

What is Cultural Diversity?

Why is there such a disparity between the progress that people in power claim they want to enact a diverse culture and what they actually end up doing about it? Part of the problem is that it doesn't seem that anyone has settled on what diversity actually means, it is used in far too many contexts. Is it a variety of types of people on the stages of awards shows and in the boardrooms of Fortune 500 companies? Is it raw numbers? Is it who is in a position of power to hire and fire and shape external and internal cultures? Is it who isn't in power, but might be someday?



What is cultural diversity? Diversity is nothing more than a difference from the majority. In any culture there is a majority and many minorities. Culture is a set of norms that set standards for a society of what is acceptable behavior.

In every culture there are basic standards for social interaction such as personal space distance, eye contact, amount of body language displayed in public, negotiating style, etc. In America, we stand about eighteen inches apart when engaged in normal conversation; prefer very direct eye contact; are pretty demonstrative with body language and negotiate very directly always asking the other party for their "bottom line". In other cultures they may stand closer or farther than we are comfortable, may view direct eye contact as rude, be more or less open to displaying body language and negotiate more indirectly.

In America, many of us have a peculiar habit of assuming that those who differ from our norms are wrong. We tend to view the world from a rather myopic view leading to those outside this country calling us "Ugly Americans".

Cultural diversity makes our country richer by making it a more interesting place in which to live. Just think how boring a meal would be without Chinese, Mexican, Japanese, Italian, German, French or Indian food!

Cultural diversity also makes our country stronger and better able to compete in the new global economy. People from diverse cultures bring language skills, new ways of thinking, creative solutions to difficult problems and negotiating skills.

In the past, ethnographers in the United States used to refer to our country as a melting pot where new immigrants would eventually be fully integrated into the American culture. This has obviously not happened so modern researchers have not begun to talk about America as a garden salad where different cultural diversity mixes with the European American culture to form a meal where all of the various ingredients are still readily identifiable.

Cultural diversity makes the United States a much more interesting place in which to live for all of its inhabitants. Thankfully we have diversity.

If we all thought alike imagine how boring the world would be ...