

The American Mosaic

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Do you ever wonder what is so unique about living in America? Compared to other countries our cultural, social, economic and political system enables us to lead free, self-determined lives. Our national consciousness and what contributes to our social and political stability will be discussed. In this class we will study the distinguishing characteristics of a national culture we call American Individualism. An overview of our country's transforming events, and great leaders in politics, literature, humanities, human rights, science and medicine, and art will be discussed to evaluate contributions made to create this unique and evolving American culture. We will examine our democratic community and how it draws on our diverse, pluralistic, civic, religious and secular traditions to make our country the great civilization that it is.

Whoever wants to know the hearts and minds of America had better learn baseball.

Jacques Barzun

We are now at the pint where we must decide whether we are to honor the concept of a plural society which gains strength through diversity, or whether we are to have bitter fragmentation that will result in perpetual tension and strife.

Earl Warren

America has believed that in differentiation, not in uniformity, lies the path of progress. It acted on this belief; it has advanced human happiness, and is has prospered.

Louis D. Brandeis

Religious Pluralism in America

What is Assimilation?

Assimilation refers to the integrative process many ethnic and racial groups experience by blending into the fabric of American culture. The process consists of inheriting the dominant culture's values, traditions, mores, beliefs, and social, psychological and perhaps religious/spiritual characteristics of their new culture.

What is the difference between melting pot and salad bowl? A melting pot refers to many cultures blending into one culture and salad bowl refers to the various culture groups remaining distinct from one another. I suspect the truth is somewhere in between; meaning that individuals can assume two identities by retaining their heritage and internalizing the new culture's value system.

The Origins of the Dominant Culture

In 1790 the first census was taken in America and it indicated that four million people were Caucasian. About eight out of 10 people were descendants of England and approximately 20% of the population represented African-Americans (700,000 slaves and 60,000 were free). The Caucasian population retained economic and political power. During the time of the American Revolution the Caucasian population was mostly English, Protestant and middle class. There is an acronym for this description, White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP). The emerging dominant American culture was described as English speaking and Western European. This group established the traditional values considered natural rights such as freedom, equality of opportunity, the pursuit of happiness and to be self-determined.

Assimilation of Non-Protestants and Non-Europeans

The immigrants who arrived by the millions in the 19th and 20th century came from poverty stricken countries of southern and eastern Europe, and included Catholics and Jews. Americans were threatened by these immigrants because they thought they wouldn't understand the values, culture and attempt to change our ways of living. At the turn of the century, the American economy was expanding and immigrants were able to find employment and improve their standard of living. As a result, immigrants more easily assimilated to American culture.

Religious Pluralism in America

To begin with, we need to acknowledge that all religions being practiced in the U.S. make important and meaningful contributions to American culture. These religions create a rich, cultural mosaic for us to learn new forms of religious expression. We can credit the Spanish for establishing the Catholic faith in the North American continent in the 1500's.

During the 1800's Catholic missionaries from Spain and Latin America arrived in what is now California and the southwest and these missionaries named some of the following cities:

San Francisco, Santa Fe and San Antonio

In the late 1800's European settlers started colonies on the east coast of North America. These settlers were mostly Protestants and presently they account for about two-thirds of all Christians.

The Protestant faith separated itself from the Roman Catholic Church in Europe in the 16th century. Reportedly, Protestants understood that everyone sins and must seek forgiveness from G-d rather than from a righteous, pious religious leader such as the Pope. This is the reason the Protestant Church broke from Roman Catholicism. For the Protestants, each individual was responsible for creating his/her own relationship with G-d. Eventually, the Protestants created separate denominations of their own which included Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians and the United Church of Christ.

Religious Diversity Among Protestantism

The Protestant Church believes that each individual, and not the church is the important element of religious life. The European Protestants reinforced this view that no single church is the one everyone needs to honor and worship. The

prevailing thought and expectation at the time was that everyone needed to be tolerant and accept the various forms of religious expression in America. It is for this reason we now enjoy religious pluralism.

Common Elements in Protestantism

In all Protestant denominations, the one value that has shaped American culture has been the focus on self-improvement. For Protestants who sin, they must ask G-d for forgiveness or receive eternal punishment for sinning. It's for this reason the emphasis is on admitting your sins and correcting your life.

Material Success and Self-Discipline

In the United States today, achieving material success is usually the outcome of self-improvement. American Protestants encourage individuals to work hard and be disciplined which contributes to the industrial success of America. Further, Protestants considered all forms of work done by Americans as important, including work done by farmers and merchants as important and holy. For the Protestants, self-discipline was a capacity in man and woman which was holy. The outcome of self-discipline was for individuals to save their money instead of spending it for immediate gratification. From this ideology came the Protestant Work Ethic.

Protestantism and Humanitarianism

The Protestant faith expects its followers to help the needy and disadvantaged while focusing on self-improvement. The expectation is that we become more loving human beings by assisting the needy, being charitable and by volunteering. Some examples include Andrew Carnegie, a wealthy businessman in the early 1900's who donated more than 300 million dollars to schools and universities, and to construct public libraries. John D. Rockefeller donated money to build the University of Chicago.

Born Again Christians and the Religious Right

If we look for examples to illustrate dramatic changes, to show self-improvement among Protestants, we say one is born again. Individuals who claim to be born again admit they were searching, perhaps confused and sinful. So, they opened their life to G-d and his son Jesus Christ before their lives changed completely. A percentage of Born Again Christians belong to the Protestant Church. The conservative Christians label themselves as The Moral Majority or The Religious Right or The Christian Right and they oppose legalized abortion and the ban on prayer in public schools.

Why Cultures Survive, Natural Rights and Liberty

Well, I think there's lots to be thankful for living in America and I'll try to explain it in this very brief historical-developmental piece. Let's start with defining culture as a shared system of symbolic knowledge where behavior is patterned from speech (language) and where predictable behavior patterns are established to nurture cultural stability (a fancy way of saying getting along with each other), in the form of cultural codes for social life, role expectations and social norms all for the purpose of creating predictability and survivability of the culture. Culture emerges because a people want to survive and live together on cooperative terms.

How about we call culture a social glue for now. The goal of social organization and cooperative behavior is to reduce the incidence of unpredictability in behavior of a culture and its people. We can discuss it also in terms of reducing uncertainty in behavior of a people which reduces chaos/anomie (social disorganization). Culture also creates social expectations among a group of people. Rules, social norms and values surface to increase conformity and unity. Culture is as a social bond that creates consistency in thought and action.

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

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

Historically our culture's roots began with the colonist's focus on liberty. The early colonists agreed that self-governance was a cultural value that resulted in the writing of the constitution and Declaration of Independence. The Civil War reflected a pivotal period in our history and culture because it represented a war about individual rights. Essentially, our country was divided around the issue of slavery and natural rights.

What is the one core value of American culture? It is natural right and the shared belief that everyone belongs. On the flip side, the pursuit of happiness through self-reliance and the belief that one should pursue his/her own destiny can lead one to be emotionally detached from his/her social institutions. A few authors label this phenomenon as a culture of narcissism or preoccupation with the private self which interferes with our desires to deepen our involvement in the lives of others. The other concern and natural outcome related to our culture's emphasis on individual rights and achievement is the belief in rugged individualism where one makes it on his/her own.

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

America in a Nutshell

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

Native Americans in North America British in New England Germans in Pennsylvania

Spanish in the Southwest Dutch in New York

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

Is It About Material Wealth?

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

Diversity

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

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

Think about this: Do Americans see diversity as a strength or a phenomenon that has the potential to enrich our lives and learn more about our special and unique life-ways? I think one of the greatest virtues of America is the limited power of government and church, thereby eliminating any notions of an ideology that may be consistent with an aristocracy or autocratic government. America enables you and me to express our individualism, to be free and control our own destiny without government interference. I put it like this: Americans are self-directed and self-determined. I suppose this only applies to you if you are goal directed and your behavior is purposeful. Know what I mean?

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

Equality of Opportunity

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

The Socialization Experience in Mainstream America

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

What is Social Constructionism?

Social constructionism is a fancy way of saying there are no universal truths about human beings and nature. This is because human beings design and construct their world based on their cultural filters; the unique features of their people. If all cultures were the same we'd have universal truths and we don't have universal truths. One can argue there are moral absolutes; moral absolutes such as every human being, regardless of where they live in the world or what culture they are a member of needs to have access to food, be treated with dignity and to have their life be perceived as sacred.

The Modern Malaise

If we surveyed Americans, estimates would indicate that about 80% of us would admit we're under stress in our lives. The lifestyles we lead, including long commutes to work, dissatisfying jobs, anxiety and uncertainty about whether we'll be laid off, and concerns over our children's welfare can overload our system. At many turns, we're needing to manage a concern before it becomes a crisis. Consequently, some turn to over the counter drugs to cope and relieve anxiety and worries, and the tranquilizer Valium remains one of the most frequently prescribed medication. These are all ephemeral—quick, temporary fixes to serious complicated problems that will only re-emerge unless we make genuine, enduring lifestyle modifications.

In addition, estimates indicate that 13 million Americans are problem drinkers. The American Medical Association estimates that half of the revenue for medical services spent annually is due to unhealthy lifestyles. Let's call this condition the malaise of contemporary times. The furious pace we're maintaining just to keep pace with societal changes can lead to exhaustion. Invariably, we experience life as complicated, impersonal and ever-changing; not allowing us to appreciate our commitments to family and friends. The existential vacuum we feel trapped in produces feelings of alienation and despair in a seemingly impersonal world. The pervasive feeling of helplessness leaves us powerless and wishing to be rescued. Remember—despite all of us experiencing stress in our daily lives, stress only becomes unbearable and a tremendous burden if you feel you have lost control—that you cannot impact healthy, adaptive change to find meaning, fulfillment and purpose in life.

The confusion we experience may result from our conflicts around what we really want out of life. If what you're after is guided by society's prescribed values— the big house, a European luxury car and magnificent vacations every year; and you've had an epiphany; a breakthrough experience that's illuminated your misguided direction in life, then get back in the saddle with your compass and head in a different direction. You must realize that society often prescribes values and achievements for us—and that unless you stop, regroup and ask yourself if pursuing these societal values adds meaning and purpose in your life, you'll be achieving for others and not necessarily you. You need to achieve and live for you—not society or your employer.

Asking the Ultimate Question: What is my Purpose in Life?

What is the purpose of your life? You can begin by asking yourself what are the values that drive your life? By doing so—you'll see that values such as integrity, trustworthiness, honesty, responsible, spiritual and kindness will touch the lives of others in meaningful ways and, in part fulfill your pursuit of purpose in life. You then assert the purpose of your life is to be an outstanding performer at work by being honest, responsible and doing your job with integrity. Others around you will benefit from your honest work—they will feel more satisfied working with you.

In short—all of us want to lead value driven lives. However, some of us are so consumed with work, pacing furiously to get ahead, raising healthy kids and managing our schedules that we don't stop and ask those compelling questions. We spin and spin—not stopping to hydrate with a replenishing drink, and renewing our systems. Underneath, a lingering sense of futility and disillusionment pervades your outlook on life and it causes you to be confused about where you're going. You painfully realize there's a large gap between what you expect in life and what you actually have. A moment of such insight is invaluable, and it should compel you to ask the ultimate question: Is this all there is to my life? Ideally—you stop spinning, hydrate and before getting back in the saddle of your bicycle, you re-evaluate your expectations, short/ long term goals and purpose in life. The value in experiencing such an epiphany is that it promotes genuine, lasting lifestyle changes—the kind that generates more moments of happiness, contentment and meaning in life.

However, regardless of how much self-direction and self-determination you exercise in America, making it in this great country isn't easy. Many of us are uncertain about our jobs, the rising interest rate, terrorism, our children's performance, the cost of gas and crime. In short, uncertainty and chronic exposure to these sources of stress keeps us vigilant—and for some, produces feelings of helplessness. In it's most extreme, one can experience degrees of loss of control in life accompanied by the more serious existential questions like:

1. What am I doing with my life?
2. Is this life I'm leading really fulfilling for me?
3. What is my darn purpose in life?
4. Am I out of control?
5. Who will I become if I keep heading this way?

The Meaning of Culture

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

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

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

Language

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

Types of Subcultures

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

Knowledge, Beliefs and Values

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Individualism and Expressive Individualism

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

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

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

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

Why We Need Each Other to Feel Good About Ourselves

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

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

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

Agents of Socialization

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

Primary and Secondary Socialization

Mom and dad raising you is called *primary socialization*. Enlisting in any branch of the armed services represents *secondary socialization*. Attending law school or a police academy are other examples of secondary socialization experiences. You could even call marriage a secondary socialization experience. All I want to say about marriage is that it's an institution based on romantic love. If you think about how we select our marital partners in Western culture, you'll realize we pretty much choose our mates based on homogamy. *Homogamy* is a word referring to the tendency for people who share similar social characteristics to marry each other.

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

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

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

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

Self-Acceptance and Self-Esteem

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

The Importance of Belonging

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

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

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

Belonging to Groups

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

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

Social Differentiation and Social Class

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

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

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

Wealth

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

Power

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

Prestige

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

The unfortunate, unavoidable reality is that social differentiation leads to *social inequality*. Remember the categories that were created based on personal, biological and physical differences? Well, individuals in society created a ranking system to classify these differences. The problem, however, with this ranking system is in the social meaning individuals assign to the ranked characteristics. What worries me is what we do with the social meaning associated with being African-American, Asian, and Hispanic, affluent or living in poverty, young or old. I know about these social meanings and the effects they have on individuals being ranked. Imagine people's race determining where they are ranked in the system. It sounds unfair to me. The assumption one makes when ranking others based on race is that an individual's behavior is determined by their physical characteristics.

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

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

