eye. Diversity comes in multiple forms and dimensions, some of which are *hidden or invisible*. Humans differ from each other in a wide variety of ways, including physical features, religious beliefs, mental and physical abilities, national origins, social backgrounds, gender, sexual orientation, and a variety of other dimensions. Although diversity is often thought exclusively in terms of ethnic (cultural) or racial diversity, persons who are members of the same ethnic or racial group may still be diverse with respect to gender, social class (socioeconomic status), religion, and national origin. As a future teacher, the particular forms of diversity that you want to emphasize and capitalize on will depend on the particular composition of your school's student population and its surrounding community.

“People who would never dream of using an ethnic or racial slur talk about nutcases, wackos, loony tunes, and people all the time say, ‘Oh, he’s crazy’ and it’s hurtful, it really is hurtful.”

—Elyn Saks, lawyer, law professor, and author of *The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness*—a book about her life as a schizophrenic

Reflection 1.1

Look over the list of groups that comprise the diversity spectrum in Figure 1.1. Do you notice any groups missing from the list that should be added, either because they have distinctive characteristics or because they have been targets of prejudice and discrimination?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

“Diversity is a value that is shown in mutual respect and appreciation of similarities and differences.”

—Public Service Enterprise Group

It's important to keep in mind that human *variety* and *similarity* coexist and complement one another. Thus, diversity education not only enhances appreciation of human differences, it also promotes awareness of universal aspects of the human experience that are common to all people—whatever their particular social or cultural background happens to be. For example, despite our racial and ethnic differences, all humans experience the same emotions and communicate them with the same facial expressions (see **Figure 1.2**).

Humans all over the world display the same facial expressions when experiencing certain emotions. See if you can detect the emotions being expressed in the following faces. (To find the answers, turn your book upside down.)

FIGURE 1.2



Answers: The emotions shown. Top, left to right: anger, fear, and sadness. Bottom, left to right: disgust, happiness, and surprise.

All images © JupiterImages Corporation.

Reflection 1.2 List three human experiences that you think are universal (i.e., which are experienced by all humans in all cultures).

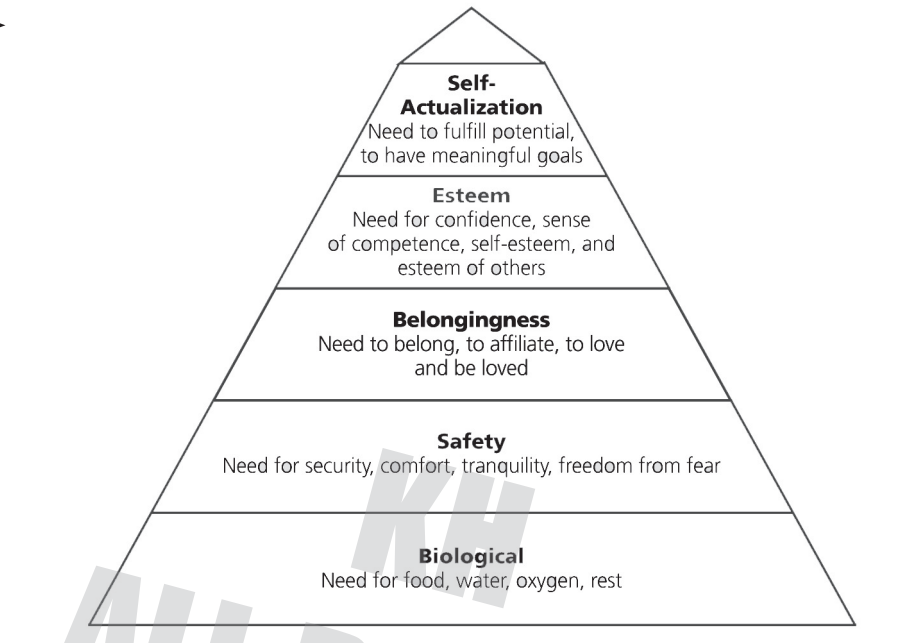
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

FIGURE 1.3

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs resembles a pyramid.

“Knowledge of characteristics and needs that all human beings share can foster a sense of community among individuals of diverse ethnic identities.”

—Cheryl Bernstein Cohen, author of *Teaching about Ethnic Diversity*



Human characteristics that anthropologists have found to be shared by all groups of people in every corner of the world include storytelling, poetry, bodily adornment, music and dance, creation and decoration of artifacts, families and socialization of children by elders, a sense of right and wrong, supernatural beliefs, and mourning of the dead (Pinker, 1994). Although different ethnic groups may express these attitudes, beliefs, and practices in different ways, they are universal experiences that are common to all human groups.

Furthermore, humans from all ethnic groups have the same, basic human needs—such as those depicted in **Figure 1.3**—which represents psychologist Abraham Maslow's famous hierarchy (pyramid) of human needs.



PERSONAL INSIGHT

I was born and reared in rural southeastern Kentucky. After many years of teaching about race being more than skin deep but our history has been so heavily ingrained in our psyche that it is all about biology, I had the opportunity to display an example of this in front of a distinguished class of future professionals several years ago. I was a guest lecturer and had asked several people to enter center stage with me to allow

the students to ask questions of us. It just so happened that there were four males (including me), two of which were black and two of which were white. The questions could be anything and they had a total of five minutes to ask them. As you can imagine, the questions ranged from the type of employment we were involved in to the type of car we drove. After the time reached its limit on the questions, I asked my three friends to exit stage left. I then asked the students to choose who they thought were the most similar and who

were the most different. As you probably guessed, it was reported from the class that the two African-Americans and the two European Americans were the similar pairs. After the three gentlemen rejoined me on stage, I instructed the students to ask several specific cultural questions of the group—specifically on likes, dislikes, upbringing, food, etc. You probably guessed by now that it was found that the African-American from East Kentucky was most similar to the European American from East Tennessee and the Caucasian male from Washington, DC, was most similar to the black male from New York City. First impressions matter but make sure it is not only skin deep.

Aaron Thompson

Consider This . . .

Diversity represents variations on the common theme of humanity. Although human groups acquire different cultural differences, those differences are cultivated from the same soil—they are all grounded in the common experience of being human.

The relationship between humanity and diversity is well illustrated by the development of language in children. Although humans across the world speak different languages, when all newborns enter the world, they babble with the same language sounds, which allow them to speak the sounds of any human language. However, they will continue to use only those language sounds they hear spoken in their particular culture—the other babbling sounds they used as newborns will drop out of their oral repertoire (Oller, 1981). The same set of sounds humans use at birth (our “universal language”) reflects our common humanity, whereas the distinctive set of sounds different groups of humans use to express themselves in their “native language” reflects our cultural diversity.

Thus, the cultures associated with different groups may be viewed simply as variations on the same theme: being human. You may have heard people say: “We’re all human, aren’t we?” The answer to this important question is, “yes and no.” We are all the same, but not in the same way. A good metaphor for understanding this apparent contradiction is to visualize humanity as a quilt in which different cultural groups are joined together by the common thread of humanity—the common bond of being human. The different patches that comprise the quilt represent diversity—the distinctive cultures that comprise our common humanity. The quilt metaphor acknowledges the identity and beauty of all cultures and differs radically from the original American “melting pot” metaphor, which viewed differences as something that should be melted down or eliminated. The quilt metaphor also differs from the later “salad bowl” metaphor, which suggested that America is a hodgepodge or mishmash of different cultures thrown together without any common connection. In contrast, the quilt metaphor represents the philosophy of cultural pluralism and suggests that the unique identity of different cultural groups should be maintained, recognized, and celebrated; yet, at the same time, these cultural differences are interweaved into a larger, commonly

“We all live with the objective of being happy; our lives are all different and yet the same.”

—Anne Frank, victim of the Holocaust and renowned author of *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, written while she was in hiding for two years with her family during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands

“We are all the same, and we are all unique.”

—Georgia Dunston, African American biologist and research specialist in human genetics



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shared national tapestry (Banks, 2006). On a global level, cultural differences within and across nations join together to form an even larger, unified whole: our shared humanity.



PERSONAL INSIGHT

When I was 12 years old and living in New York City, I returned from school one Friday afternoon and my mother asked me if anything interesting happened at school that day. I mentioned to her that the teacher went around the room, asking us what we had for dinner last night. At that moment, my mother began to become a bit concerned and nervously asked me: “What did you tell the teacher?” I said: “I told her

and the rest of the class that I had pasta last night because my family always eats pasta on Thursdays and Sundays.” My mother exploded and fired back at me: “Why couldn’t you tell her that we had steak or roast beef!” For a moment, I was stunned and couldn’t figure out what I had done wrong or why I should have lied about eating pasta. Then it suddenly dawned on me: My mother was embarrassed about being an Italian American. She wanted me to hide our family’s ethnic background and make it sound like we were very “American.” I never forgot this experience. For the first time in my life, I became aware that my mother was ashamed about being a member of the same group to which every member of my family belonged (including me). After her outburst, I felt a combined rush of astonishment and embarrassment. These feelings eventually faded and my mother’s reaction ended up having the opposite effect on me. Instead of making me feel inferior or ashamed about being Italian American, her reaction that day caused me to become more conscious of, and take more pride in, my Italian heritage.

As I grew older, I also grew to understand and sympathize with my mother for feeling the way she did. She had grown up during the era of America’s “melting pot”—a time when different American ethnic groups were expected to melt down and melt away their ethnicity. They were not to celebrate diversity, they were to eliminate it.

“We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic.”

—Jimmy Carter, 39th President of the United States and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize

Joe Cuseo

Consider This . . .

When we appreciate diversity and humanity simultaneously, we capitalize on the power of our differences while preserving our collective strength through unity.

As you proceed through this book, keep in mind the following distinctions among humanity, diversity, and individuality:

- ▶ **Humanity:** All humans are members of the *same group* (the human species).
- ▶ **Diversity:** All humans are members of *different groups* (e.g., different cultural and gender groups).
- ▶ **Cultural Competence:** Assessing the effectiveness of diversity outcomes.
- ▶ **Individuality:** Each human is a *unique individual* who differs from all other humans and all other members of any group to which that individual may belong.

“Every human is, at the same time, like all other humans, like some humans, and like no other human.”

—Clyde Kluckhohn, American anthropologist

Looking at a student's group membership should not mean that we overlook the student's individuality. Understanding a person's group membership is just one way of helping us better understand how that person's individuality may be influenced by the cultural group(s) to which that individual belongs.

Consider This . . .

Appreciating human diversity should not come at the expense of depreciating our commonality (humanity) or individuality. Although it's valuable to learn about different cultures and common characteristics shared by all members of the same culture, the fact remains that significant differences exist among individuals who share the same culture. Don't assume that each individual from the same cultural background has the same personal characteristics.

“I realize that I'm black, but I like to be viewed as a person, and this is everybody's wish.”

—Michael Jordan, Hall of Fame basketball player

What Is Cultural Diversity?

Culture can be broadly defined as a distinctive pattern of beliefs and values that are learned by a group of people who share the same social heritage and traditions. In short, culture is the whole way in which a group of people has learned to live (Peoples & Bailey, 2008); this includes their way of speaking (language), dressing (fashion), eating (cuisine), and expressing themselves artistically. (See **Box 1.1** for a summary of the key components of culture). Even more significant than visible differences in the physical artifacts of different cultures are invisible, deeply held differences in cultural beliefs, values, and world views (National Council for the Social Studies, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999).

“Culture shapes mind . . . it provides us with a tool kit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conceptions of ourselves and our powers.”

—Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*

Sometimes, the terms “culture” and “society” are used interchangeably as if they were synonymous; however, each of these terms refers to a different aspect of humanity. Society is a group of people organized under the same social system. For example, all members of American society are organized under the same system of government, justice, and education. In contrast, culture is what members of a certain group of people share with respect to their past traditions and current ways of living—regardless of the particular society or social system in which they currently live (Nicholas, 1991). For example, cultural differences can exist within the same society, thus resulting in a “multicultural” society.



Box 1.1 Key Components of Culture

Diversity across cultural groups is expressed in a wide variety of ways, but the following list contains some of the more critical components of culture.

- *Language*: how a cultural group communicates verbally and nonverbally (e.g., the nature of body language its members use while communicating).
- *Space (Distance)*: how members of a cultural group arrange or distance themselves in space or place (e.g., how closely they position themselves while engaging in conversation).
- *Time*: how a cultural group conceives of, divides up, and makes use of time (e.g., the speed or pace at which they move and conduct their daily business).
- *Aesthetics*: how a cultural group appreciates and expresses artistic beauty and creativity (e.g., its visual art, culinary art, music, theater, literature, and dance).
- *Family*: cultural attitudes and habits with respect to raising children and treating elderly relatives (e.g., its customary style of parenting children and caring for aging parents).
- *Finances*: how much economic capital the cultural group has to meet its members' material needs (e.g., socioeconomic status), and the values they hold about the acquisition of wealth and consumption of material goods (e.g., amount of emphasis placed on material possessions and the extent to which their possessions should be flaunted publically).
- *Science and Technology*: the culture's attitude toward science and the use of modern technology (e.g., whether or not the culture is technologically “advanced”).
- *Philosophy*: the culture's view about what constitutes wisdom, truth, goodness, and the meaning or purpose of life (e.g., the group's predominant ethical viewpoints and moral standards).
- *Religion*: the culture's beliefs about the existence of a supreme being and an afterlife (e.g., heaven, hell, or reincarnation).



Reflection 1.3

Look back at the key components of culture cited in Box 1.1. Think of another component of culture that you think is important or influential and add it to the list. Explain why you think this is an important element of a group's culture.

What Is Ethnic Diversity?

A group of people who share the same culture is referred to as an *ethnic group*. Thus, ethnicity (ethnic group) refers to a group of people *who* share the same culture, and culture refers to *what* an ethnic group shares in common. An ethnic group's common cultural characteristics are not inherited or passed on genetically, they are passed on through *socialization*—that is, they are *learned* and transmitted through the group members' shared social environment and experiences. (Note how this environmental influence on culture is consistent with the use of the term “culture” in such phrases as “becoming cultured” or “cultivating crops.”)

It's important for teachers to realize that students from different cultural backgrounds may respond to exactly the same curriculum in very different ways. Consider the following math problem, which was presented to a class of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds: “It costs \$1.50 to travel each way on the city bus. A transit system ‘fast pass’ costs \$65 a month. Which is the more economical way to get to work, the daily fare or the fast pass?” Students from higher income suburban families assumed that the individual in the problem was commuting to work five days per week at a rate of \$3 per day. However, lower income, inner city students were more likely to respond to the problem with questions such as: “How many jobs are we talking about?” and “Is it a part-time job?” (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

What Is Racial Diversity?

Members of an *ethnic* group share common *cultural* characteristics that have been acquired through shared social-learning experiences. In contrast, members of a *racial* group share common *physical* characteristics (e.g., skin color or facial features) that have been acquired biologically (inherited). It must be remembered, however, that racial categories are not scientifically based concepts, they are social constructs—that is, social-group categories constructed (created) by humans (Anderson & Fienberg, 2000). Human societies have simply decided to organize or categorize themselves into different groups based on certain external differences in their appearance—particularly the color of their outer layer of skin—and then decided to coin the term “race” as a way of labeling groups of people based on differences in their physical appearance. The Census Bureau could have divided people into categories based on other physical characteristics, such as their eye color (blue, brown, green), hair color (brown, blonde, red), or hair texture (straight, wavy, curly, frizzy).

It should be noted that the concept of race emerged late in human history. The ancient Greeks didn't divide people into groups based on differences in physical appearance, but categorized them on the basis of differences in their social status, religion, and language. In fact, the word “race” does not appear anywhere in the English language until 1508, when it was used in an English poem to refer to a line of kings (California Newsreel, 2003).

“Most variation is within, not between, ‘races.’ That means two random Koreans may be as genetically different as a Korean and an Italian.”

—California Newsreel,
Race: The Power of an Illusion

Furthermore, scholars still disagree about what human groups actually constitute a biological “race” and whether totally distinctive races truly exist (Wheelright, 2005). There are no specific genes that differentiate one race from another, so there’s no way a blood test or any type of “internal” genetic test could be run to determine a person’s race. The truth is that no single gene or set of genes are shared by all members of the same race, which would distinguish them from members of other races.



PERSONAL INSIGHT

My father stood approximately six feet and had light brown straight hair. His skin color was that of a Western European with a very slight suntan. My mother was from Alabama and she was dark in skin color with high cheek bones and long curly black hair. In fact, if you did not know that my father was of African-American descent, you would not have thought of him as black.

All of my life I have thought of myself as African-American and all of the people who are familiar with me thought of me as African-American. I have lived half of a century with that as my racial identity. However, several years ago, after carefully looking through available records on births in my family history, I discovered that less than 50% of my lineage was African. Biologically, I am not black. Socially and emotionally, I am. Clearly, race is more of a socially constructed concept than a biologically based fact.

Aaron Thompson

Although humans display diversity in skin color or tone, the reality is that all members of the human species share remarkably similar physical features. Despite differences in the surface appearance of our skin, members of our species are more similar biologically than any other living species (California Newsreel, 2003); over 98 percent of the genes that make up humans from different racial groups are exactly the same (Bridgeman, 2003; Molnar, 1991). This extraordinary amount of genetic overlap across human beings accounts for the many similarities that exist among us—despite superficial differences in color that exist at the surface of our skin. For example, all humans have similar external features that give us a “human” appearance and clearly distinguish us from other animal species. All humans also have internal organs that are similar in structure and function, and no matter what the color of our outer layer of skin, when it’s cut, we all bleed in the same color.

The differences in skin color that exist among humans we see today is largely due to environmental adaptations that evolved over thousands of years among human groups that lived in very different climatic regions of the world. Darker skin tones likely developed among humans who inhabited and reproduced in hotter regions nearer the equator (e.g., Africans), where their darker skin evolved to help them adapt and survived by providing their bodies with better protection from the potentially damaging effects of the sun (Bridgeman, 2003). In contrast,

lighter skin tones developed over time among humans inhabiting colder geographical regions that were farther from the equator (e.g., Scandinavia), where lighter skin enabled their bodies to absorb greater amounts of sunlight, making more efficient use of the vitamin D supplied by the sun (Jablonski & Chaplin, 2002).



PERSONAL INSIGHT

I was proofreading the material found in this chapter while sitting in a coffee shop at Chicago O'Hare airport. I looked up from my work for a second and saw what appeared to be a white girl about 18 years old. As I lowered my head to return to my work, I did a double-take to look at her again because my first glance left me with the feeling that something about her was different or unusual. When I looked at her more

closely the second time, I noticed that although she had white skin, the features of her face and hair appeared to be those of an African-American. After a couple of seconds of puzzlement, I figured it out: she was an *albino* African-American. That satisfied me for the moment and I returned to my work; however, I later began to wonder whether it would still be accurate to say that she was “black” because her skin was actually white. Would her hair and facial features be sufficient for her to be considered (or classified) as black? If yes, then what about someone who had black skin tone, but did not have the typical hair and facial features of black people? Is skin color the physical feature that truly defines an African-American, or are other features equally important? I was unable to answer these questions, but I found it ironic that all of these thoughts were running through my mind at the exact same time I was writing a book about diversity.

Later, on the plane ride home, I thought again about that albino African-American girl and realized that she was a perfect example of how classifying people into “races” is not based on objective, scientifically determined evidence, but on subjective, socially constructed categories.

Joe Cuseo



Reflection 1.4 What race do you consider yourself to be? Would you say you identify strongly with your race, or are you rarely conscious of it? Why?

Diversity from a Cultural Perspective

Cultural differences can exist within the same society (a multicultural society), within the same nation (domestic diversity), and across different nations (international diversity). The major cultural (ethnic) groups found within the United States include:

- ▶ Native Americans (American Indians)
 - ▶ Cherokee, Navaho, Hopi, Alaskan natives, Blackfoot, etc.

- ▶ African-Americans (blacks)
 - ▶ Americans whose cultural roots lie in the continent of Africa (e.g., Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria) and the Caribbean Islands (e.g., Bahamas, Cuba, Jamaica), etc.
- ▶ Hispanic Americans (Latinos)
 - ▶ Americans with cultural roots in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central America (e.g., El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua), and South America (e.g., Brazil, Columbia, Venezuela), etc.
- ▶ Asian Americans
 - ▶ Americans who are cultural descendents of East Asia (e.g., Japan, China, Korea), Southeast Asia (e.g., Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia), and South Asia (e.g., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh), etc.
- ▶ Middle Eastern Americans
 - ▶ Americans with cultural roots in Iraq, Iran, Israel, etc.
- ▶ European Americans (whites)
 - ▶ Descendents from Western Europe (e.g., United Kingdom, Ireland, Netherlands), Eastern Europe (e.g., Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria), Southern Europe (e.g., Italy, Greece, Portugal), and Northern Europe/Scandinavia (e.g., Denmark, Sweden, Norway), etc.

Currently, European Americans represent the *majority* ethnic group in the United States because they account for more than one-half of the American population. Native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans are considered to be ethnic *minority* groups because each of these groups represents less than 50 percent of the American population.

Ethnic groups can be comprised of whites or people of color. For people of color, their ethnicity is immediately visible to other people; in contrast, members of white ethnic groups have the option of choosing whether they want to identify with or share their ethnicity with others because it is not visible to the naked eye. Members of ethnic minority groups with European ancestry can more easily “blend into” or become assimilated into the majority (dominant) culture because their minority status can’t be visibly detected. Minority white immigrants of European ancestry have even changed their last names to appear to be Americans of English descent. In contrast, the immediately detectable minority status of African-Americans, or darker skinned Hispanics and Native Americans, doesn’t allow them the option of presenting themselves as members of an already assimilated majority group (National Council for the Social Studies, 1991).



PERSONAL INSIGHT

My mother's family changed their name from the very Italian-sounding "DeVigilio" to the more American-sounding "Vigilis," and my mother's first name was changed from the Italian-sounding Carmella to Mildred. My father's first name was also changed from Biaggio to Blase; he chose to list his first name, not his last name (Cuseo), on the sign outside his watch repair cubicle in New York City because he feared that would reveal his Italian ethnicity and people would not bring him their business.

Thus, my parents were able to minimize their risk of appearing "different" and encountering discrimination, while maximizing their chances of being assimilated (absorbed) into American culture. If my parents were members of a nonwhite ethnic group, they would not have been able to "hide" their ethnicity and reduce their risk of encountering prejudice or discrimination. I learned later that some Jewish Americans used the same name-changing strategies as my parents and grandparents; for example, changing their last name from Greenbaum to Green in order to avoid anti-Semitic treatment.

Joe Cuseo

As with racial grouping, classifying humans into different ethnic groups can also be very arbitrary and subject to different interpretations by different groups of people. Hispanics are not defined as a race, but are classified as an ethnic group by the U.S. Census Bureau. However, among those who checked "some other race" in the 2000 Census, 97 percent were Hispanic. This finding suggests that Hispanic Americans consider themselves to be a racial group, probably because this is how they feel they're perceived and treated by non-Hispanics (Cianciotto, 2005). Supporting the Hispanic viewpoint that others perceive them as a race, rather than an ethnic group, is the recent use of the term "racial profiling" in the American media to describe Arizona's controversial 2010 law that allows police to target people who "look" like illegal aliens from Mexico, Central America, and South America. Again, this illustrates how race and ethnicity are subjective, socially constructed concepts that depend on how society perceives and treats certain social groups, which, in turn, affect how these groups perceive themselves.

America will continue to struggle with the issue of racial and ethnic group classification because the nation's racial and ethnic diversity is growing, and members of different ethnic and racial groups are increasingly forming cross-ethnic and interracial families. By 2050, the number of Americans who will identify themselves as being of two or more races is projected to more than triple—from 5.2 million to 16.2 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008a). Thus, it will become even more difficult to place Americans into distinct racial or ethnic categories.



STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

"I'm the only person from my 'race' in class."

Hispanic student commenting on why he felt uncomfortable being the only Latino in his class on Race, Ethnicity, & Gender



PERSONAL INSIGHT

As the child of a black man and a white woman, and as someone born in the racial melting pot of Hawaii, with a sister who's half Indonesian but who's usually mistaken for Mexican or Puerto Rican, and a brother-in-law and niece of Chinese descent, with some blood relatives who resemble Margaret Thatcher and others who could pass for Bernie Mac, family get-togethers over Christmas take on the appearance of a UN

General Assembly meeting. I've never had the option of restricting my loyalties on the basis of race, or measuring my worth on the basis of tribe.

Barack Obama (2006)

↔

Reflection 1.5 What ethnic group(s) are you a member of, or do you identify with? What cultural values do you think are shared by members your ethnic group(s)?

Diversity from a Societal Perspective: Differences in Socioeconomic Status (a.k.a., Social Class)

Diversity also appears in the form of socioeconomic status or social classes, which are typically stratified (divided) into lower, middle, or upper class, depending on its members' level of education and income. Groups occupying lower social strata have significantly fewer social and economic opportunities or privileges (Feagin & Feagin, 2003).

Diversity in Income

According to U.S. Census figures, the wealthiest 20 percent of the American population controls approximately 50 percent of the country's total income, and the 20 percent of Americans with the lowest income control only 4 percent of the nation's income. Sharp discrepancies also exist in income level among different racial, ethnic, and gender groups. In 2007, black households had the lowest median income (\$33,916) as compared to a median income of \$54,920 for non-Hispanic white households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008b).

Poverty continues to be a problem in America. In 2007, 12.5 percent of Americans (37.3 million people) lived below the poverty line, making the United States one of the most impoverished of all developed countries in the world (Shah, 2008). Although all ethnic and racial groups experience poverty, minority groups

experience poverty at significantly higher rates than the white majority. In 2007, poverty rates for different ethnic and racial groups were as follows:

Whites: 8.2%
 Asians: 10.2%
 Hispanics: 21.5%
 Blacks: 24.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008b)

It's estimated that 600,000 families and 1.25 million children are now homeless, accounting for roughly 50 percent of the homeless population. Typically, these families are comprised of a mother and two children under the age of five (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2007).



Reflection 1.6 What do you think is the factor that is most responsible for poverty in:

- (a) the United States?
- (b) the world?



PERSONAL INSIGHT

When I was a four-year-old boy living in the mountains of Kentucky, it was safe for a young lad to walk the railroad tracks and roads alone. Knowing this, my mother would send me to the general store to buy a variety of small items we needed for our household. Since we had very little money, she was aware of the fact that we had to be cautious and only spend money on the staples we needed to survive. I could only purchase items from the general store that my mother strictly ordered me to buy. Most of these items cost less than a dollar and many times you could buy multiple items for a dollar in the early 1960s. At the store's checkout counter there were jars with different kinds of candy or gum. You could buy two pieces for one cent. I didn't think there would be any harm in rewarding myself with two pieces of candy after doing a good deed. After all, I could devour the evidence of my disobedience on my slow walk home. When I returned home from the store, my mother—being the protector of the vault and the sergeant-of-arms in our household—would count each item I bought to make sure I had been charged correctly. My mother never failed to notice if I was even one cent short!

Growing up in poverty wasn't fun but we managed to eat. What we ate had to be reasonable in price and bought in bulk. Every morning my mother fixed rice or oatmeal for breakfast along with wonderful butter-milk biscuits. Every night she fixed pinto beans and cornbread for dinner. We also had fresh vegetables from the garden and apples, hickory nuts, and walnuts from surrounding trees. Meat was not readily available and was only eaten when we killed a chicken or hog that we had raised.

Aaron Thompson

Diversity in Level of Education

Differences in social class also reflect differences in level of education. Discrepancies continue to exist in the level of education attained between members of majority and minority groups. The high school completion rate for white majority students is significantly higher than it is for students from minority ethnic and racial groups. In 2008, the high school dropout rate for white students was 4.8 percent, compared to 9.9 percent for black students and 18.3 percent for Hispanic students (Chapman, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2010).

College enrollment and graduation rates for minority students are also consistently lower than those for majority students. In 2009, 71 percent of majority students who graduated from high school enrolled in college—compared to 62 percent of Hispanic high school graduates and 63 percent of black high school graduates (Aud et al., 2011). Socioeconomic status also has an effect as to whether students immediately enroll in college after high school. In 2009, the immediate college enrollment rate for students from low income families was 55 percent compared to 85 percent of students from high income families and 67 percent of students from middle income families who immediately enrolled in college after high school (Aud et al., 2011). The percentage of Americans from different ethnic and racial groups who have attained a bachelor's degree is as follows:

Asians (52%)
 non-Hispanic whites (33%),
 Blacks (20%)
 Hispanics (13%) (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010)

“The underlying goal of multicultural education is to effect social change. The pathway toward this goal incorporates of three strands of transformation: the transformation of self, the transformation of schools, and the transformation of society.”

—EdChange Organization, 1995–2009

Diversity from a National Perspective

The United States is home to the largest number of immigrants from the widest variety of countries around the world. America is a nation that has been built and developed by diverse immigrant groups, many of whom came to our shores with the intent of escaping prejudice or discrimination in their native nations and with the hope of gaining equal opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their families (Levine & Levine, 1996).

America's emphasis on the importance of combining diversity with unity is reflected in its national motto: *E pluribus Unum* (“Out of many, one”), which appears on the back of all its coins. The motto stresses the nation's belief that, in a free society, diversity is a source of strength. Providing our students with a multicultural education grounded in the context of national unity serves to put America's motto into practice (National Council for the Social Sciences, 1991).

Because America is rapidly becoming a more racially and ethnically diverse nation, the importance of reinforcing the idea of diversity and unity is probably greater today than at any other time in U.S. history. In 2008, the minority popula-

tion in the United States reached an all-time high of 34 percent. The population of ethnic minorities is currently growing at a much faster rate than the white majority and this trend is expected to continue. By the middle of the 21st century, the minority population will grow from one-third of the U.S. population to more than one-half (54%), more than 60 percent of the nation's children are expected to be members of minority groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008a).

The rise in ethnic and racial diversity in the United States is mirrored by student diversity throughout its educational system—from kindergarten through college. The rising diversity in America's schools is particularly noteworthy when viewed in light of the historical discrimination toward minority groups in the United States. In the early 19th century, education was not a right, it was a privilege available only to those who could afford to attend private schools. Members of certain minority groups were left out of the educational process altogether, or were forced to be educated in inferior, racially segregated schools. This separate and unequal system of American education continued until the groundbreaking Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which changed the face of education for people of color by ruling that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” The judicial decision made it illegal for Kansas and 20 other states to deliver education in segregated classrooms.

Each American ethnic group has a unique historical experience that contributed to the development of its particular culture. Thus, by incorporating ethnic diversity into our students' historical perspective, they learn about the diverse multicultural histories layered within our national history and the unique struggles that different groups of Americans endured to secure personal freedoms, human rights, and social justice. For instance, a multicultural historical perspective provides students with a clearer understanding of current-day concepts of race and racism. The expression “white race” did not make its historical appearance until it was introduced by Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries. Up to that point in time, the term was not used anywhere else in the world. America became a race-conscious nation in large part because of the expanding cotton industry needing more land—on which Native Americans were settled, and a greater labor force—which could be obtained inexpensively by using African American slaves. To meet their needs for land and labor, the white Anglo-Protestant upper class created and disseminated the idea of a privileged “white race” that was entitled to enslave people of color. Thus, the concept of a white race was originally devised by English settlers to gain socioeconomic advantages and to justify enslavement of African and Native Americans—who were deemed to be “uncivilized savages.” Subsequent waves of American immigrants who initially defined themselves as German, Irish, or Italian, gradually began to refer to themselves as “white” as they began to move up to higher levels of socioeconomic and political status (Feagin & Feagin, 2003).

“Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental.”

—W. E. B. Du Bois, African American sociologist, historian, and Civil Rights activist

“The Constitution of the United States knows no distinction between citizens on account of color.”

—Frederick Douglass, abolitionist, author, advocate for equal rights for all people, and former slave

Diversity from an International Perspective

International communication and interdependence among nations is growing as a result of advances in technology, international travel, and multinational corporations. As a result, acquiring an international perspective and developing intercultural competencies have become essential for career success in today's world and to effectively address our world's most pressing problems (e.g., global warming and international terrorism). Thus, the need for students to acquire an international perspective, cross-cultural awareness, and intercultural communication skills are probably more important today than at any other time in the history of American education. Unfortunately, much work needs to be done because American students lag behind students from other industrialized nations in international knowledge and skills (Bok, 2006). For instance, only 5 to 10 percent of American college graduates have basic competence in any language other than English, and approximately two-thirds of them have not taken a single course in international studies (Adelman, 2004).

Diversity from a Global Perspective

The diversity of humankind becomes strikingly apparent when viewed from a global perspective. If it were possible to reduce the world's population to a "village" of precisely 100 people, while keeping its ethnic and racial proportions exactly the same, this global village would have the following characteristics:

- 82 nonwhites and 18 whites
 - 67 non-Christians and 33 Christians
 - 60 Asians, 14 Africans, 12 Europeans, 8 Latin Americans, 5 Americans and Canadians, and 1 from the South Pacific
 - 51 males and 49 females
 - 80 live in substandard housing
 - 67 unable to read
 - 50 malnourished and 1 dying of starvation
 - 39 without access to sufficient sanitation
 - 33 without access to a safe water supply
 - 24 without any electricity; and, among the 76 with electricity, most would only be able to use it for light at night
 - 7 with access to the Internet
 - 1 with a college education
 - 1 with HIV
 - 5 in control of 32 percent of the entire world's wealth; all 5 are citizens of the United States
 - 33 attempt to live on just 3 percent of the world's total income
- (Meadows, 2005)

Reflection 1.7 Look back at the characteristics of the “global village.” Which of its characteristic(s) most surprised you?

Why?

A global perspective on diversity goes beyond just human diversity to include *biodiversity*—variations among all life forms that inhabit planet earth. Biodiversity exists because of *ecosystem* diversity—that is, all biological, climatic, geological, and chemical ingredients in the environment combine to maintain the life of plants and animals, whose life needs are met by interacting with all parts of the environmental system (Norse, 1990). Thus, the contemporary issue of environmental sustainability is actually a diversity issue that embraces both ecosystem diversity and, ultimately, biodiversity. The global significance of this issue is highlighted by the fact that the United Nations declared 2010 to be the “International Year of Biodiversity” (IYB) in order to raise global awareness that preservation of biodiversity requires the collective effort of every nation and all humankind (UNEP News Centre, 2010).

“Nature models interdependence in marvelous ways. The symbiotic processes of people taking in oxygen and releasing carbon dioxide, which is taken in by plants, which release oxygen. It seems that the world is trying to tell us something.”

—Komives, Lucas, & McMahon (2007)

Diversity from the Perspective of the Universe (Cosmos)

Human diversity on planet earth is mirrored by the cosmic diversity of the universe. Let us not forget earth is just one planet (the “third stone from the sun”), sharing a solar system with seven other planets—and it’s only one celestial body,

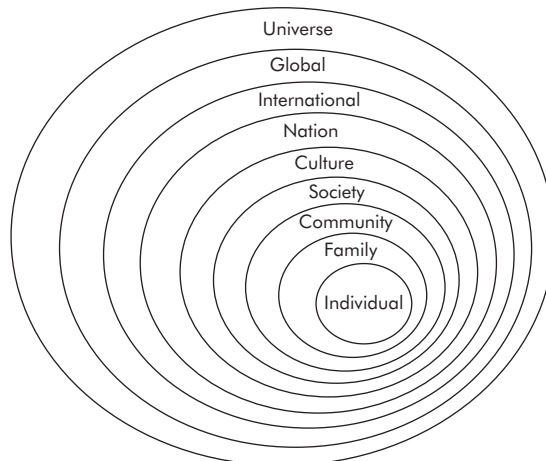


FIGURE 1.4

Diversity is represented in multiple strands and layers of the world—ranging from the individual to the universe.

sharing a galaxy with millions of other celestial bodies that include stars, moons, meteorites, and asteroids (Encrenaz et al., 2004). Thus, diversity is a natural and integral component of both our social and physical world.

Summary and Conclusion

Diversity refers to the wide variety of differences that exist among individuals and groups who comprise humanity (the human species). Humans can and do differ from one another in multiple ways, including physical features, religious beliefs, mental and physical abilities, national origins, social backgrounds, gender, and sexual orientation.

It's important to keep in mind that human *variety* and *similarity* coexist and complement one another. Thus, diversity education not only enhances appreciation of human differences; it also promotes awareness of universal aspects of the human condition that are common to all people—whatever their particular social or cultural background may be.

Racial diversity involves grouping humans into categories that are not scientifically based, but socially determined. There are no specific genes that differentiate one race from another; there is no “blood test” or genetic marker that can be used to detect a person's race. Humans have simply decided to classify themselves into “racial” categories on the basis of certain external differences in physical appearance, particularly the shade of their outer layer of skin.

An ethnic group is a group of people who share a distinctive culture (i.e., a particular set of shared traditions, customs, and social heritage). Unlike a racial group, whose members share physical characteristics that they are born with, the shared characteristics of an ethnic group are *learned* through shared social experiences. Thus, *ethnic diversity* refers to different groups of people with different cultural characteristics. Cultural differences can exist within the same society (multicultural society), within the same nation (domestic diversity), and across different nations (international diversity).

As with racial grouping, classifying groups of people into different ethnic groups can be very subjective and interpreted differently by different groups of people. Both race and ethnicity are arbitrary, socially constructed concepts that depend on how society perceives and treats certain social groups, which, in turn, affect how these groups perceive themselves. America will continue to struggle with this racial and ethnic group classification issue because, as its racial and ethnic diversity grows, members of different ethnic and racial groups will increasingly form cross-ethnic and interracial families.

Diversity also appears in the form of socioeconomic statuses (social class) that are typically stratified (divided) into lower, middle, or upper class, depending on its members' level of education and income. Discrepancies continue to exist in the level of income and education attained between members of majority and minority groups.

When diversity is viewed from an international perspective, the burgeoning “global economy” is creating a greater demand for workers with cross-cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills than at any other time in our nation’s history. Viewed from more than a strictly economic perspective, collaboration among diverse nations and cultures is now essential for preserving the planet (e.g., combating global warming or irreversible climate change) and protecting all people from the threat of international terrorism. America’s students lag behind students from other industrialized nations in international knowledge and foreign language skills, so much work needs to be done with our students to prepare them for these global challenges.

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Exercises

Create a Cultural Autobiography

Write a concise cultural autobiography based on your level of exposure to those who differ from you, how your cultural background has affected your values and beliefs, and whether you faced discrimination, stereotyping, or prejudice as a child. If you can think of a situation where you were not as tolerant as you should have been, note that as well.

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Match the Face with the Background

Form groups of fellow future educators now (and students in your classroom later) to conduct this exercise. Cut out pictures of faces from different sources (not recognizable or famous) that represent different cultures and ethnicities. Group members should study the faces and then offer a description of the person based on their perception.

Name

Age

Occupation

Family background

Friends

Education

Religion

Socioeconomic status

Political viewpoint

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