

Diversity and demographic characteristics



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A fundamental principle of social psychology is that each of us is continually under the pressure of social influence and diversity. Not only when we are in the presence of others, but even in our most private moments, we are subject to social pressures such as social roles, norms, and types of diversity. As William Shakespeare put it, ‘ All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.’ In this social drama, our particular social background and diversity determines the audiences to which each of us plays and provides us with norms that specify how we should act in the parts that we have been assigned. The combined pressure of these social characteristics and diversity characteristics determines how we behave.

1. Ethnicity

Most Americans can trace their ancestry back to some country across the oceans or the Mexican-American or Canadian-American borders. Each ethnic group has enriched our culture with its own particular types of music, food, customs, and dress. People concerned about and committed to improving intergroup relations must guard against such clichés as “ I’m not prejudiced” and “ I treat all people the same.” Even the most “ liberal” individuals do not treat all people the same (Campbell 1971). It is behaviors, not attitudes, which comprise the major intergroup problems. There are many laws against discriminatory behaviors, but there are none against prejudicial attitudes.

What most writers commonly call race relations should be properly understood in the larger context of human relations. Of particular concern should be the expression of negative attitudes and behavior by people toward others according to their identification as members of a particular

group. The expression of these attitudes and behavioral patterns is not innate but is learned as a part of the cultural process. Because of this, hope that they can be modified is justified. Negative group attitudes and destructive group conflicts are less likely to arise when people treat each other as individuals and respond to each other on the basis of individual characteristics and behavior.

In most organizations, English is the only prescribed language. Employees whose first language is not English are expected to leave their native language at the door before entering the organization. This is especially harsh on immigrants. The theory behind the speak-English-only norm is obvious – it is believed that if immigrants speak only English they will be able to interact better with the other employees. Employers who support such behavior fail to understand – or dismiss it if they know it – that forced exposure to a new language can sometimes impede acquisition of communication skills in that language.

Today with rapid communication and increased mobility, with the findings of science and the events of history generally made known, people everywhere are becoming aware of the alternatives to old ways. They have access to facts of history and interpretations of science that were previously unknown or unavailable to them. There have thus been opened up to them new conceptions of their behaviors. Much of the turmoil of the world today can be traced to the fact that modern communications and mobility have made people everywhere aware of cultural alternatives. All of these things are of the greatest significance in changing patterns of individual behavior.

2. Religion

According to Campbell (1975), religion is one of the major components of social evolution. Religious preaching, indoctrination, and moralizing serve to shift the direction of individual behavior away from personal, selfish goals and toward the more socially oriented ends that are necessary to perpetuate society. Campbell even suggested that to counteract the innate selfishness of human nature, religion's preaching of concern for others must be extreme. The controlling function of religion is apparent in the views of Marx, Freud, and Campbell. For all three, religion is a social creation; it is passed on from generation to generation by social influence. It serves to restrain some (Marx) or all (Freud and Campbell) people from acting on selfish, aggressive impulses.

A behavioral influence analysis seems to provide clear, simple answers to two basic questions: Where does personal religion come from? Any why? The answers: It comes from society through the pressure of social roles, norms, and reference groups. It functions to keep individuals from acting only to meet their personal wants and needs.

Anyone who has seen the clothes and gestures of fans leaving a rock concert, knows the power of identification. It can be a powerful force in religious life as well. It can lead people to try their utmost to follow in the footsteps of an esteemed religious leader – the Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad. It can also lead people to talk and even to think about religion like their parents or like an admired minister, priest, rabbi, teacher, or friend.

Is our behavior a result of our personal free will or is it determined by environmental influences? The press of our environment, and especially religion influence, contributes to who people are as individuals. Religious influence contributes to making people who they are. It affects the way people see the world, the way they think, what they want, and what they choose to do, in what way they behave. Religion serves important functions at the personal behavior; most notably, it helps the individual deal with existential questions.'

3. Gender

When sex differences in behaviors are found, they often result from gender stereotypes. Consider, for example, the common finding that men report more sexual partners than women do (Wiederman 1997). Does this reflect a real sex difference, or does it indicate instead that when responding to surveys, men and women respond in ways that conform to gender stereotypes? If common stereotypes portray men to be more "promiscuous" and interested in sex than women, then perhaps men and women describe themselves consistent with these stereotypes. Men's tendency to report more sexual partners than women may also indicate that men boast (and perhaps lie) more than women do about their sexual "conquests."

Gender refers to society's idea of how boys or girls or men and women are expected to behave and should be treated (Diamant 1998). A sex role is the acting out of one's biological predisposition, while a gender role is the acting out of social norms or expectations, whether or not they coincide with personal urges or preferences. Gender identity refers to how an individual

sees himself or herself as fulfilling these societal expectations. The descriptive terms often used in this regard are relative to masculinity and femininity.

Gender has everything to do with the society in which one lives and may or may not have much to do with biology (Diamant 1998). Male may be reared as a boy but grow to live as a woman. One's gender is socially taught, imposed, or chosen. Gender divergence or dimensional concordance for both genders refers to bisexuality. Celibate individuals may identify as failing somewhere on this plane based on their feelings, fantasies, or political views. People who have sexual feelings or engage in stigmatized behaviors may proclaim or be assigned a social identity (Diamant 1998). In repressive cultures, public sexual behavior may be inconsistent with personal attraction or identity, and socially unacceptable feelings may be suppressed or unrecognized for years.

4. Personality traits

Personality traits change over time, but for most traits and for most individuals, the changes are unlikely to be large (Buss 90). A young human child who is high in sociability would be just as sociable as an adolescent. Such stability is infrequent among traits, the typical pattern being an increase in the intensity or frequency of the behavior that defines the trait or less frequently, a decrease in intensity or frequency (emotionality, for example). A highly active infant, being observed several years later, would be considered highly active only if there were an increase in tempo and vigor.

As youngsters mature, their behavioral tendencies are assumed to follow one path rather than another, and the groove of each path is assumed to deepen with the passing years. The longer one remains within a deepening groove, the more difficult it is to shift to another pathway. Such an inertial tendency of personality traits surely lends stability to behavior.

Concerning learning, once conditioning has occurred, it can be maintained by a low schedule of reinforcement, which means that old habits – personality traits – die hard. Conditioned avoidance is especially refractory to change because the individual stays away from the fearful situations and so never extinguishes the avoidance response.

The behavior of others is an obvious determinant of one's social behavior. Their reactions tend to be stereotyped, which facilitates constancy of social behavior in those involved with them. Thus if the other primates in the immediate group tend to be submissive, the alpha male is likely to continue to be dominant. Human families become accustomed to the behavior of its members, and their behavior and expectations act as a damper on change.

Thus if an adolescent male suddenly dresses neatly and attends closely to his hair and fingernails, his parents, siblings, and friends are likely to comment on the change and perhaps even tease him. Clearly, the expectations of others can be a conservative force, for they usually wish us to behave as we have in the past. Significant changes in our personality traits would require them to develop new means of dealing with us, and so they behave toward us in a manner that rewards stability and consistency.

Thus the inertial tendencies of others may contribute to the stability of behavior.