CULTURAL IDENTITY – SESSION 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>In this week’s sessions you will...</th>
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<td></td>
<td>learn what cultural identity means to you</td>
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<td>learn what elements contribute to a person’s cultural identity</td>
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<td>look at Social and Ethnic identity</td>
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<td>look at ways to compare and contrast cultures</td>
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<td>look at fundamental differences between cultures</td>
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DISCUSSION POINT 1

In small groups, discuss and make notes on the following questions below

- What does cultural identity mean to you?
  ____________________________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________________________

- What elements contribute to a person’s cultural identity?
  ____________________________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________________________

- How would you identify your culture?
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  ____________________________________________________________________________
  ____________________________________________________________________________

Notes:
WHAT IS CULTURE?

There are many interpretations of what is defined and known as culture.

Some believe it is acquired and passed down through generations. Others believe it is a system of beliefs and values within a society.

Culture has also been described as ‘...shared features which encapsulate people together in a community’ (Shah, 2003).

WHAT IS IDENTITY?

Identity can be described as the entirety of how we as individuals view or perceive ourselves as unique from others.

Bhugra (2004) states it is the ‘Racial, cultural and ethnic identities form part of one’s identity, and identity will change with development at a personal as well as at a social level along with migration and acculturation’.

It is also perceived as ‘dynamic’ and ‘fluid’ - because it is established and extracted in interaction which is necessary to understand how communication works in diverse and transitory situations.

It also has substance that is not only transmitted from generation to generation, but from cultural group member to newcomer.

One or more specific cultural identities may be noticeable in a given conversation.
THE WEB OF IDENTITY

There is no straightforward relationship between identity and social concepts such as Religion, Family and Gender. Our identities are embedded in a Web of Identity (Livesey 2004), which is a visual representation of the intersection between identity and society.

The Web of Identity (Livesey, 2004) illustrates the complex and multi-layered interaction between identity and social structure. Individuals are surrounded by large social forces; they live their lives with limited options available to them when making decisions and choices.

Example:

Ang (1998) grew up in Indonesia and is of Chinese descent. Ang describes how her identity (as a foreigner and stranger) was constructed by the indigenous Indonesians and was not truly accepted as a member of the community. This social mechanism has a significant influence upon people who are constructed as a foreigner and ‘people who are positioned as ‘foreign’ develop all kinds of strategies to deal with it—some people will try to deny their foreignness, and self hatred is part of this, or they will try to assimilate into the dominant culture as much as possible’ (Ang 1998, 153–154).
WHAT IS SOCIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY?

Social identity is thought of as the culturally defined personality characteristics, which are ascribed to social roles, such as the role of being a father, mother, friend, employer or employee (Bhugra and Becker, 2005).

Ethnic identity is a source of social identity. Composed of people who may or may not share the same race but do share common cultural characteristics, including history, beliefs, values, food and entertainment preferences, religion and language.

Ethnicity typically incorporates both race and culture (Shah, 2004).
DISCUSSION POINT 2

• What elements could be considered when comparing and contrasting cultures?

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__________________________________________________________________________
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• Which of these elements would you consider to be the most significant?

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__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
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Notes:
WAYS TO COMPARE AND CONTRAST CULTURES

Several methods and frameworks have been constructed to address variances of cultural identities:

- Gudykunst’s (1985) variables measured in intergroup research include attitudes, perceived similarity, uncertainty, and attributions.

- Giles and Johnson’s (1981, 1986) give attention to variables such as group vitality, ethnic boundaries, and status.

- Hofstede’s (1983) research on core symbols identifies four dimensions of culture: individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity-femininity.

- DeVos’ (1982) describes the process of culture and ethnic groups using symbolic emblems to differentiate themselves from other groups. Anything from mode of dress to a code of language or a key term or reference in conversation can be regarded as an emblem.

FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CULTURES

In any given nation or culture, differences between people are much greater than differences between groups. Education, social standing, religion, personality, belief structure, past experience, affection shown in the home, and numerous other factors will affect human behaviour and culture (Billikopf, 2009).

There are differences in approach as to what is considered polite and appropriate behaviour both in and out of work. In some cultures "yes" means, "I hear you" more than "I agree." Length of pleasantries and greetings before getting down to business; level of tolerance for being around someone speaking a foreign (not-understood) language; politeness measured in terms of gallantry or etiquette (e.g., standing up for a woman who approaches a table, yielding a seat on the bus to an older person, etc.); and manner of expected dress are all examples of possible cultural differences and traditions.

Paying attention to customs and cultural differences can give someone outside that culture a better chance of assimilation or acceptance. Ignoring these can get an unsuspecting person into trouble.
DISCUSSION POINT 3: FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CULTURES

In small groups/pairs discuss the similarities and differences between your cultures with regard to:

- Dress
- Gender roles
- Social activities
- Meeting and Greeting
- Gestures
- Dining Etiquette
- Food
- Language

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<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Differences</th>
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DISCUSSION POINT 4:

Pair work

Discuss possible examples of where history has had an effect on your culture. Can you think of examples for other cultures?

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_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
HOMEWORK – BLOG TASK 1

Individual task – Out-of-class work

Interview an international student (preferably from a different country to that of your own) and find out how they felt when they first arrived in the UK. When preparing your questions, consider the following cultural differences we looked at in our workshop today that they may have experienced. Write a short summary (around 300 words) of your interview and bring it to the next class.
REFERENCES


Billikopf, G (2009). Cultural Differences? Or, are we really that different? [online] Available at: [http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7article/article01.htm](http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7article/article01.htm) [Accessed on 18th July 2012]


