

Culture, Education and Unspoken Expectations

Point of This Assignment: To help you become more aware of how your cultural, family and religious identity has helped to shape you and your attitudes - especially towards education and career.

Terms and Definitions

Nationality:¹

The nation where you hold legal citizenship.

Ethnicity:

Traditions, history, beliefs, etc. Labels attributed to groups that intersect in tradition, history and language within an overarching culture. May or may not be of the same race.

Culture:

Intellectual, artistic, spiritual gestalts that is comprised of many races or ethnic groups co-existing in time.

Race:

It is more appropriate to identify as a social-cultural construct based on familial place of origin and at times physical appearances.

Socio-Economic Status²

A measure of an individual or family's relative economic and social ranking as determined by parents' occupation and income.

Generational Status:

The number of generations a family has been in the country. Generational status will often have a major influence on an individual's cultural identity, with immigrants feeling a much stronger tie to the country of origin, whereas first- or second-generation born individuals will likely feel some connection with their of country of origin, but will likely feel more connection with the culture of the country where they were raised.

Cultural Orientation:

Collectivistic

Valuing what is in the best interest of the larger group, even if at individual's expense. (*Common among many Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, African* and some Jewish cultures.*)

Individualistic

Valuing what is in the best interest of the individual, even if at the larger group's expense. (*Common among many Caucasian cultures.*)

**In asking African-Americans whether the culture is more individualistic or collectivistic, the most consistent response received has been "it will vary from family to family".*

Note:

1. Increasingly, a family's attitude towards higher education is influenced by two additional variables in addition to culture:
 - 1) ***Parent's level of education***
 - 2) ***Socio Economic Status***
2. Some students may find these questions challenging to answer due to their individual circumstances:
 - a. Bi-racial or multi-racial students
 - b. Students raised in foster homes or in the foster system
 - c. People who were adopted at an age old enough to remember.

¹ Mayers, C. Multicultural Counseling class lecture: CSUSB 4/11/07

² <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/glossary/s.asp>

Culture, Education and Unspoken Expectations

- d. Individuals coming from “blended” families where differing ethnic cultures were involved.
- e. Individuals who, for other reasons, were not raised by their biological families.

The common theme for these individuals is that they likely had received more than one set of messages from differing “cultures” (i.e.: biological family, step family, foster family(s), and foster care system). If this fits your life, then as you answer the following questions, simply look for whether or not you received multiple sets of messages. If so, then list the differences where they exist. If you were influenced by more than one ethnic culture, then be sure to answer the questions for bi-racial/multi-racial students regarding your ethnic identity. Keep in mind that you will have an opportunity at the end of this assignment to identify how much you agree with what you were taught.

For example: A person could have as biological parents an African-American mother, a Chinese-American father, and lived with both until she was about 8; but then was placed into the foster-care system, and then lived with a Caucasian foster mother and a Latino foster father until she became an adult. Therefore, she may sometimes need to answer questions like this:

Influence	<u>Biological Family</u>		<u>Foster Family</u>		<u>Foster Care System</u>
	Mom	Dad	Mom	Dad	
Message	<i>Biological Mom said...</i>	<i>Biological Dad said...</i>	<i>Foster Mom said...</i>	<i>Foster Dad said...</i>	<i>The system said...</i>
How do you see your ethnic identity?	Only she can answer this question. But, even though she may physically look like she is fully African-American, she may still see herself as being multi-racial because she had so many influences shaping her identity.				

Be sure to ask for help if you still don’t know how to answer questions.

Your Family Background:

1. ***Family’s experience with college: Did your parents (or any other family member) attend and/or graduate from college? Yes / No***
 - a. ***If yes, who went to college, what type of school did they attend, and how much education did they ultimately obtain? _____***

2. ***What is your family’s socio-economic status? (Low-income, middle-class, upper-class, etc.)?***

3. ***What is your Ethnic/Cultural/Racial background? If you are biracial or multi-racial, specify which groups make up your ethnic identity. If so, also indicate in the questions that follow if there are any differences between the different groups’ influences on your personal beliefs. (Please be more specific than to use general labels such as White, Asian, Hispanic, etc.):***

Culture, Education and Unspoken Expectations

4. **For bi-racial and multi-racial students: How do you see your ethnic identity?** (For example: “Technically I am bi-racial, but I consider myself to be White because my parents are divorced and I was raised by my White mother; so my father’s Hispanic culture did not have much impact on my upbringing. Or, “My father is African-American and my mother is Mexican-American, but I consider myself to be African-American.” Or, my mother is Asian and my father is Mexican. They are still married, so both groups influenced my upbringing, therefore I do consider my ethnic identity to be bi-racial – a combination of both. Or, N/A – I am not bi-racial.)
-
-

5. **Generational Status: For how many generations (if at all) has your family been in this country?** (For example: I am an international student, immigrant, first-, second, third-generation, too many to count, etc.) (This question of generational status will likely be more relevant to Asian, Hispanic, and Middle-Eastern students than to white and black students since it is more likely that black and white students’ families have in this country for too many generations to track.)
-
-

Your Religious Community:

6. **Did you grow up with any religious background?** Yes / No
a. **If no, skip to Question 11.**
b. **If yes, continue to answer questions in this section.**
7. **What was denomination/orientation of your religious foundation?** (For example, “I was raised Catholic, Muslim, Christian, Non-denominational, etc.”)
-
-

8. **How strong was that religious influence on your upbringing?** (For example: “Very strong- my parents were very religious.” “Not very – we only went to church on Christmas and Easter.” Not very – my grandparents and aunts/uncles were religious, but my parents weren’t.”, etc.
-
-

9. **How much emphasis did that religion place on education and career?**
-
-

10. **Did they teach anything specific about what kind of education and/or career you should pursue? Or, did they teach any specific values regarding education and/or career?** (Follow your parents’ occupation, support your family, education is of primary importance, don’t make work your first priority, etc.) **If yes, what did they teach?**

11. *Do you now have a religious faith system?* Yes / No

a. *If no, skip to Question 16*

b. *If yes, continue to answer questions in this section.*

12. *What was denomination/orientation of your religious current faith? (For example, "I am Catholic, Muslim, Christian, Non-denominational, etc.")*

13. *How strong is that religious influence currently on your life? (For example: "Very strong- I am very religious." "Not very – I only go to church on Christmas and Easter." "Not very – my family is religious, and I respect that, but don't embrace it myself", etc.)*

14. *How much emphasis does your religion place on education and career?*

15. *Do they teach anything specific about what kind of education and/or career you should pursue? Or, did they teach any specific values regarding education and career? (Follow your parents' occupation, support your family, education is of primary importance, don't make work your first priority, etc.) If yes, what do they teach?*

Your Geographical Community:

16. *Where did you grow up?* _____

17. *What was the Ethnic/Cultural/Racial composition of the neighborhood where you grew up?* _____

18. *Did the schools you attended have a "College Going Culture" where it was just assumed and expected that everyone was going to go to college? Explain your response.*

19. *Do you now live in an area now that is different from where you were raised? If so, how? (This question is mostly relevant to older students.)*

Your Own World:

Think about how you were raised. What is considered “normal” regarding the following subjects? As you answer these questions, think about what was considered normal in your immediate family, extended family, and your surrounding community (if these differ). Make distinctions as appropriate.

Attitudes and Expectations about:

1. What are men supposed to do with themselves upon reaching adulthood? (*What age is that?*)

2. What are women supposed to do with themselves upon reaching adulthood? (*What age?*)

3. What kind of jobs were men expected to obtain as adults?

4. What kind of jobs (if at all) were women expected to obtain as adults?

5. At what age, and how it is determined, that people should get married _____

6. Pursuing higher education? Is it encouraged, expected, mandatory, non-existent or otherwise?

7. Parents’ role in child’s choice of education and/or career? (Strong, non-existent, etc.)

8. If the traditional-aged student and parent(s) disagree on what should be the student’s education/career choice, will the student be “allowed” to defy the parents’ expectations by pursuing what he/she wants instead of pursuing the parents’ expectations?

9. Who is responsible for providing for a traditional-aged college student’s physical needs? (Student, parent, etc.)

10. How much are traditional-aged college students expected to contribute to their family's maintenance? (Financially, running errands, babysitting, helping with family business, etc.)

11. If a student has a **routine, school-related responsibility** (*go to class, homework, study for test, etc.*) and a **non-emergency family-related need** (*child/dependent care, drive someone to doctor's appointment, problem in extended family member's life, etc.*), competing for his/her attention, would the student be expected to?

A) Put school before family -- or

B) Put family before school

Explain your response:

12. If a student has a **routine, school-related responsibility** (*go to class, homework, study for test, etc.*) and a **work** (*a job which pays the bills, but offers little or no potential for the long-term future*), competing for his/her attention, would the student be expected to?

A) Put school before work -- or

B) Put work before school

Explain your response:

13. Is it appropriate for people who are over the traditional age of 18-20 (especially women and mothers) to go to school? Will such people receive support or criticism?

14. Now that you have answered these questions about what your family/community/culture thinks is normal, go back to each question and ask yourself whether or not you agree with those attitudes. If you disagree, state why. (Use additional sheets of paper if necessary.)

15. How has your cultural and/or environmental shaping impacted your personal attitudes towards higher education and career choice?

16. How do your personal life experiences compare with the stereo-types associated with your ethnic group(s)? (If you are bi-racial or multi-racial, you might want to look at the different groups individually.) (*Very similar, very different, somewhat similar or different, etc.*)

17. In reflecting on your answers to the questions above, ask yourself whether your personal value system is more collectivistic or individualistic in nature.

18. After watching the video and listening to the class discussions, what differences do you see between the various cultural groups represented? What do you think of those differences?

Test your understanding:

What is the main point of this assignment?

Why were you expected to do this exercise?

What type of person would need to do this exercise?

How well do you fit the profile of the person for whom this assignment was created?

Reflection: (*Write down your response after completing this assignment.*)
