

Lesson Plan: Cultural Identity

learning objectives

What is cultural identity? What behaviors, qualities, and beliefs make up one's cultural identity? Why is cultural identity important? How does it affect personal development and social interactions?

time-plan

time	activity	aids
5 minutes	define and discuss the concept of culture, ethnicity, race, and gender + why is it important to understand and respect cultural differences in today's diverse world	-
5-10 minutes	each student creates an identity mind map of themselves, including aspects such as hobbies, interests, family background, cultural heritage, etc.	paper, pens
15 minutes	discussion in smaller groups → First, talking about their mind maps, then also discussing some of the following questions: Does your cultural identity influence your daily life? Can you think of a time when your cultural identity played a significant role in your personal development and social interactions? How do you think understanding and respecting cultural differences can lead to a more inclusive and harmonious society?	projector
10 minutes	read 'Myths about Cultural Identity and How to Cope With a Cultural Identity Crisis' in pairs	printed worksheet for each pair
5-10 minutes	final discussion: What did you think of the article? Have you ever experienced a cultural identity crisis? Have you learned anything new about cultural identity, or has your opinion on what it entails changed?	-

materials:

Myths about Cultural Identity

I often encounter three big myths about cultural identity in my work with clients. And I find that it is critical that we identify and address these myths before my client is ready to move forward.

The first myth is that our cultural identity is fixed, which simply isn't true. It is dynamic and it evolves as we affiliate ourselves with different groups. Think about some of the beliefs you had as a child that have since changed. This happens due to our exposure to new ways of thinking and as we absorb whatever resonates for us into our cultural identity.

The second myth I often hear is that some of us don't have a cultural identity at all. The reality is that *everyone* has one. However, many of us are unaware of our own cultural identity and how it influences every single aspect of our life.

The final, and perhaps most dangerous myth, is that our own cultural identity is mainstream, i.e., many of us believe we interpret situations the same way others do. When this is the case, our desire to understand the world can result in the creation of mental shortcuts that influence how we interact with someone who has a cultural identity that's different from ours.

The danger of these shortcuts is that they can lead to generalizing and stereotyping. When this occurs, we prejudge people as "friend or foe," the latter of which can trigger a "fight or flight" response and cripple our ability to have meaningful, healthy, and productive interactions.

When I work with clients, I help them unravel their assumptions about what is normal, right, and true for them. But before we can get to work, it's important that they understand the strength of cultural influences and how they shape our worldview so they can begin to recognize them in their own life and challenge them as they make decisions about their futures.

Our cultural identity influences how we interpret and react to situations, so it is important that we become aware of our own identity in relation to the world around us. Since we have an innate craving to feel a sense of belonging to a group, when we are under stress we tend to subconsciously revert to whatever behaviors make us "feel" safe and accepted. In doing so, we set up invisible barriers within ourselves *and* between ourselves and others that impact personal interactions, professional performance, and organizational success.

In my professional life, I've seen conflicts arise due to fundamentally different viewpoints and a lack of understanding about the effect of cultural identities. When we develop an awareness of how our identities can act as a catalyst or barrier for growth, we unlock our true potential.

There may also be times in our lives when our own cultural identity comes into conflict with what we encounter in the world around us or what we feel within ourselves to be true. For instance, the person who pursued a career in science (from our example earlier) might eventually have this experience because instead of finding a career path that felt right to *them*,

they did what their family expected of them. This tension, which is often called a cultural identity crisis, can create discomfort and even distress.

Cultural Identity Crisis

Should you experience a cultural identity crisis, you may feel a natural tendency to ignore or blame other factors for the conflict. However, it is important to pay attention to yourself and to examine the cultural conditioning that formed your cultural identity in the first place. Here are three things you can do to begin this process:

1. Pause and begin building your awareness around your own cultural identity. Our worksheet (<https://www.exceptionalfutures.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Identifying-Your-Cultural-Contributors.pdf> ... you can try to fill out the worksheet at home, if you'd like) can help you get started.
2. Once you have raised your awareness around your own identity, consider where your identity may be misaligned with the situation at hand. Here are some questions to ask yourself:
 - How has my cultural identity affected my reaction to this situation?
 - What influencers have contributed to building my identity in relation to this situation?
 - Does my cultural identity truly reflect the person I want to be going forward?
 - If the tension is with another person, try looking at things from their perspective. What influencers and cultural contributors might have impacted the way the other person is approaching the situation?
3. Finally, come up with 1-2 actionable steps to address the situation, then commit to reflecting on your own identity regularly. This could be as simple as taking 5-10 minutes each month to revisit the worksheets listed above and considering how any new groups in your life (such as new social groups or a change in employment) are contributing to the growth and evolution of your identity.

Wilson, V. (2023, June 29). *What is Cultural Identity and Why is it Important?* Exceptional Futures. <https://www.exceptionalfutures.com/cultural-identity/>