



# Diversity, Oppression, and Change

## *Culturally Grounded Social Work*

THIRD EDITION

Flavio Francisco Marsiglia · Stephen S. Kulis · Stephanie Lechuga-Peña



OXFORD

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*Flavio Francisco Marsiglia, Stephen S. Kulis and  
Stephanie Lechuga-Peña*

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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*This book is dedicated to our parents Lucía & Flavio Antonio; Dottie; and Carolina & William—who taught us so much about cultural diversity and resiliency.*



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# PREFACE

This book introduces a culturally grounded approach to social work practice. It explores cultural diversity and its relationship to oppression and transformative action in the context of social work education at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The book was born in part out of the need for a text that explicitly addresses the dynamic intersectionalities among identities based on race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, religion, and ability status. The culturally grounded perspective presented here aims at making accessible culturally specific ways of helping that are not generally part of mainstream social work practice methods. In these pages, we present the social worker as a learner and as an advocate capable of integrating community assets as the foundation for any intervention.

Most social work programs infuse cultural diversity content throughout their courses, and many require students to take courses that specifically examine cultural diversity, oppression, and race and ethnicity. We have participated in the design of diversity-specific courses and currently teach a course entitled Diversity and Oppression in the Social Work Context. This book emerged out of these teaching experiences, the burgeoning literature on the subject, findings from our own culturally grounded professional practice and research, and the shared perspectives gained from dialogue with students, community members, and colleagues. The book attempts to improve social work practice by breaking through the compartmentalized methods that we currently use to teach social work practice, policy, and research.

Because many readers are members or allies of oppressed groups who often travel across real or imaginary cultural boundaries, these materials are presented not out of a postcolonial need to explain identity groups to the uninformed, but rather as a means of viewing cultural diversity as a strength within current social work practice. We have purposely attempted to avoid the laundry-list approach of reviewing one by one all cultural groups and identities. That method runs the risk of omitting, underemphasizing, or overemphasizing certain groups. Instead, we stress concepts that are applicable in a variety of social contexts and with different cultural communities while at the same time reviewing core cultural norms of selected groups as illustrations or examples of those concepts.

Increasingly, social work circles and allied professions approach culturally grounded social work as a form of practice deliberately embedded in the culture of the client. Over time, this approach has emerged as an indigenous alternative response to Eurocentric approaches to social work that rely on an implicit Westernized belief that there can and should be a mainstream, standardized, and culturally neutral form of practice, one that focuses on the materialistic and individual aspects of human beings (Schiele, 1997). Culturally grounded social work is firmly rooted in the rich soil of culture in all of its manifestations. This book facilitates a process of gaining awareness about the nutrients present in that fertile ground and suggests attitudes and behaviors for culturally grounded social work practice.

Although the point of departure and key focus of this book is ethnicity and race, the text infuses crosscutting content on gender, sexual orientation, ability status, and social class. The main purpose of this integration is to advance the concept of intersectionality—that is, the belief that humans form identities that are culturally multidimensional and beautifully complex. For example, at an intake interview, a European American female social worker forms initial impressions of Sharon as a middle-class African American heterosexual woman, but learns that she identifies herself as Afro-Caribbean lesbian. Sharon wants to discuss the pressure she feels to define herself according to society's rigid classifications of race, gender, and sexual orientation. By listening to her story, the social worker starts to understand who Sharon is and honestly questions, revises, and dismisses the preconceived ideas or labels she initially imposed on her client.

This book is as much about social workers as it is about the people they work with, but the clients are the focus of the inquiry. It is the social worker rather than the consumer or client who is "the other"—not to induce guilt, but as an exercise in awareness. This personal awareness enables social workers to overcome obstacles that may arise when there are cultural differences between them and those they work with. Professionals may or may not share the norms and values of the individuals and communities they encounter, but ethically they need to avoid imposing their own values on them and attempt to engage with oppressed and vulnerable populations in a competent, empathetic, and supportive fashion.

Regardless of one's cultural roots, as products and members of academe, all practitioners are subject to the acculturative effects of higher education. This influence can lead to the adoption of White-, heteronormative-, male-, and middle class-oriented attitudes that can create barriers with their communities of origin and the people they serve. This book provides social workers and allied practitioners with an understanding of the complex intersectionalities of identities through the introduction of culturally grounded social work practice. Adopting an intersectionality lens will help social workers to work effectively in collaboration with individuals and communities from different cultural backgrounds.

Throughout the text, readers will ask themselves the existential question, "Who am I?" Answering this question entails an ongoing examination of perceptions of self vis-à-vis one's clients. Through this journey, social workers will ask themselves how individuals, families, groups, and communities perceive them. Whom, and what, do they represent through their professional interactions? Issues of race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability status—both their own status and that of their clients—are key factors

that influence how they answer these questions. This self-awareness also helps practitioners maintain their honesty and professional competency.

This text invites readers to see themselves as agents of change in partnership with individuals, groups, and communities. To help readers embrace such a role fully and competently, the text delves into the history and contemporary experiences of selected communities. Oppression and inequality provide the essential context in which culturally grounded social work practice takes place. Social work as a profession helps individuals and communities move toward liberation in the manner advocated by the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire—that is, by recognizing both the roots of the oppression and the collective and individual resources for social action and lasting change.

We approach culture as a source of individual and community strength and as the well-spring of identity, which nurtures humans on their individual and collective journeys. Culture is also a lens through which people understand their lives, needs, and possibilities, and a framework through which they construct their dreams and gain the support necessary to make them a reality. Culture may also contain restrictions, constraints, and negative messages that can become the basis for differentiation, scapegoating, and oppression. Effective practitioners approach the cultural views and beliefs of their clients with honest curiosity. They see cultural differences not as a barrier to be overcome, bypassed, altered, or finessed, but instead as a needed resource to be tapped by the professional in order to achieve effective social work practice. In situations in which cultural narratives are perpetuating oppressive norms and values, the social worker's role is to invite clients to examine more deeply the foundation or genesis of their cultural assumptions.

In Western societies, the word “culture” is commonly associated with tangible objects or artifacts. For example, an impressionist painting or a European opera is considered high culture, while reality television shows and popular music are seen as examples of low culture. We approach culture in a more expansive way, as a very dynamic and collective process. Culture inspires and connects people, it is spoken and unspoken, and it is preserved and passed on through symbols and symbolism. It needs boundaries to survive and to be identifiable. Its boundaries, however, are dynamic and are constantly shifting, sometimes producing new sets of insiders and outsiders. Culture requires interpretation and a context for those interpretations; it needs a community in order to exist and transform itself. Culture is so pervasive that it is a constant factor in the social worker–client relationship.

In our postmodern times, we understand culture as a multidimensional and multilayered phenomenon—as the sum of many levels of meaning. An individual's culture is the result of the intersection of factors such as race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, acculturation status, immigration status, religion, and social class. Cultures have a history and share narratives about their origins and their present. For that reason, it is important to examine the oppression of non-dominant culture groups from historical and sociological perspectives. An outsider seeking basic information about an individual's cultural background may perceive intersectionality as a confusing web of meanings that do not always align. The outsider may ask, “What—or which group—are you?” The question presumes the existence of simplistic unidimensional labels that capture a person's identity. Intersectionality, however, requires a different type of question: “Who are you?” This

question goes beyond old labels and honors the ways in which people explain and make sense of their lives, identities, and intersectionalities. Every individual is the product of a complex collection of identities that draw from many different types of heritages and from membership in different social groups. Individuals then make sense and reconcile these identities in unique ways. The pronoun “who” is a reminder that individuals are not objects and that it is through culture and their narratives that they become fully and uniquely human.

An anti-oppressive social work stance also challenges us to ask ourselves, “For what purpose?” Too often, social work interventions merely address the individual symptoms of a much larger structural issue. To address oppression, social workers look past its observable consequences (e.g., depression, unemployment, domestic violence) to address larger structural elements that maintain inequality. By identifying oppressive conditions in partnership with communities, culturally grounded social work facilitates real and lasting social change that builds a more just society. Culturally grounded social work shares much with the anti-oppressive practice (AOP) model, which has been widely used in Australia, Canada, England, and other countries of the Commonwealth since the 1970s (Dominelli, 1998), as well as more recently in the United States (Hines, 2012). AOP aims at the “eradication of oppression through institutional and societal changes” (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005, p. 436). Our proposed approach shares with AOP an emphasis on the unique cultural and historical experiences of communities and individuals in the conceptualization of social work practice and research (Graham, Shier, & Brownlee, 2012).

Cultural identity formation is a process or journey through which individuals integrate their contextual experiences within their communities of origin and communities of choice. We present social work practice as having a liberating role when it operates in partnership with oppressed cultural communities at the micro, *mezzo*, and macro ecological levels. This book highlights the multiple layers of meaning and the ever-changing nature of culture. It rejects static definitions of culture based on labels and outsiders’ perspectives of “what” the other is. Instead, it proposes a narrative approach whereby the professional learns how to listen and comes to understand step by step “who” the client is.

Traditional ways of labeling or describing a person’s culture, such as referring to an individual’s race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, or social class, are reflections or products of a social structure that produces privilege and oppression. At the same time, these characteristics of individuals are key sources of identity, peoplehood, and support. We encourage social work and other allied professions to embrace the “who” paradigm and, in partnership with communities, overcome the “what” paradigm that deters change and perpetuates oppression. Labels imposed from the outside can be a source of oppression, while the embrace of identities can be a source of strength and can carry the promise of liberation.

We present information about selected communities and identity groups while examining attitudes toward difference and culturally specific professional attitudes and behaviors. The text provides both theoretical foundations and specific approaches for a humanistic social work practice that recognizes the strengths and resiliency inherent in the cultures of individuals, groups, and communities.

The overall aims of this book are

1. To provide a foundation for culturally grounded social work practice;
2. To explain how the intersectionality of social factors affects the client;
3. To foster an understanding of how the intersectionality of factors affects the social worker;
4. To strengthen critical thinking skills to better understand ourselves, other individuals, communities, and the broader society; and
5. To provide readers with the knowledge and skills needed to move beyond cultural awareness into social action and change.

The content of this book is organized into four main areas: (1) an introduction to the culturally grounded approach, (2) a review of the key theories on which the approach rests, (3) an exploration of key identity factors, and (4) an application of the culturally grounded approach to the social work profession.

We present examples and illustrations of key concepts throughout the text. The purpose of these case studies is to promote critical thinking and integration of knowledge. These case studies can be used to conduct small-group class exercises or for individual reflection. This is a possible discussion guide:

1. Summarize the content. What does it say?
2. Share your reactions to the material, both intellectual (e.g., *vis-à-vis* new or old knowledge, confusion, stimulation) and emotional (e.g., anger, sadness, happiness, validation).
3. Universalize the content. What are the broad implications of this content for the broader society and for specific communities and groups?
4. Personalize the content. What are the applications and implications for you as an individual and as a professional?
5. Discuss other social work practice, policy, and research implications.

We encourage readers to integrate the content of this book by asking themselves throughout, “How do the concepts and issues presented here apply to the communities I am working with?” Further, we encourage you to use your own personal experiences and the narratives you collect from your work with diverse communities as the compass that guides your efforts to become a culturally grounded practitioner.

This book is a tool among many other tools for exploring the richness of cultural identities. The dynamic nature of culture challenges us to be aware of and open to changing ideas about diversity in our communities. As society evolves, oppressed communities identify and implement new ways to embrace and to give voice to their shared identities. As a result, the words and labels that describe the communities can change over time, reflecting new understandings of the common sources of their identities, expanded categories of membership, and empowerment within the communities to define who they are.

Members of the same community may self-identify in more than one way. For example, among Latinx in the United States, some members may prefer to self-identify as Hispanic, Chicana/Chicano, Mexican American, or Latinx, focusing on cultural, historical, or political roots. The emergence and widespread adoption of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning) to refer to sexual and gender minorities explicitly

recognizes with each letter the diversity of the community. Many core identities develop and solidify during adolescence and young adulthood; this can create generational differences in how members of the same communities define themselves. As many communities reclaim the power to determine how they self-identify, rather than accepting terms imposed on them from outside, we become more fully and acutely aware of how oppressive labels are. One lesson for practitioners is to listen closely and honor how clients self-identify and be attentive to language and terms that cause discomfort or offense. When we come from outside the community, we may fear that we will offend clients because of a lack of familiarity with the community and changes in the preferred terms for describing identities. While honoring those feelings, it is important to maintain a focus on the client's struggles, not our own, and allow the clients to narrate their identity journeys.

As authors of this book, we are aware that terms that we employ to describe members of oppressed communities may be lacking or even offensive to some. Language can be inadequate in finding terms that are short and descriptive, yet encompass the diversity within the community, match current understanding of the community's position in society, and reflect how members of the community actually think of themselves. If we use a term that is uncomfortable for you as a reader, please let us know about it. You may also consider it an opportunity for an open discussion in class. For example, we use the term *Latinx* to refer to all people of Latin American or Hispanic ancestry living in the United States. Because the Spanish language is gender sensitive, when we refer only to females we use the term *Latina/s*, and for males we use *Latino/s*. When referring to members of the community in general, regardless of their gender, we decided to use the gender neutral and more inclusive term *Latinx* rather than some alternatives used commonly in the recent past, such as *Latino/a* or *Latinos/as*. We encourage you to explore the origins of different terms and how members of the community, over time, have embraced, altered, replaced, or rejected them. When possible, we use more than one term to refer to a specific group in an attempt to honor different perspectives.

As part of our emphasis on intersectionality, we approach identity formation as a personal journey within a specific community. A process often shaped by membership in multiple communities, whether defined around ethnicity/race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, religion, or ability status. In a rapidly evolving field of study, we know that this edition does not cover all terms or perspectives on identity and diversity. We aim, however, to be as inclusive as possible and have made a concerted effort to incorporate emerging empowering language. Please, keep the communication channels open. We appreciate your feedback and take every comment and suggestion seriously. Thank you! We wish you a fruitful journey.

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PART

1

**CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND  
SOCIAL WORK**



# CULTURE

Culture and cultural differences have historically had a major influence on the development of modern nations. Current international issues such as immigration, globalization, violence, and wars sparked by ethnic and religious conflict, as well as fast-developing economies, are increasingly challenging our understanding of cultural diversity. As ideas about cultural diversity broaden in scope, we ask ourselves anew how culture affects the way people think and behave. Social workers recognize culture as a source of strength for individuals and communities, but at the same time, we see how cultural differences accentuate ethnic boundaries, leading to discrimination, isolation, and a lack of access to resources for vulnerable clients. Cultural differences may also build a barrier between the social worker and the client. If the professionals do not acknowledge the social class and cultural differences that might exist between them and their clients, they will not be able to work effectively with their clients. Cultural competency not only helps us to understand how culture affects the client, but it also helps us to move beyond simple cultural labels and develop a sense of the cultural identity of the client. Although social workers can never be fully knowledgeable about all other cultures, which would be challenging if not impossible, they can have “cultural competence,” or the awareness of difference and a genuine acknowledgment of not knowing. Culturally competent social work practice creates a space for dialogue and exploration of each person’s experience, which results from multiple intersecting identities. This chapter provides an introductory understanding of culture. It reviews different perspectives on how culture influences behavior and how social workers can acknowledge cultural differences and acquire the skills necessary to work with members of different cultural backgrounds.

When asked to describe their culture, social work students offer an array of revealing responses. They are likely to mention personal qualities or personality characteristics, such as distinctive ways of communicating and expressing emotion (e.g., “We are comfortable with loud disagreements,” “We all hug a lot”). Some refer to their shared social work values, such as the value they place on helping others. Still others connect culture to family but cast it in terms of the roles they play as daughters, sons, or parents (e.g., “We are always there for

each other”). The question puzzles other students as they wonder if they belong to a distinctive culture at all. The students who respond by explicitly connecting their own culture to race, ethnicity, gender, social class, or sexual orientation tend to come from groups that are not part of the dominant culture. For example, students are more likely to describe their culture as Japanese American, Jewish, African American, or gay rather than as upper-middle class, heterosexual, or White. As the class discussion progresses, it often becomes clear that some students feel uncomfortable identifying any cultural differences that set them apart from others. The implicit message is that by deemphasizing those differences, they overcome obstacles to understanding one another and become better social workers.

The discomfort and avoidance surrounding the topic of culture have many possible sources: difficulty in finding the right vocabulary, a fear of creating distance, or reluctance to acknowledge the cultural differences and power differentials that exist between social workers and their clients. Although it is genuinely difficult and uncomfortable to talk about cultural differences, conversations about culture are necessary rehearsals for honoring the cultural differences between the social worker and the client that are an essential part of social work practice.

Recognizing the influence of culture is a necessary first step to the application of a culturally grounded approach. Culture and cultural differences are elusive topics in part because culture is both an outcome and a process that arises from the meaningful interaction of people. Culture is a group’s distinctive way of life as reflected in its language, values, and norms of behavior. Although cultural background influences the way people think and act, many take these cultural influences for granted and often are unaware of their profound impact on their lives and the lives of others. Members of non-dominant cultures, however, do not have the privilege of forgetting about their cultural background. Their minority status is always present, affecting their daily thoughts, conversations, and interactions, and it is a reminder that others view and treat them as different. In this book, the term “minority” is not used in a numerical sense but in a sociological sense. In the United States and other countries, to be a racial or ethnic minority indicates less power and a lower social and economic status compared with other groups, particularly vis-à-vis the White majority. Likewise, when the term “majority” is used, it is not used in a numerical sense but reflects the concentration of power, privilege, and a history of oppressive practices of a group toward other groups. The same meaning is attached to the term “minority” when it is applied to gender: Women are the numerical majority in the world, but their lower status in most societies and their historical oppression make them a minority group. Minority, thus, is not used here to indicate that a group is less than anyone else. It is not an adjective about the group, but it describes the group’s status in a given social structure; it refers to power and oppression, not self-worth. For example, racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States have rich legacies of contributions to the larger society that make the country what it is today.

Still, culture is much more than a way of distinguishing groups according to their differences. Culture not only is a distinctive set of prescriptions about how to act and what to expect in the world, but also is a source of strength and inspiration that helps people cope with the daily stressors they face. When social workers welcome culture into the client–worker relationship, they allow for the utilization of the full range of resources that clients bring with them and a more accurate interpretation of behavior.

Culture is born out of behaviors that communities repeat and encode. Eventually those behaviors take on symbolic value. Codes are the identifiable categories of behaviors or practices repeated over time. For example, in Iranian culture, as in many other non-Western cultures, male friends and family members greet each other with two kisses, signifying familiarity, friendship, and trust in their culture. In many countries, people wear black as a sign of mourning. In Egyptian culture, people use their right hand to interact with others; for anyone to use the left would be offensive. In many Asian cultures, one handles business cards using both hands; presenting a card using only one hand would be disrespectful. These codes become the backbone of culture. After certain behaviors and their corresponding norms and values become familiar to a cultural group, its members develop expectations about what practices are appropriate in given situations. Some of these expectations can become resources and strengths that nurture, protect, and inspire individuals and community members toward social participation and well-being. Although those codes or behaviors are easily recognizable among members of a cultural group (insiders), they can easily go unrecognized by members of another cultural group (outsiders). Even to insiders, these codes may be so commonplace that community members might overlook them as part of their culture, which can present a challenge when these norms and values perpetuate oppressive narratives and behaviors.

Culture provides the filters through which women and men look at their lives and the lives of those in their social environments. Cultures are identifiable constellations of shared ideas and values and of how people interpret the world around them, and are a guide to how they are expected to think and behave in their community. Culture allows people to share their interpretations of the past as well as the future. These shared ideas and beliefs change over time and are connected to a particular geographic place and a particular time in history. Culture is dynamic and is constantly evolving in its social and political context. Different members of a cultural group often relate in different ways to their common culture: Individuals vary in their level of adherence to the collective norms and often may have their own unique interpretations of the cultural worlds they inhabit. It is therefore important for social workers to understand the value of culture and its influence on individuals, but it is also important for social workers to be aware of these potential individual differences within a cultural group so that they do not perpetuate cultural or group stereotypes. Cultural awareness is a necessary first step for social workers as they navigate with humility the uncharted waters of unfamiliar cultures. It helps them recognize and decipher cultural codes and assess their own competency level to be of help. This first step is essential for developing high levels of professional competence and effectiveness.

## **CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES**

Cultural identity refers to the set of values held by a community and its corresponding worldview. The two combine to form a referential framework that in turn influences both the relationship among individuals within that society and their collective sense of identity. Although a community has a shared cultural identity, individuals within that community have unique expressions of that collective identity. Social class, race, ethnicity, religion, and language make important contributions to an individual's cultural identity. Cultural identity



is present in the institutions, the habits and traditions, and the knowledge that define any society. Virtually all societies have more than one culture, each marked by its own language or languages, diet, manners, and other characteristics. The coexistence of multiple cultures creates a system of social stratification, where differences of social class, power, and prestige can emerge among groups. Those differences are enforced through boundaries that groups develop and enforce over time. Through boundaries, people learn what is permissible and what is not permissible. Those boundaries affect individual cultural identities. For example, some identity choices may be encouraged, while others may not be available to members of a group. Some members may have access to—and be expected to pursue or take advantage of—certain resources such as higher education; while other members may not perceive that they have access to such resources.

In contemporary society, most people find themselves crossing cultural boundaries on a regular basis in their daily lives. Our world has become interdependent because of the development of technology and the affordability of modes of transportation that facilitate traveling. Social workers often work with immigrants and refugees and often are called to assist in humanitarian efforts (Estes, 2009). Historically, countries around the world have had a variety of responses to the movement of people across borders, with some attempting to restrict movement and others taking a more welcoming stance. Regardless of formal immigration policies, people cross both real and virtual cultural boundaries daily. Some may say that interacting with people who look, speak, dress, or think in ways that are different from what is perceived as the norm is a form of daily cultural boundary crossing. Most cultural groups are constantly exposed to many outside cultural influences, resulting in an ongoing cultural transaction whereby individuals adopt aspects of other cultures. Although culture is dynamic and changing, the mixture of cultural influences does not result in a simple blend in which all cultures add equally to an evolving recipe. For those who are outside what is considered the cultural mainstream, cultural change occurs through a variety of processes that can involve assimilation, acculturation, and enculturation.

### **ASSIMILATION**

Assimilation is the process of letting go of some aspects of one's culture of origin while incorporating norms and behaviors of the majority or dominant culture. Numbers or the relative size of the cultural groups cannot solely explain the unidirectional nature of this process. A dominant culture can be a numerical minority but have the most power and the ability to enforce its supremacy over a larger cultural group. For example, in some cities in the Southwestern United States, Latinx students are in the numerical majority, but laws forbid schools to have Spanish/English bilingual programs. Many Latinx students in elementary school need to switch to speak exclusively in English, and later when they are in high school, they may enroll in Spanish classes and relearn the language to fulfill a foreign language requirement. Assimilation describes a unidirectional process shaped by power differentials and assumptions about difference that are often illogical or simply false.

Assimilation involves activities by which a minority group abandons the unique features of its culture of origin and adapts to the values and behaviors of the dominant culture. Often, the dominant group accepts some limited aspects of the minority group's cultural or social

life, and both groups become integrated into a common social structure. Assimilation can be both cultural and structural. Cultural assimilation occurs when two or more groups develop a common culture based on the dominant group's culture, into which minor aspects of the minority group culture are incorporated. Structural assimilation occurs when two or more groups participate in the same social institutions, organizations, and interpersonal networks. For example, through intermarriage, workplace integration, and overlapping friendships. Friendships between members of majority and minority ethnic and racial groups often require the members of minority groups to adjust to the norms and behaviors of the friend representing the dominant group. Although members of both groups hold seemingly equal positions in these social structures as spouses, coworkers, classmates, or friends, the status differential is maintained and enforced (Healey, 2011). The barriers to cultural and structural integration may include the prejudice and discrimination that differences in phenotype (racial or ethnic appearance), language, religion, and surnames may trigger (Ayers, Kulis, & Marsiglia, 2013). Skin color (racial) or speaking English as a second language (cultural) may trigger a set of stereotypes on the part of a group of coworkers from the dominant culture when a very well-qualified colleague from a minority group receives a promotion (structural) instead of one of them.

### **ACCULTURATION**

Because culture is a dynamic process, culture of origin is just one ingredient in the formation of cultural identity. The acculturation process allows individuals to integrate elements of other cultures as they develop their new identities. Acculturation is a form of cultural synthesis that takes place when the original norms, values, and behaviors become mixed and changed because of exposure to new influences. Differences in public policy, social class, power, and prestige influence the acculturation process in unique ways. Although minority cultures generally experience stronger pressure to change than do mainstream cultures, the dominant culture often voluntarily absorbs desired aspects of the minority culture. Thus, acculturation is not a unidirectional process but is instead multidirectional and multidimensional. White middle-class teenagers may incorporate the dress and mode of speech of their Mexican American or African American classmates. They have a choice whether or not to incorporate these behaviors, while their minority classmates may feel that they need to speak and dress like their White classmates in order to advance academically and professionally.

Acculturation is the process of adapting to a non-native culture that occurs when individuals from two or more different cultures encounter each other. Acculturation occurs in two distinct dimensions. Behavioral acculturation relates to the adoption of external aspects of the dominant culture, such as language and social skills that allow the individual to fit in. Psychological acculturation involves realignment with the ideologies of the dominant culture or its way of thinking and seeing the world (cosmology). These two forms of acculturation run along parallel paths but do not necessarily occur at the same pace (Van Oudenhoven, Judd, & Ward, 2008).

Acculturation models were developed during the first half of the 20th century to explain the experiences of different groups of European migrants who entered the United States in successive waves and who initially faced much discrimination and had to make

difficult adjustments. These groups were largely accepted and assimilated into US educational, economic, political, and social institutions within three generations, during which time there was widespread intermarriage across ethnic group lines. The original assimilationist models advanced a linear and progressive process of acculturation into the mainstream culture. Nevertheless, these models are less applicable to today's immigrants. Among the key differences between earlier European immigrants and many 21st-century immigrants from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa is the intensity and duration of the experience of discrimination and the greater ease of maintaining contact with the culture of origin fostered by less expensive and more convenient communication and transportation options. A century ago, first-generation European immigrants faced opposition from native-born Americans who questioned their loyalties and feared they would compete for the same jobs. Today, however, the second and third generations of immigrant families often confront these same obstacles. The self-identification of the children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren of Mexican immigrants as both Mexican and American may be a reflection of discrimination and a reaction to their perception of unequal treatment and less-than-full acceptance by mainstream US culture, rather than of their unwillingness to acculturate.

For instance, a study of children of Latin American background born in the United States who experienced discrimination found that these children were less likely to self-identify as American. This was true even among some third-generation Latinx, but the effects of discrimination were less apparent for Latinx children who phenotypically look White (Golash-Boza, 2006). A study of second-generation West Indian and Haitian American adolescents in New York City found three types of identities: a Black American identity, a hyphenated ethnic or national origin identity (e.g., Jamaican American), and an immigrant identity (Waters, 1994). The different identities reflected the youths' different perceptions of the impact of race on their social and economic opportunities in the United States. The youths who identified with a Black American identity tended to experience more racial discrimination than those who identified with a West Indian identity.

Similar trends emerged in international comparative studies. The political and economic climate of the receiving country at the time of immigration influences the process of acculturation. This varies from country to country and at different points in history. For example, immigrants' ability to obtain documented status, a process that varies greatly from country to country, has a significant influence on their opportunities for fuller integration into the receiving country. In a comparison of Somali refugees' immigration experiences in London and Minneapolis, employment status was the strongest predictor of well-being, with individuals in Minneapolis reporting higher rates of employment (Warfa et al., 2012). When considering employment and contextual factors such as integration services, the economic climate and discriminatory hiring processes within countries can affect the ability and the desire to acculturate to the dominant culture.

An immigrant's experience of discrimination, which is a reflection of an overall national attitude toward immigration, also determines an individual's decision to acculturate (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Immigrants who feel accepted and comfortable in the receiving country are more likely to adopt its norms and values. If they are frustrated with their ability to meet their basic needs, or if they feel like outsiders, they are more likely to

maintain strong ties to their culture of origin. For example, for Russian and Ukrainian Jewish adolescents who migrated to Israel, experiencing discrimination diminished their initial intention to acculturate over and above a variety of other individual factors, including psychological resources (Tartakovsky, 2012). Similar to trends observed internationally, variations in the political, economic, and social context in the United States influence the process of acculturation for recent immigrants and the overall quality of life of other historically oppressed groups such as First Nations and African Americans.

The cultural adaptation of the children of immigrants into many communities is often problematic or troubled. Andall (2002) speaks of a second-generation decline, a second-generation revolt, and a second-generation attitude. Second-generation decline describes unwillingness among children of immigrants to accept low-paying and low-status jobs that leave them stranded outside the mainstream economy. Second-generation revolt refers to rejection among children of immigrants of elements of mainstream culture and its opportunities for social mobility, such as the value of education as the pathway to success. Second-generation attitude refers to the greater assertiveness of the children of immigrants compared with their parents, and the resulting intergenerational conflicts. The heightened awareness of children of immigrants of their status as both insiders and outsiders shapes the way they construct and navigate their hyphenated identities as well as the paths that they pursue in their social, economic, and political lives.

One classic typology describes four possible outcomes for those undergoing the acculturation process:

1. Assimilation, which replaces the culture of origin with the host culture;
2. Integration of elements of the culture of origin with those of the host culture;
3. Separation through the strict maintenance of the culture of origin; and
4. Marginalization through a rejection of both the host and origin cultures (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Related studies have found that host societies have lower levels of acceptance for members of non-dominant cultural groups that have greater differences from them. These minority groups have limited opportunities to choose among the different pathways of acculturation, and many either feel pressure to assimilate or become marginalized socially and economically (Loch, 2009). The experience of many male Caribbean immigrants exemplifies this situation. The pressure to replace the more polarized attitudes and behaviors regarding gender roles of Caribbean culture with a more gender-neutral and egalitarian perspective can heighten acculturation stress; this pressure contributes to their relationship problems, addictive behavior, and mental illness (Kosberg, 2002).

When working with clients of different cultures, social workers use culturally competent assessment methods to understand their acculturation status. For example, ethnographic interviewing is a method for understanding the experiences and worldviews of individuals and families from non-dominant cultures (Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare [CASCW], 2001). This type of assessment helps workers uncover possible acculturation stress and identify how the ethnic community may be a source of strength and support for its members as they attempt to cope with stressful situations.