Chapter 2: Cultural Diversity

What is the right way to eat a hot dog? If you are from New York, you might top your hot dog with spicy brown mustard and onions or sauerkraut. If you are from Chicago, you might top your hot dog with sweet onions, pickle spears, tomato, relish, and hot peppers. If you are from Houston, you might top your hot dog with chili, cheese, and jalapenos. Reading this list, you might think some of these sound good or maybe you wouldn't eat any of these toppings on your hot dogs.

In this chapter, you will learn about cultural diversity. We will discuss how culture impacts our values, beliefs, behaviors (even our hot dog topping preferences), and how diversity of culture influences our workplace. This will provide you with useful tools to engage with others in your personal and professional life who may be different from you.

2.1 Culture and Diversity

Introduction to Culture

What are the rules when you pass an acquaintance at school, work, in the grocery store, or in the mall? Generally, we do not consider all of the intricacies of the rules of behavior. We may simply say, "Hello!" and ask, "How was your weekend?" or some other trivial question meant to be a friendly greeting. Rarely do we physically embrace or even touch the individual. In fact, doing so may be viewed with scorn or distaste, since as people in the United States we have fairly rigid rules about personal space. However, we all adhere to various rules and standards that are created and maintained in culture. These rules and expectations have meaning, and there are ways in which you may violate this negotiation. Consider what would happen if you stopped and informed everyone who said, "Hi, how are you?" exactly how you were doing that day, and in detail. You would more than likely violate rules of culture and specifically greeting. Perhaps in a different culture the question would be more literal, and it may require a response. Or if you are having coffee with a good friend, perhaps that question warrants a more detailed response. These examples are all aspects of **culture**, which is the ongoing negotiation of learned and patterned beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Unpacking the definition, we can see that culture shouldn't be conceptualized as stable and unchanging. Culture is "negotiated," it is dynamic, and cultural changes can be traced and analyzed to better understand why our society is the way it is. This definition also points out that culture is learned, which accounts for the importance of socializing institutions like family, school, peers, and the media that we learned about in Module 1. Culture is patterned in that there are recognizable widespread similarities among people within a cultural group. There is also deviation from and resistance to those patterns by individuals and subgroups within a culture, which is why cultural patterns change over time. Last, this definition acknowledges that culture influences our beliefs about what is true and false, our attitudes including our likes and dislikes, our values regarding what is

right and wrong, and our behaviors. It is from these cultural influences that our identities are formed.

Humans are social creatures. Since the dawn of Homo sapiens, people have grouped together into communities in order to survive. Living together, people form common habits and behaviors—from specific methods of childrearing to preferred techniques for obtaining food. In modern-day Paris, many people shop daily at outdoor markets to pick up what they need for their evening meal, buying cheese, meat, and vegetables from different specialty stalls. In the United States, the majority of people shop once a week at supermarkets, filling large carts to the brim. How would a Parisian perceive U.S. shopping behaviors that Americans take for granted?

Almost every human behavior, from shopping to marriage to expressions of feelings, is learned. In the United States, people tend to view marriage as a choice between two people, based on mutual feelings of love. In other nations and in other times, marriages have been arranged through an intricate process of interviews and negotiations between entire families. To someone raised in the United States, arranged marriages may seem strange or even wrong. Conversely, someone whose marriage was arranged might be perplexed with the idea of people choosing their own spouse without guidance from others. In both cases, a person from one culture may have misconceptions about the customs of the other. In other words, the way in which people view marriage depends largely on what they have been taught.

Behavior based on learned customs is not a bad thing. Being familiar with unwritten rules helps people feel secure and "normal." Most people want to live their daily lives confident that their behaviors will not be challenged or disrupted. But even an action as seemingly simple as commuting to work evidences a great deal of cultural propriety.

Take the case of going to work on public transportation. Whether people are commuting in Dublin, Cairo, Mumbai, or San Francisco, many behaviors will be the same, but significant differences also arise between cultures. Typically, a passenger will find a marked bus stop or station, wait for his bus or train, pay an agent before or after boarding, and quietly take a seat if one is available. But when boarding a bus in Cairo, passengers might have to run, because buses there often do not come to a full stop to take on patrons. Dublin bus riders would be expected to extend an arm to indicate that they want the bus to stop for them. And when boarding a commuter train in Mumbai, passengers must squeeze into overstuffed cars amid a lot of pushing and shoving on the crowded platforms. That kind of behavior would be considered the height of rudeness in the United States, but in Mumbai it reflects the daily challenges of getting around on a train system that is taxed to capacity (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 How would a visitor from the suburban United States act and feel on this crowded Tokyo train? Crowded Train – Hanenosuke – CC BY-SA 2.0

In this example of commuting, culture consists of thoughts (expectations about personal space, for example) and tangible things (bus stops, trains, and seating capacity). **Material culture** refers to the objects or belongings of a group of people. Metro passes and bus tokens are part of material culture, as are automobiles, stores, and the physical structures where people worship. **Nonmaterial culture**, in contrast, consists of the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a society. Material and nonmaterial aspects of culture are linked, and physical objects often symbolize cultural ideas. A metro pass is a material object, but it represents a form of nonmaterial culture, namely, capitalism, and the acceptance of paying for transportation. Clothing, hairstyles, and jewelry are part of material culture, but the appropriateness of wearing certain clothing for specific events reflects nonmaterial culture. A school building belongs to material culture, but the teaching methods and educational standards are part of education's nonmaterial culture. These material and nonmaterial aspects of culture can vary subtly from region to region. As people travel farther afield, moving from different regions to entirely different parts of the world, certain material and nonmaterial aspects of culture become dramatically unfamiliar. What happens when we encounter different cultures? As we interact with cultures other than our own, we become more aware of the differences and commonalities between others' worlds and our own.

Cultural Universals

Often, a comparison of one culture to another will reveal obvious differences. But all cultures also share common elements. **Cultural universals** are patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies. One example of a cultural universal is the family unit: every human society recognizes a family structure that regulates sexual reproduction and the care of children. Even so, how that family unit is defined and how it functions vary. In many Asian cultures, for example, family members from all generations commonly live

together in one household. In these cultures, young adults continue to live in the extended household family structure until they marry and join their spouse's household, or they may remain and raise their nuclear family within the extended family's homestead. In the United States, by contrast, individuals are expected to leave home and live independently for a period before forming a family unit that consists of parents and their offspring. Other cultural universals include customs like funeral rites, weddings, and celebrations of births. However, each culture may view the ceremonies quite differently.

Anthropologist George Murdock first recognized the existence of cultural universals while studying systems of kinship around the world. Murdock found that cultural universals often revolve around basic human survival, such as finding food, clothing, and shelter, or around shared human experiences, such as birth and death or illness and healing. Through his research, Murdock identified other universals including language, the concept of personal names, and, interestingly, jokes. Humor seems to be a universal way to release tensions and create a sense of unity among people (Murdock 1949). Humor is considered necessary to human interaction because it helps individuals navigate otherwise tense situations.

Ethnocentrism

Although human societies have much in common, cultural differences are far more prevalent than cultural universals. For example, while all cultures have language, analysis of conversational etiquette reveals tremendous differences. In some Middle Eastern cultures, it is common to stand close to others in conversation. Americans keep more distance and maintain a large "personal space." Additionally, behaviors as simple as eating and drinking vary greatly from culture to culture. Some cultures use tools to put the food in the mouth while others use their fingers. If your professor comes into an early morning class holding a mug of liquid, what do you assume they are drinking? In the U.S., it's most likely filled with coffee, not Earl Grey tea, a favorite in England, or Yak Butter tea, a staple in Tibet.

Some travelers pride themselves on their willingness to try unfamiliar foods, like the late celebrated food writer Anthony Bourdain (1956-2017)(Figure 2.2). Often, however, people express disgust at another culture's cuisine. They might think that it's gross to eat raw meat from a donkey or parts of a rodent, while they don't question their own habit of eating cows or pigs. Such attitudes are examples of **ethnocentrism**, which means to evaluate and judge another culture based on one's own cultural norms. Ethnocentrism is believing your group is the correct measuring standard and if other cultures do not measure up to it, they are wrong. As sociologist William Graham Sumner (1906) described the term, it is a belief or attitude that one's own culture is better than all others. Almost everyone is a little bit ethnocentric. A high level of appreciation for one's own culture can be healthy. A shared sense of community pride, for example, connects people in a society.

But ethnocentrism can lead to disdain or dislike of other cultures and could cause misunderstanding, stereotyping, and conflict.

Figure 2.2 Anthony Bourdain hosted my food shows travelling around the world trying different foods. Chef Anthony Bourdain in Singapore – Cheryl Chia – CC BY 2.0

When people find themselves in a new culture, they may experience disorientation and frustration, also referred to as **culture shock**. In addition to the traveler's biological clock being 'off', a traveler from Chicago might find the nightly silence of rural Montana unsettling, not peaceful. Now, imagine that the 'difference' is cultural. An exchange student from China to the U.S. might be annoyed by the constant interruptions in class as other students ask questions—a practice that is considered rude in China. Perhaps the Chicago traveler was initially captivated with Montana's quiet beauty and the Chinese student was originally excited to see a U.S.- style classroom firsthand. But as they experience unanticipated differences from their own culture, they may experience ethnocentrism as their excitement gives way to discomfort and doubts about how to behave appropriately in the new situation. According to many authors, international students studying in the U.S. report that there are personality traits and behaviors expected of them. Black African students report having to learn to 'be Black in the U.S.' and Chinese students report that they are naturally expected to be good at math. In African countries, people are identified by country or kin, not color. Eventually, as people learn more about a culture, they adapt to the new culture for a variety of reasons.

Culture shock may appear because people aren't always expecting cultural differences. Anthropologist Ken Barger (1971) discovered this when he conducted a participatory observation in an Inuit community in the Canadian Arctic. Originally from Indiana, Barger hesitated when invited to join a local snowshoe race. He knew he would never hold his own against these experts. Sure enough, he finished last, to his mortification. But the tribal members congratulated him, saying, "You really tried!" In Barger's own culture, he

had learned to value victory. To the Inuit people, winning was enjoyable, but their culture valued survival skills essential to their environment: how hard someone tried could mean the difference between life and death. Over the course of his stay, Barger participated in caribou hunts, learned how to take shelter in winter storms, and sometimes went days with little or no food to share among tribal members. Trying hard and working together, two nonmaterial values, were indeed much more important than winning. During his time with the Inuit tribe, Barger learned to engage in cultural relativism.

Cultural Relativism

Cultural relativism is the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards rather than viewing it through the lens of one's own culture. Practicing cultural relativism requires an open mind and a willingness to consider, and even adapt to, new values, norms, and practices.

However, indiscriminately embracing everything about a new culture is not always possible. Even the most culturally relativist people from egalitarian societies—ones in which women have political rights and control over their own bodies—question whether the widespread practice of female genital mutilation in countries such as Ethiopia and Sudan should be accepted as a part of cultural tradition. Social scientists attempting to engage in cultural relativism, then, may struggle to reconcile aspects of their own culture with aspects of a culture that they are studying.

Sometimes when people attempt to address feelings of ethnocentrism and develop cultural relativism, they swing too far to the other end of the spectrum. **Xenocentrism** is the opposite of ethnocentrism, and refers to the belief that another culture is superior to one's own. An exchange student who goes home after a semester abroad or a social scientist who returns from the field may find it difficult to associate with the values of their own culture after having experienced what they deem a more upright or nobler way of living. Xenophobia, on the other hand is an irrational fear or hatred of different cultures.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for people learning about different cultures is the matter of keeping perspective. It is impossible for anyone to overcome all cultural biases. The best we can do is strive to be aware of them. Pride in one's own culture doesn't have to lead to imposing its values or ideas on others. And an appreciation for another culture shouldn't preclude individuals from studying it with a critical eye. This practice is perhaps the most difficult for all social scientists.

High, Low, and Popular Culture

Can you identify the Chief Financial Officer of three major corporations? How about the name of the server at three local hangouts? How many books do you own? How many social media sites do you visit? Is your family listed on the Social Register©? Have you ever heard of the Social Register©? In each pair, one type of knowledge is considered high culture and the other low culture.

The term **high culture** is used to describe the *pattern* of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in the highest or elite class segments of a society. People often associate high culture with intellectualism, political power, and prestige. In America, high culture also tends to be associated with wealth. Events considered high culture can be expensive, formal, and exclusive – attending a ballet, seeing a play, listening to a live symphony performance, or attending a prestigious university. Similarly, **low culture** is associated with the pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in the lowest class segments of a society.

The term **popular culture** refers to the pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in mainstream society. Popular culture events might include a parade, a baseball game, or the season finale of a television show. Music, anime, and cosplay are pieces of popular culture. Popular culture is accessible by most and is expressed and spread via commercial and social media outlets such as radio, television, movies, the music industry, publishers, and corporate-run websites. You can share a discussion of favorite football teams with a new coworker or comment on a reality show when making small talk in line at the grocery store. But if you tried to launch into a deep discussion on the classical Greek play *Antigone*, few members of U.S. society today would be familiar with it. Although high culture may be considered by some as superior to popular culture, the lines between high culture and popular culture vary over time and place. Shakespearean plays, considered to be popular culture when they were written, are now part of our society's high culture. Five hundred years from now, will our descendants consider *Dancing with the Stars* as fine performance art?

Subculture and Counterculture

A **subculture** is just what it sounds like—a smaller cultural group within a larger culture. People of a subculture are part of the larger culture but also share a specific identity within a smaller group. Thousands of subcultures exist within the U.S. Ethnic and racial groups share the language, food, and customs of their heritage. Other subcultures are formed through shared experiences (Figure 2.3). Biker culture revolves around an interest in motorcycles. Some subcultures are formed by people who possess traits or preferences that differ from the majority of a society's population. The body modification community embraces aesthetic additions to the human body, such as tattoos, piercings, and certain forms of plastic surgery. But even as members of a subculture band together, they still identify with and participate in the larger society.

Figure 2.3 Cosplayers are a distinct subculture (a smaller cultural group within the larger culture) in the United States. And within the larger subculture are subgroups, such as this one emulating D.C. Comics characters. [Dragon Con 2013 - DC Universe](#) – [Pat Loika](#) – [CC BY 2.0](#)

In contrast to subcultures, which operate relatively smoothly within the larger society, **countercultures** reject some of the larger culture's norms and values and might actively defy larger society by developing their own set of rules and norms to live by, sometimes even creating communities that operate outside of greater society. Counterculture members are 'against' the dominant ruling culture and want to install their own values. Subculture members may want to change some things but established procedures are followed.

Cultural Competence

As a college student, you are likely to find yourself in diverse classrooms, organizations, and – eventually – workplaces. It is important to prepare yourself to be able to adapt to diverse environments. **Cultural competence** can be defined as the ability to recognize and adapt to cultural differences and similarities. It involves "(a) the cultivation of deep cultural self-awareness and understanding (i.e., how one's own beliefs, values, perceptions, interpretations, judgments, and behaviors are influenced by one's cultural community or communities) and (b) increased cultural other-understanding (i.e., comprehension of the different ways people from other cultural groups make sense of and respond to the presence of cultural differences)" (Bennett, 2015).

In other words, cultural competency requires you to be aware of your own cultural practices, values, and experiences, and to be able to read, interpret, and respond to those of others. Such awareness will help you successfully navigate the cultural differences you will encounter in diverse environments. Cultural competency is critical to working and

building relationships with people from different cultures; it is so critical, in fact, that it is now one of the most highly desired skills in the modern workforce (Bennett, 2015).

We don't automatically understand differences among people and celebrate the value of those differences. Cultural competency is a skill that you can learn and improve upon over time and with practice. What actions can you take to build your cultural competency skills?

Diversity

Cultural diversity is found everywhere in college, in the workplace, in life. It should be respected, appreciated, and celebrated. To be successful as a college student, it is critical that you understand and can describe your own diverse background and how it impacts your view of the world. Being self-aware allows you to identify what makes you who you are while recognizing the differences that exist between you, other students, your professors, and all the members of your community. This section will discuss the factors that make up a person's culture and how one can effectively communicate and work with people who may be different.

"Diversity: the art of thinking independently together."
—Malcolm Forbes, entrepreneur, founder of Forbes magazine

What is Diversity?

Let's start with the basics. What is diversity? Grab a pen and a piece of paper. Quickly jot down how you would define diversity. What's the first thing that came to mind? Take a minute to write your response and then continue reading.

When students from UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health were asked to define diversity, they each recorded their response. You can check out their responses. Take a minute to compare your answers to theirs. Chances are, there were similar themes between your answers and theirs, but your response did not identically match any of the others. This is the perfect way to define diversity.

Each of us are different. Everyone comes with different backgrounds and experiences. Diversity cannot be simply defined by a variety of ethnicities or races. It can also not be simply described as people from different countries or cultures. Instead, diversity encompasses all of these things and more. As we'll use the term here, **diversity** refers to the great variety of human characteristics—ways that we are different even as we are all human and share more similarities than differences. These differences are an essential part of what enriches humanity. Aspects of diversity may be cultural, biological, or personal in nature. Diversity generally involves things that may significantly affect some people's perceptions of others—not just any way people happen to be different. For example, having different tastes in music, movies, or books is not what we usually refer to as diversity.

When discussing diversity, it is often difficult to avoid seeming to generalize about different types of people—and such generalizations can seem similar to dangerous stereotypes. The following descriptions are meant only to suggest that individuals are different from other individuals in many possible ways and that we can all learn things from people whose ideas, beliefs, attitudes, values, backgrounds, experiences, and behaviors are different from our own. We have previously discussed in-depth some of the major aspects of diversity including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and ability. Below is a brief list of additional areas of diversity:

- **Cultural background:** Culture, like ethnicity, refers to shared characteristics, language, beliefs, behaviors, and identity. We are all influenced by our culture to some extent. While ethnic groups are typically smaller groups within a larger society, the larger society itself is often called the "dominant culture." The term is often used rather loosely to refer to any group with identifiable shared characteristics.

- **Educational background:** Colleges do not use a cookie-cutter approach to admit only students with identical academic skills. A diversity of educational background helps ensure a free flow of ideas and challenges those who might become set in their ways.

- **Age:** While younger students attending college immediately after high school are generally within the same age range, older students returning to school bring a diversity of age. Because they often have broader life experiences, many older students bring different ideas and attitudes to the campus.

- **Geography:** People from different places within the United States or the world often have a range of differences in ideas, attitudes, and behaviors.

- **Political views:** A diversity of political views helps broaden the level of discourse on campuses concerning current events and the roles of government and leadership at all levels.

- **Socioeconomic background:** People's identities are influenced by how they grow up, and part of that background involves socioeconomic factors. Socioeconomic diversity can contribute to a wide variety of ideas and attitudes.

- **Religion:** For many people, religion is not just a Sunday morning practice but a larger spiritual force that infuses their lives. Religion helps shape different ways of thinking and behaving.

Surface Diversity and Deep Diversity

Surface diversity and deep diversity are categories of personal attributes—or differences in attributes—that people perceive to exist between people or groups of people.

Surface-level diversity refers to differences you can generally observe in others, like ethnicity, race, gender, age, culture, language, etc. You can quickly and easily observe these features in a person. And people often do just that, making subtle judgments at the same time, which can lead to bias or discrimination. For example, if a teacher believes that older students perform better than younger students, they may give slightly higher grades to the older students than the younger students. This bias is based on a perception of the attribute of age, which is surface-level diversity.

Deep-level diversity, on the other hand, reflects differences that are less visible, like personality, attitude, beliefs, and values. These attributes are generally communicated verbally and non-verbally, so they are not easily noticeable or measurable. You may not detect deep-level diversity in a classmate, for example, until you get to know him or her, at which point you may find that you are either comfortable with these deeper character levels, or perhaps not. But once you gain this deeper level of awareness, you may focus less on surface diversity. For example, at the beginning of a term, a classmate belonging to a minority ethnic group whose native language is not English (surface diversity) may be treated differently by fellow classmates in another ethnic group. But as the term gets underway, classmates begin discovering the person's values and beliefs (deep-level diversity), which they find they are comfortable with. The surface-level attributes of language and perhaps skin color become more "transparent" (less noticeable) as comfort is gained with deep-level attributes.

Summary

- The term culture generally describes the shared values, beliefs, norms, language, practices, and artifacts of people.
- Our experience of cultural difference is influenced by our ethnocentrism (judging others using your cultural standards) and Xenocentrism (belief that another culture is superior).
- Cultural competence is the ability to recognize and adapt to cultural differences and similarities.
- Surface-level diversity refers to characteristics you can easily observe, while deep-level diversity refers to attributes that are not visible.

Discussion Questions

1. Examine the difference between material and nonmaterial culture in your world. Identify ten objects that are part of your regular cultural experience. For each, then identify what aspects of nonmaterial culture (values, beliefs, norms, language, and practices) that these objects represent. What has this exercise revealed to you about your culture?

2. Do you believe that feelings of ethnocentricity or xenocentric attitudes and practices are prevalent in U.S. culture? Why do you believe this? What issues or events might influence your ideas about these concepts?

3. How do you define diversity? Compare and contrast your answer with others. Do you feel like you left anything out or want to add more to your definition? Were there other definitions that you did not agree with? What do the differences in definitions indicate about diversity?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of adding Diversity and Cultural Competency (Gail Sabo – OER Commons) to What is Culture? (Sociology 3e – Openstax).
- Added and changed some images as well as changed formatting for photos to provide links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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2.2 Elements of Culture

Values and Beliefs

The first, and perhaps most crucial, elements of culture we will discuss are values and beliefs. **Values** are ideals, or principles and standards members of a culture hold in high regard. For example, most cultures in any society hold "knowledge" (education) in high regard. Values are deeply embedded and are critical for learning a culture's **beliefs**, which are the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true. Individual cultures in a society have personal beliefs, but they also shared collective values. To illustrate the difference, U.S. citizens may believe in the American Dream—that anyone who works hard enough will be successful and wealthy. Underlying this belief is the American value that wealth is important. In other cultures, success may be tied less to wealth and more to having many healthy children. Values shape a society by suggesting what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, sought or avoided.

Values often suggest how people should behave, but they don't accurately reflect how people do behave. Values portray an **ideal culture**; the standards society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal culture differs from **real culture**, which reflects what actually happens in a society. In an ideal culture, there would be no traffic accidents, murders, poverty, or racial tension. But in real culture, police officers, lawmakers, educators, and social workers constantly strive to prevent or address these issues. American teenagers are encouraged to value celibacy. However, the number of unplanned pregnancies among teens reveals that the ideal alone is not enough to spare teenagers the potential consequences of having sex.

One of the ways societies strive to maintain its values is through rewards and punishments. When people observe the norms of society and uphold its values, they are often rewarded. A boy who helps an elderly woman board a bus may receive a smile and a "thank you." A business manager who raises profit margins may receive a quarterly bonus. People **sanction** unwanted or inappropriate behaviors by withholding support, approval, or permission, or by implementing sanctions. We may think of 'sanction' as a negative term, but sanctions are forms of **social control**, ways to encourage conformity to

cultural norms or rules. Sometimes people conform to norms in anticipation or expectation of positive sanctions. Receiving good grades, for instance, may mean praise from parents and teachers. Sanctions can also be negative. A boy who shoves an elderly woman aside to board the bus first may receive frowns or even a scolding from other passengers. A business manager who drives away customers will likely be fired. Breaking norms and rejecting values can lead to cultural sanctions such as earning a negative label like 'lazy' or to legal sanctions, such as traffic tickets, fines, or imprisonment. Utilizing social control encourages most people to conform regardless of whether authority figures (such as law enforcement) are present.

Values are not static. They change across time and between groups as people evaluate, debate, and change collective social beliefs. Values also vary from culture to culture. For example, cultures differ in their values about what kinds of physical closeness are appropriate in public. It's rare to see two male friends or coworkers holding hands in the U.S. where that behavior often symbolizes romantic feelings. But in many nations, masculine physical intimacy is considered natural in public. This difference in cultural values came to light when people reacted to photos of former president G.W. Bush holding hands with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in 2005. Simple gestures, such as hand-holding, carry great symbolic differences across cultures (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4 a) In many parts of Africa and the Middle East, it is considered normal for men to hold hands in friendship. How would US citizens react to these two soldiers? Soldiers Holding Hands - Geordie Mott – CC BY 2.0 b) President George W. Bush of the United States and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia meeting at Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas, April 25, 2005. Bush-Abdullah-1 - David Bohrer, White House – Public Domain

Norms

So far, many of the examples in this module have described how people are *expected* to behave in certain situations—for example, buying food or boarding a bus. These examples describe the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured, also referred to as norms. **Norms** are behaviors that reflect compliance with what cultures and societies have defined as good, right, and important. Most members adhere to them.

Formal norms are established, written rules existing in all societies. They support many **social institutions**, such as the military, criminal justice and healthcare systems, and public schools. We might question what *purpose* these norms serve, *who* creates, benefits, and suffers under these formal norms, and wonder about how a group that benefits interacts. Laws are formal norms, but so are employee manuals, college entrance exam requirements, and "no running" signs at swimming pools. Formal norms are the most specific and clearly stated of the various types of norms, and they are the most strictly enforced. But they are enforced to varying degrees.

For example, private property is highly valued in the U.S. Thieves can be fined, imprisoned, or both. People safeguard valuable possessions by locking their doors, buying a safe, and installing alarm systems on homes and cars. A less strictly enforced social norm is driving while intoxicated. While it's against the law to drive drunk, drinking is for the most part an acceptable social behavior. And though there are laws to punish drunk driving, there are few systems in place to prevent the crime.

There are plenty of formal norms, but the list of **informal norms**—casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to—is longer. People learn informal norms by observation, imitation, and general socialization. Some informal norms are taught directly— "Kiss your Aunt Edna" or "Use your napkin"—while others are learned by observation, including understanding consequences when someone else violates a norm. Informal norms dictate appropriate behaviors without the need of written rules and so may be difficult to learn when you are new to or not familiar with the culture.

Although informal norms define personal interactions, they extend into other systems as well. In the U.S., there are informal norms regarding behavior at fast food restaurants. Customers line up to order their food and leave when they are done. They don't sit down at a table with strangers, sing loudly as they prepare their condiments, or nap in a booth. Most people don't commit even harmless breaches of informal norms.

Norms may be further classified as either mores or folkways. **Mores** (mor-ays) are norms that embody the moral views and principles of a group. They often have a religious foundation. Violating them can have serious consequences. The strongest mores are protected with laws and other formal sanctions. In most societies, for instance, homicide is considered immoral, and it's punishable by law (a formal norm). But more often, mores are judged and guarded by public sentiment (an informal norm). People who violate mores are seen as shameful. They can even be shunned or banned from some groups.

The mores of the U.S. school system require that a student's writing be in the student's own words or use special forms (such as quotation marks and a whole system of citation) for crediting other writers. Submitting or publishing another person's words as if they are one's own has a name—plagiarism. The consequences for violating this norm are often severe and can result in expulsion from school or termination from employment.

Unlike mores, **folkways** are norms without any moral underpinnings. Rather, folkways direct appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture. We can think of them as 'traditions'—things we do because we 'always have.' They indicate whether to shake hands or kiss on the cheek when greeting another person. They specify whether to wear a tie and blazer or a T-shirt and sandals to an event. In Canada, women can smile and say hello to men on the street. In Egypt, that's not acceptable. In regions in the southern U.S., bumping into an acquaintance means stopping to chat. It's considered rude not to, no matter how busy one is. In other regions, people guard their privacy and value time efficiency. A simple nod of the head is enough. Other accepted folkways in the U.S. may include holding the door open for a stranger or giving someone a gift on their birthday. The rules regarding these folkways may change from culture to culture. A folkway in one culture could be extremely rude in another.

Folkways are actions that people everywhere take for granted. People need to act without thinking in order to get seamlessly through daily routines. They can't stop and analyze every action (Sumner, 1906). Folkways might be small actions, learned by observation and imitated, but they are by no means trivial. An important folkway in many cultures is kissing Grandmother on the cheek. Fail to do so and you will likely be scolded.

Symbols and Culture

Humans, consciously and subconsciously, are always striving to make sense of their surrounding world. **Symbols**—such as gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words—help people understand that world. They provide communication methods to understanding experiences by conveying recognizable meanings that are shared by societies (Figure 6.5).

The world is filled with symbols. Sports uniforms, company logos, and traffic signs are symbols. In some cultures, a gold ring is a symbol of marriage. Some symbols are highly functional; stop signs, for instance, provide useful instruction. As physical objects, they belong to material culture, but because they function as symbols, they also convey nonmaterial cultural meanings. Some symbols are valuable only in what they represent. Trophies, blue ribbons, or gold medals, for example, represent accomplishments. But many objects have both material and nonmaterial symbolic value.

Figure 2.5 Some road signs are universal. But how would you interpret the signage on the right? a)Crossing People Sign in Thailand - Dick Elbers - CC BY-SA 4.0 b) Traffic sign - Honza Soukup – CC BY 2.0

Symbols often get noticed when they are out of context. Used unconventionally, they convey strong messages. A stop sign placed on the door of a college building makes a political statement, as does a camouflage military jacket worn in an antiwar protest. Together, the semaphore signals for "N" and "D" represent nuclear disarmament—and form the well-known peace sign (Westcott, 2008). Some college students wear pajamas and bedroom slippers to class, clothing that was formerly associated only with privacy and bedtime. By wearing the outfit, students are defying traditional cultural norms.

Some symbols represent only one side of the story and elicit strong emotions, which can lead to social unrest. Their presence is a reminder of a nation's worst times and not something to celebrate. Many of these symbols are targets of vandalism as the destruction of these representations is symbolic. Effigies representing public figures are burned to demonstrate anger at certain leaders. In 1989, crowds tore down the Berlin Wall, a decades-old symbol of the division between East and West Germany, communism, and capitalism. In the U.S. beginning in 2019, statues associated with slavery and the Civil War were removed from state capitols, college campuses, and public parks. In Germany, any display of Hitler or Nazi memorabilia or to deny the Holocaust is illegal.

While different cultures have varying systems of symbols, one system is common to all: language. Whatever its form, people learn social and cultural norms through it.

Language and Symbols

Language is a system that uses symbols with which people communicate and through which culture is transmitted. Letters (which make up words), pictographs, and hand gestures are all symbols that create a language used for communication. Sign language, for example, requires an intimate knowledge not only of an alphabet but also of signs that represent entire words and the meaning indicated by certain facial expressions or postures. Its grammar differs from the spoken language. As spoken language is different across regions, nations and cultures, and can even differ by the age of the person, so too does sign language.

All language systems contain the same basic elements that are effective in communicating ideas - object, subject, action. A written language system consists of symbols that refer to spoken sound. Taken together, these symbols convey specific meanings. The English language uses a combination of twenty-six letters to create words. These twenty-six letters make up over 600,000 recognized words (OED Online, 2011). We can compare the reliance on tone and inflection to Mandarin Chinese. It contains over 8,000 characters, but the same character may symbolize different concepts depending on the tone used.

English today contains an English and French version for the same concept. For example, in the English version, one eats, but in French version, one dines. In the English version, we meet someone. In the French version, we encounter someone. Americans may be surprised by the inclusion of a 'u' in some spellings of words like 'behaviour' or 'flavour.' Americans have dropped that 'u' that writers of British English include. Billions of people speak English, and there are almost as many pronunciations of it.

Rules for speaking and writing vary even within cultures, most notably by region. Do you eat a grinder, a sub, or a hero/gyro? Do you refer to a can of carbonated liquid as "soda" a "pop" or a "coke"? Is a household entertainment room a "family room," "rec room," or "den"? When leaving a restaurant, do you ask your server for a "check," the "ticket," or your "bill"? Language is constantly evolving and adding new words as societies create new ideas. In this age of technology, many cultures have adapted almost instantly to new nouns such as "e-mail" and "Internet," and verbs such as "downloading," "texting," and "blogging." These would have been considered nonsense words thirty years ago.

Language and Culture

Even while it constantly evolves, language shapes our perception of reality and our behavior. In the 1920s, linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf advanced this idea which became known as **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** or linguistic relativity. It is based on the

idea that people experience their world through their language, and therefore understand their world through the cultural meanings embedded in their language. The hypothesis suggests that language shapes thought and thus behavior (Swoyer, 2003). For example, words have attached meanings beyond their definition that can influence thought and behavior. In the U.S. where the number thirteen is associated with bad luck, many high-rise buildings do not have a 13th floor. In Japan, however, the number four is considered unlucky, since it is pronounced similarly to the Japanese word for "death."

Many social scientists believe that language can have a broad and lasting impact on perception. In 2002, Lera Boroditsky and her colleagues conducted experiments on native German and Spanish speakers in English. Unlike English, these languages assign genders to nouns. In German, for example, the word for sun, die Sonne, is feminine, but the word for moon, der Mond, is masculine. The team chose a set of nouns with opposite genders in German and Spanish and asked participants to provide adjectives to describe them. They found that German speakers used more masculine adjectives than Spanish speakers when describing a noun that was grammatically masculine in German but feminine in Spanish. For example, the word for key is masculine in German and feminine in Spanish. German speakers described keys as hard, heavy, jagged, metal, serrated, and useful, while Spanish speakers used the adjectives, golden, intricate, little, lovely, shiny, and tiny. The team concluded that gender perceptions acquired in a person's native language carry forward to how they see the world even when they switch to a language without grammatical genders (Boroditsky, Schmidt, and Phillips, 2002).

Some social scientists also believe the structure of language can have consequences on both individual and group behavior. For example, a series of studies have found that Finland has a significantly higher rate of workplace accidents than Sweden despite the fact that the languages have similar workplace regulations (Salminen & Johansson, 2000). John A. Lucy explained this discrepancy through differences in the structure of these languages. Swedish places a greater emphasis on the timing of movement in three-dimensional space. Consequently, Lucy argued, the Swedish factories are physically arranged in a manner that supports the smooth running of the product process. Finnish factors experience frequent disruptions, so that workers must rush and have more accidents (Lucy, 1997).

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been interpreted to suggest that if a word does not exist in a language, then users of that language cannot have the experience. Studies have shown, for instance, that unless people have access to the word "ambivalent," they don't *recognize* having conflicting positive and negative feelings about an issue as 'ambivalence.' However, the hypothesis should not suggest that people do not have conflicting feelings but rather that they interpret the feelings differently.

In addition to using spoken language, people communicate without words. Nonverbal communication is symbolic, and, as in the case of language, is learned through one's

culture. Some gestures are nearly universal; some are not. Smiles often indicate positive reinforcement in the U.S., whereas in some cultures it is rude as you do not know the person. A thumbs-up in Russia and Australia is an offensive curse (Passero, 2002). Other gestures vary in meaning depending on the situation and the person. A wave of the hand can mean many things, depending on how it's done and for whom. It may mean "hello," "goodbye," "no thank you," or "I'm royalty." Winks convey a variety of messages, including "We have a secret," "I'm only kidding," or "I'm attracted to you." From a distance, a person may "read" the emotional situation of people just by watching their body language and facial expressions. However, many cultures communicate with lots of physicality, which people outside that culture may interpret as an argument. So, for example, you might believe two people are arguing when, in fact, they are simply having a regular conversation.

Summary

- Values are ideals, or principles and standards members of a culture hold in high regard.
- Beliefs, which are the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true.
- Values portray an ideal culture; the standards society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal culture differs from real culture, which reflects what actually happens in a society.
- Norms are behaviors that reflect compliance with what cultures and societies have defined as good, right, and important.
- Symbols—such as gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words—help people understand that world.
- Language is a system that uses symbols with which people communicate and through which culture is transmitted

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? Do you agree or disagree with it? Cite examples or research to support your point of view.
2. How would the elimination of a social "norm" influence your culture? Describe the positive and negative effects.

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Replaced photos that were no longer available/had broken links
- Added photos with links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

Attributions

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2.3 Diversity in the Workplace

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Differentiate between social diversity and social progress
- Discuss the benefits and challenges of a diverse workforce

We all have our strengths and our weaknesses, things we excel in and things we struggle with. We have our endearing personality traits and our sometimes-annoying ones. Could you imagine working only with people exactly like you, from the same background, with the same experiences, the same personalities? Probably not. And that's a good thing. Diversity helps to keep things interesting, exciting, and progressing. Interacting with a large variety of individuals can help stimulate your mind and present ideas and opinions you may not have ever discovered on your own.

Recognizing diversity in your daily life can help you to see the world from new and different perspectives. Diversity is an essential part of every organization and it is important to recognize how it influences the workforce (Figure 6.6). Understanding diversity can help us to work better in group or team situations and gives us insight into the behavior of an organization. This section will explore the history, complexity, benefits, and challenges of diversity in the workplace.

Figure 2.6 A diverse workforce helps raise awareness of cultural worldview and attitudes towards cultural differences. [BLM Employees at Work](#) - [Bureau of Land Management Oregon and Washington](#) – [CC BY 2.0](#)

Social Diversity and Social Progress

Let's start with the basics. What is diversity? Grab a pen and a piece of paper. Quickly jot down how you would define diversity. What's the first thing that came to mind? Take a minute to write your response and then continue reading.

When students from UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health were asked to define diversity, they each recorded their response. [You can check out their responses](). Take a minute to compare your answers to theirs. Chances are, there were similar themes between your answers and theirs, but your response did not identically match any of the others. This is the perfect way to define diversity.

Each of us are different. Everyone comes with different backgrounds and experiences. Diversity cannot be simply defined by a variety of ethnicities or races. It can also not be simply described as people from different countries or cultures. Instead, diversity encompasses all of these things and more. Diversity includes but is not limited to language, religion, marital status, gender, age, socioeconomic status, geography, politics—and the list goes on and on.

Now that we have reviewed diversity, we need to discuss social diversity. You're probably wondering how the two are different. Santana (2018) defines social diversity as a successful community which includes individuals from diverse backgrounds who all contribute to the success of the community by practicing understanding and respect of different ideas and perspectives. Santana explains that successful socially diverse communities are able to work together to achieve common goals.

While the two terms have a lot of similarities, diversity is defined by a variety of differences between individuals whereas social diversity describes how a community, society, or organization utilizes their members' diversity to work towards a common goal. Lastly, we need to define and discuss social progress.

Harvard Business School's Social Progress Index defines social progress as, "the capacity of a society to meet the basic human needs of its citizens, establish the building blocks that allow citizens and communities to enhance and sustain the quality of their lives, and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential." Let's break it down to better understand the many aspects of social progress.

There are many lenses in which to view social progress. For the purpose of this section, we will specifically focus on social progress in the workplace. Let's focus on the last part of the definition, "to enhance and sustain the quality of their lives, and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential." Simply put, social progress is the idea of giving people from all backgrounds the opportunity and environment to work towards their goals and success. Now, how is social progress different from social diversity? Social progress should be constantly evolving and changing to ensure people can reach their
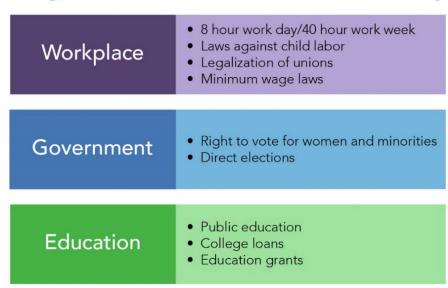
full potential whereas social diversity is a term that evaluates where a community or organization is currently operating.

History of Social Progress

To completely understand social progress on a global scale, you would have to dedicate your life to studying the ins and outs of cultures and societies around the globe. Since we do not have a lifetime to discuss social progress for the purpose of this course, we will review the history of social progress in America over the last century. Even more specifically, we will discuss the history of social progress in America's workplaces. It is important to examine the history of social progress in order to fully comprehend how times have changed in the past century and also to better recognize opportunities in which we need to evolve and improve.

The Progressive Era began in the late 1800s and focused on both political and ethical reform. Progressives argued that business organizations needed to be more regulated in order to ensure economic opportunity for all. Progressives believed that all people deserved the opportunity to flourish through government regulations controlling workplace environments, hiring practices, unions, child labor, minimum wage, etc. While many of these things will appear to be common sense by today's standards, these were controversial and rebellious ideas in the early 1900s (Figure 6.7).

Progressive Reforms in the 20th Century

Workplace	• 8 hour work day/40 hour work week • Laws against child labor • Legalization of unions • Minimum wage laws
Government	• Right to vote for women and minorities • Direct elections
Education	• Public education • College loans • Education grants

Figure 2.7 Progressives created reforms in the workplace, government, and education. Progressive Reforms in the 20th Century – Lumen Learning – CC BY 4.0

The Progressive Era created a domino effect of social change. While change has been slow at times, a lot has happened since the start of the 20th century. In 1948 President Truman signed what is believed by many to be the first workplace diversity initiative on record. Executive Order 9981 ordered a desegregation of the armed services. Although it

did not prohibit segregation, it did mandate equal treatment and opportunity for all people in the armed services, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Then, in the 1960s, The Civil Rights Act was passed, prohibiting discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, or sex. This was a huge step in the history of social progress as it drastically changed the number of opportunities available to people from all backgrounds. Next, in 1987, Workforce 2000 was created, discussing factors that would have an impact on the US workforce in the decades to come.

Workforce 2000 was created in the late 1980s and discussed a variety of factors predicted to influence America's workforce by the year 2000. The Workforce 2000 document was authored by the Hudson Institute, an Indianapolis, Indiana company, and sponsored by the United States Department of Labor. Hudson Institute's mission statement is, "to think about the future in unconventional ways" and that is exactly what they did.

Hudson Institute identified four trends they believed would prove to be true by the year 2000. They are as follows:

1. The American economy should grow at a relatively healthy pace

2. Manufacturing will be a much smaller share of the economy in the year 2000

3. The workforce will grow slowly, becoming older, more female, and more disadvantaged

4. The new jobs in service industries will demand much higher skill levels than jobs of today

While all four of these expected trends are interesting on a variety of levels, for the purpose of this class, let's focus on number three and how it helped to identify diversity changes in the workplace.

The report stated that the number of women and minorities entering into the workforce would grow by the year 2000. Some people believed the report suggested the total number of employees per organization would be comprised of more women and minorities than straight white cisgender men. However, the report clearly stated that the overall additions to the workforce would be comprised of more women and minorities rather than the total. Therefore, while they predicted an increase in the number of women and minorities, they did not predict a large overall percentage change in the makeup of organizations. Although the overall change to the workforce would appear to be minor, the trends presented in the report began to change society's way of thinking. Workforce diversity became a topic of conversation both in and out of the workforce, helping to develop the birth of the diversity industry.

Many companies acknowledged a change in workforce demographics were on the horizon; however, very few companies recognized how diversity could positively influence

a company's bottom-line. Instead of welcoming the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their newly acquired female and minority employees, they focused on getting them to adapt to the current company majority. In many cases, a company's diversity was only reflected through the way their employees looked, not in the way their employees behaved and operated. Training and development were focused on getting the new employees to adapt to the current way of doing things, instead of training the whole company to view business operations from a variety of new perspectives. While assimilation is important to foster fluidity within an organization, utilizing the diverse backgrounds and experiences of employees can help propel operations and output to the next level. Being able to properly manage diversity, in all aspects of the term, became a new focus for many organizations and opened the door for a new era of diversity training and appreciation.

Since there was a new focus on diversity, specifically for hiring and including women and minorities, some current members of the workforce began to feel ostracized. White males specifically were viewed as a diversity problem, and their issues and concerns were not validated because they were the majority, not the minority. This forced people to revisit the concept of diversity, reminding people that diversity includes all people from all backgrounds and that includes white males. All these new concepts and ideas created discussions that are still being held today. For example, there is still a debate about the importance of including white males in the realm of diversity or solely focusing on the traditionally underrepresented groups. Also, does diversity primarily include ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and age? Or does it also include education, socioeconomic background, and previous experiences? Society and the business world are still working their way through some of these conversations today.

Diversity and social progress continue to be an important focus for companies and the way companies foster diversity continues to develop and grow. In today's workplace, companies can promote diversity through domestic partner benefits, paid maternity/paternity leave, flexible schedules, a range of dress code requirements, etc. At the end of this module, we will discuss strategies and ideas you can use to encourage and promote diversity in the workplace.

While this was just a quick review into the history of social progress, hopefully it gave some insight into how much American organizations have grown and developed over the last century. While there are still changes on the horizon, modern society is more open to diversity and what it can bring to the table.

Complexity of Diversity in the Workplace

As we have discussed, diversity is everywhere, including the workplace. Diversity can be defined on a variety of levels. There are both external and internal factors that need to be considered when discussing diversity. **External diversity** is often displayed in a person's appearance. External diversity can include but is not limited to, gender, age, ethnicity,

and sometimes even religion. It is also important to note that even external diversity traits are not always easy to identify as not everyone ages the same or looks the same, even if they're from the same part of the world or expressed their gender in the same way.

Internal diversity, on the other hand, is even more challenging to define and identify. **Internal diversity** includes individual experiences and backgrounds. Internal diversity examples may include how people were raised, where they went to school, previous job experience, etc.

Not every piece of the diversity puzzle can fit neatly into a category. Diversity is extremely complex and incorporates almost every aspect of a person's life. You may find people that are similar to you and have similar core values and beliefs; however, there is no one who is exactly like you because everyone has different experiences throughout their lifetime. Even similar interactions and experiences may have a different effect on each individual who lives it.

The workplace is equally as complex as the rest of society. Once again, the workplace will not identically mirror society but it still experiences similar diversity challenges. We will now examine the benefits and challenges of having a diverse workplace.

Benefits of Diversity in the Workplace

UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center's (GGSC) definition of diversity captures not only that essential element of difference but why it matters. To quote: "'diversity' refers to both an obvious fact of human life—namely, that there are many different kinds of people—and the idea that this diversity drives cultural, economic, and social vitality and innovation.'" From a human resource management standpoint, it's important to note that diversity benefits both the organization and individuals. GGSC cites research indicating that "individuals thrive when they are able to tolerate and embrace the diversity of the world." Of course, the opposite is also true: intolerance undermines our well-being.

Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle, and Yee (2018) observe that "While social justice, legal compliance, or maintaining industry-standard employee environment protocols is typically the initial impetus behind these efforts, many successful companies regard I&D [inclusion & diversity] as a source of competitive advantage, and specifically as a key enabler of growth." The authors found that the business case for diversity and inclusion remains compelling, listing the following benefits:

- **Diversity drives business performance.** A more diverse leadership team correlates with financial outperformance.

- **Executive diversity (gender++) matters.** The companies with the highest gender diversity on their executive teams tend to have higher profitability. Additionally, ethnic and cultural diversity of executive also leads to higher profitability."

- **Lack of diversity impairs business results.** Companies that opt out of building a diverse workforce are less likely to be as profitable as companies that work toward a diverse workforce.

Hunt et al. (2018) found that companies with more diversity are better able to attract top talent and increase employee satisfaction, leading to a positive relationship between inclusion and diversity and performance. The following benefits outlined by Reynolds (2019) expand upon these findings:

- **Greater creativity and innovation**—diversity of thought—for example, different experiences, perspectives and cognitive styles—can stimulate creativity and drive innovation.

- **Improved competitive positioning**—"local knowledge"—everything from local laws and customs to connections, language and cultural fluency—can increase the probability of success when entering a new country or region.

- **Improved marketing effectiveness**—having an understanding of the nuances of culture and language is a prerequisite for developing appropriate products and marketing materials. The list of gaffes is endless...and the financial and brand impact of errors can be significant, from a line of Nike Air shoes that were perceived to be disrespectful of Allah to the poor Chinese translation of KFC's "Finger lickin' good tagline: "so tasty, you'll eat your fingers off!"

- **Improved talent acquisition & retention**—this is particularly critical in a competitive job market: embracing diversity not only increases the talent pool, it improves candidate attraction and retention. A Glassdoor survey found that 67% of job seekers indicated that diversity was an important factor when evaluating companies and job offers. Reynolds also cites HR.com research that indicates diversity, including diversity of gender, religion, and ethnicity, improves retention.

- **Increased organizational adaptability**—hiring individuals with a broader base of skills and experience and cognitive styles will likely be more effective in developing new products and services, supporting a diverse client base and will allow an organization to anticipate and leverage market and socio-cultural or political developments/opportunities.

- **Greater productivity**—research has shown that the range of experience, expertise and cognitive styles that are implicit in a diverse workforce improve complex problem-solving, innovation and productivity.

- **Greater personal and professional growth**—learning to work across and leverage differences can be an enriching experience and an opportunity to build a diverse network and develop a range of high-value soft skills including communication, empathy, collaborative problem-solving and multicultural awareness. To that point,

GGSC reports that a study published in Psychological Science found that "social and emotional intelligence rises as we interact with more kinds of people."

Challenges of Diversity in the Workplace

What makes us different can also make it challenging for us to work well together. Challenges to employee diversity are based not only on our differences—actual or perceived—but on what we perceive as a threat. Our micro (e.g., organizational culture) and macro (e.g., socio-political and legal) operating environment can also be challenges for diversity. Long-term economic, social, political and environmental trends are rendering entire industries—and the associated skill sets—obsolete. For many in these industries and many slow-growth occupations, workplace trends seem to represent a clear and present danger.

Buckley and Bachman (2017) state that the U.S. labor market is increasingly dividing into two categories: "highly skilled, well-paid professional jobs and poorly paid, low-skilled jobs." There are relatively fewer middle-skill, moderate-pay jobs—for example, traditional blue-collar or administrative jobs. The idea of a static set of skills for a given occupation is a historical concept. Participation in the future labor force will increasingly require computer and mathematical skills, even at the low-skill end.

Buckley and Bachman (2017) also predict that the workforce of the future will be older ("70 is the new 50"), more diverse and more highly educated stating that "if current trends continue, tomorrow's workforce will be even more diverse than today's—by gender, by ethnicity, by culture, by religion, by sexual preference and identification, and perhaps by other characteristics we don't even know about right now."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) projects that by 2024, less than 60% of the labor force will identify as "white non-Hispanic," down from over 75% in 1994. Hispanic individuals are projected to comprise approximately 20% of the 2024 labor force, African-Americans 13% and Asians 7%. Women are expected to comprise 47% of the 2024 workforce. For many, these economic and demographic shifts represent a radical change. Macro level challenges to diversity include fixed mindsets, economic trends and outdated socio-political frameworks. Reynolds (2019) lists specific challenges to diversity that may be experienced at the organizational level:

- **Complexity.** This is the flip-side of one of diversity's benefits: it's hard work! Reynolds notes that while it might seem easier to work on a homogeneous team, there is a tendency to compromise and "settle for the status quo." Rock, Grant, and Grey (2016) argue that "working on diverse teams produces better outcomes precisely because it's harder."

- **Differences in communication behaviors.** Different cultures have different communication rules or expectations. For example, colleagues from Asian or Native

American cultures may be less inclined to "jump in" or offer their opinions due to politeness or deference as a new member or the only [fill in the blank] on the team.

- **Prejudice or negative stereotypes.** Prejudice, negative assumptions or perceived limitations can negate the benefits of diversity and create a toxic culture. The oversimplifications of stereotypes can be divisive and limiting in the workplace. Additionally, unconscious biases are often more challenging to maintaining workplace diversity.

- **Differences in language and non-verbal communications.** George Bernard Shaw quipped "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." Clearly, language differences can be a challenge, including accents and idioms. Translation errors can also occur with non-verbal communication; gestures, eye contact, personal space and greeting customs can be significantly (and disastrously) different across cultures and regions.

- **Complexity & cost of accommodations.** Hiring a non-U.S. citizen may require navigating visas and employment law as well as making accommodations for religious practices and non-standard holidays.

- **Differences in professional etiquette.** Differences in attitudes, behaviors and values ranging from punctuality to the length of the work day, form of address or how to manage conflict can cause tensions.

- **Conflicting working styles across teams.** In addition to individual differences, different approaches to work and team work—for example, the relative value of independent versus collaborative/collective thought and work—can derail progress.

Diversity and the Law

Thus far we have examined the history of social diversity, and addressed the benefits and challenges of having a diverse workforce. The progress that has been made in developing more diverse workplaces has been aided by various laws and policies, some of which were mentioned in discussing the history of social progress. We will now look more closely at the current laws impacting diversity in the workplace.

Employment Legislation

What happens when businesses make decisions that violate laws and regulations designed to protect working Americans? As a Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) training manual emphasizes: "Discrimination cost employers millions of dollars every year, not to mention the countless hours of lost work time, employee stress and the negative public image that goes along with a discrimination lawsuit."

Equal employment opportunity isn't just the right thing to do, it's the law. Specifically, it's a series of federal laws and amendments designed to eliminate employment

discrimination. Employment discrimination laws and regulations are enforced by the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**, an agency established by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII). The agency's mission is to stop and remedy unlawful employment discrimination. Specifically, the EEOC is charged with "enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information" (Figure 6.8) (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Since its creation in 1964, Congress has gradually expanded EEOC powers to include the authority to investigate claims, negotiate settlements and file lawsuits. The agency also conducts outreach and educational programs in an effort to prevent discrimination. Finally, the EEOC provides equal employment opportunity advisory services and technical support to federal agencies.

Figure 2.8 Seal of the office of the US EEOC – U.S. Government – Public Domain

Anti-Discrimination Legislation

The intent of U.S. anti-discrimination legislation is to protect workers from unfair treatment. In brief, illegal discrimination is the practice of making employment decisions based on factors unrelated to performance.

In 1964, the United States Congress passed the first Civil Rights Act. In 1963 when the legislation was introduced, the act only forbade discrimination on the basis of sex and race in hiring, promoting, and firing. However, by the time the legislation was finally passed on July 2, 1964, Section 703 (a) made it unlawful for an employer to "fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual

with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions or privileges or employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin."

Over the years, amendments to the original act have expanded the scope of the law, and today the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces laws that prohibit discrimination based on seven protected categories including age, disability, genetic information, national origin, pregnancy, race, color, religion, and sex. Federal anti-discrimination laws apply to a broad range of employee actions. Specifically, any employment decision – including hiring, compensation, scheduling, performance evaluation, promotion, firing or any other term or condition of employment – that is based on factors unrelated to performance is illegal.

While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not mention the words *affirmative action*, it did authorize the bureaucracy to makes rules to help end discrimination. **Affirmative action** refers to both mandatory and voluntary programs intended to affirm the civil rights of designated classes of individuals by taking positive action to protect them from discrimination. The first federal policy of race-conscious affirmative action emerged in 1967 and required government contractors to set "goals and timetables" for integrating and diversifying their workforce. Similar policies began to emerge through a mix of voluntary practices and federal and state policies in employment and education. These include government-mandated, government-sanctioned, and voluntary private programs that tend to focus on access to education and employment, specifically granting special consideration to historically excluded groups such as racial minorities or women. The impetus toward affirmative action is redressing the disadvantages associated with past and present discrimination. A further impetus is the desire to ensure that public institutions, such as universities, hospitals, and police forces, are more representative of the populations they serve.

In the United States, affirmative action tends to emphasize not specific quotas but rather "targeted goals" to address past discrimination in a particular institution or in broader society through "good-faith efforts . . . to identify, select, and train potentially qualified minorities and women." For example, many higher education institutions have voluntarily adopted policies that seek to increase recruitment of racial minorities. Another example is executive orders requiring some government contractors and subcontractors to adopt equal opportunity employment measures, such as outreach campaigns, targeted recruitment, employee and management development, and employee support programs.

As discussed above, the **EEOC** is the organization charged with implementing Title VII and related anti-discrimination legislation. There are currently seven categories protected under federal law: age, disability, genetic information, national origin, race and color, religion and sex. The EEOC's authority includes enforcing the following federal statutes summarized below. Unless otherwise stated, these laws apply to most employers with at

least 15 employees (20 employees for the ADEA), including employment agencies and labor unions.

- [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964:](#) Prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The law also makes it illegal to retaliate against a person who has voiced a grievance, filed a charge of discrimination or participated in an investigation or lawsuit. The prohibition against **sexual harassment** falls under Title VII of this act. As defined by the EEOC, "It is unlawful to harass a person (an applicant or employee) because of that person's sex." Harassment can include "sexual harassment" or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.

- An amendment to Title VII, [The Pregnancy Discrimination Act](#) prohibits discrimination against a woman based on pregnancy, childbirth or a related condition. As in the original law, it also makes retaliation illegal.

- [The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA):](#) Prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender in compensation for substantially similar work under similar conditions. In essence, men and women doing equal jobs must receive the same pay. Since the EPA's enactment, there has been significant – if slow – progress in achieving pay equity. Although progress has often stalled or reversed, the wage gap has narrowed consistently in recent years. Since 1963, the wage gap has decreased from 58.9% to 80.5% in 2017. For perspective: at this percentage, a woman would need to work through April 10 of the next year to make what a man in an equivalent role earned the prior year.

- [The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA):](#) Prohibits employment discrimination against individuals 40 years of age or older based on age. As with other anti-discrimination legislation, the law makes retaliation illegal.

- [Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA):](#) Prohibits discrimination against a qualified person with a disability and requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for applicants and employees with known physical or mental limitations who are otherwise qualified unless that accommodation would pose an "undue hardship" or material impact (significant difficulty or expense) on an employer's business operations. As with other anti-discrimination legislation, the law makes retaliation illegal. This law applies to private sector and state and local government employers only. Disability discrimination protection at the federal level is provided in [Sections 501 and 505 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)**.** There are three kinds of *reasonable accommodations* defined by the EEOC (29 CFR § 1630.2 – Definitions):

- o "modifications or adjustments to a job application process that enable a qualified applicant with a disability to be considered for the position such qualified applicant desires; or

- o modifications or adjustments to the work environment, or to the manner or circumstances under which the position held or desired is customarily performed, that enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of that position; or

- o modifications or adjustments that enable a covered entity's employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment as are enjoyed by its other similarly situated employees without disabilities."

- The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA): Prohibits discrimination against applicants or employees based on an individual's or his or her family's genetic information or family medical history (for example, a hereditary disease, disorder or medical condition). As with other anti-discrimination legislation, the law makes retaliation illegal.

Despite the public relations and financial risk of discriminatory hiring practices, charges of workplace discrimination are in the tens of thousands annually. Since 1997, the number of charges has ranged from a low of 75,428 in 2005 to a high of 99,947 in 2011. In fiscal year 2017, the EEOC received 84,254 charges of workplace discrimination charges and obtained $398 million in monetary benefits for victims through a combination of voluntary resolutions and litigation. As was true for the last few years, retaliation was the most frequently filed charge (49%), followed by race (34%), disability (32%), sex (30%) and age (22%). Percentages for the remaining categories range from less than 1% to 10%.

Although retaliation charges are up 3 percentage points from the prior year, 2016 percentages in the remaining top five categories were within a percentage point, with race at 35%, disability at 31%, sex at 29% and age at 23%. Note that percentages add up to more than 100 due to charges alleging multiple bases of discrimination.

Note that state and local laws may provide broader discrimination protections. If in doubt, contact your state department of labor for clarification. Note as well that laws are subject to interpretation. For example, an EEOC notice emphasizes that their interpretation of the Title VII reference to "sex" is broadly applicable to gender, gender identity and sexual orientation. And, further, that "these protections apply regardless of any contrary state or local laws."

In the Press Release announcing the 2017 data, EEOC Acting Chair Victoria A Lipnic stated that results for the fiscal year demonstrate that "the EEOC has remained steadfast in its commitment to its core values and mission: to vigorously enforce our nation's civil rights laws."

EEO Best Practices

As part of its E-Race (Eradicating Racism & Colorism from Employment) Initiative, the EEOC has identified a number of best practices that are applicable broadly, including the following:

Training, Enforcement, and Accountability

Ensure that management—specifically HR managers—and all employees know EEO laws. Implement a strong EEO policy with executive level support. Hold leaders accountable. Also: If using an outside agency for recruitment, make sure agency employees know and adhere to relevant laws; both an agency and hiring organization is liable for violations.

Promote an Inclusive Culture

It's not just enough to talk about diversity and inclusion—it takes work to foster a professional environment with respect for individual differences. Make sure that differences are welcomed. Being the "only" of anything can get tiring, so make sure you're not putting further pressure on people by surrounding them in a culture that encourages conformity. A great way to promote an inclusive culture is to make sure your leadership is diverse and to listen to the voices of minorities.

Develop Communication

Fostering open communication and developing an alternative dispute-resolution (ADR) program may reduce the chance that a miscommunication escalates into a legally actionable EEO claim. If you're not providing a path for employees to have issues resolved, they'll look elsewhere. Additionally, it's essential to protect employees from retaliation. If people think reporting an issue will only make the situation worse, they won't bring it up, which will cause the issue to fester and lead to something worse than it once was.

Evaluate Practices

Monitor compensation and evaluation practices for patterns of potential discrimination and ensure that performance appraisals are based on job performance and accurate across evaluators and roles.

Audit Selection Criteria

Ensure that selection criteria do not disproportionately exclude protected groups unless the criteria are valid predictors of successful job performance and meet the employer's business needs. Additionally, make sure that employment decisions are based on objective criteria rather than stereotypes or unconscious bias.

Make HR Decisions with EEO in Mind

Implement practices that diversify the candidate pool and leadership pipeline. Provide training and mentoring to help employees thrive. All employees should have equal access to workplace networks.

Enforce an Anti-Harassment Policy

Establish, communicate and enforce a strong anti-harassment policy. You should conduct periodic training for all employees and enforce the policy. The policy should include:

- A clear explanation of prohibited conduct, including examples

- Clear assurance that employees who make complaints or provide information related to complaints will be protected against retaliation

- A clearly described complaint process that provides multiple, accessible avenues of complaint

- Assurance that the employer will protect the confidentiality of harassment complaints to the extent possible

- A complaint process that provides a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation

- Assurance that the employer will take immediate and appropriate corrective action when it determines that harassment has occurred

EEO Complaints

If an employee believes they were or are being discriminated against at work based on a protected category, the person can file a complaint with the EEOC or a state or local agency (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). For example, in California, a discrimination claim can be filed either with the state's administrative agency, the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) or the EEOC. Workplacefairness.org notes that the "California anti-discrimination statute covers some smaller employers not covered by federal law. Therefore, if your workplace has between 5 and 14 employees (or one or more employees for harassment claims), you should file with the DFEH" (Workplace Fairness). California law also addresses language discrimination—for example, "English-only" policies. In brief, "an employer cannot limit or prohibit employees from using any language in the workplace unless there is a business necessity for the restriction." This section discusses private-sector EEO complaints and enforcement. Federal job applicants and employees follow a different process, linked here: federal EEO complaint process.

Who Should File

If federal EEO law applies your workplace and you believe you were discriminated against at work because of your race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information, you can [file a charge of discrimination](#) with the EEOC.

Filing a charge of discrimination involves submitting a signed statement asserting that an employer, union or labor organization engaged in employment discrimination. The claim serves as a request for the EEOC to take remedial action. Note that an individual, organization, or agency is allowed to file a charge on behalf of another person in order to protect that person's identity. A person (or authorized representative) is required to file a Charge of Discrimination with the EEOC prior to filing a job discrimination lawsuit based on EEO laws with the exception of the Equal Pay Act. Under the Equal Pay Act, you are allowed to file a lawsuit and go directly to court.

How to File

To start the process, you can use the [EEOC's Public Portal](#) to submit an inquiry or schedule an "intake" interview. The Public Portal landing page also has a FAQ section and Knowledge Base and allows you to find a local office and track your case. The two most frequently accessed articles are linked below:

- [What happens during an EEOC intake interview?](#)

- [If I submit an online inquiry, does that mean I filed a charge of discrimination?](#)

The second step in the process is to participate in the interview process. The interview allows you to discuss your employment discrimination situation with an EEOC staff member and determine whether filing a charge of discrimination is the appropriate next step for you. The decision of whether to file or not is yours.

The third step in the process, filing a Charge of Discrimination, can be completed through the Public Portal site.

When to File

The general rule is that a charge needs to be filed within 180 calendar days from the day the discrimination took place. Note that this time frame includes weekends and holidays, except for the final day. This time frame is extended to 300 calendar days if a state or local agency enforces a law that prohibits employment discrimination on the same basis. However, in cases of age discrimination, the filing deadline is only extended to 300 days if there is a state law prohibiting age discrimination in employment and a state agency authorized to enforce that law.

If more than one discriminatory event took place, the deadline usually applies to each event. The one exception to this rule is when the charge is ongoing harassment. In that

case, the deadline to file is within 180 or 300 days of the last incident. In conducting its investigation, the agency will consider all incidents of harassment, including those that occurred more than 180/300 days earlier.

If you are alleging a violation of the Equal Pay Act, the deadline for filing a charge or lawsuit under the EPA is two years from the day you received the last discriminatory paycheck. This timeframe is extended to three years in the case of willful discrimination. Note that if you have an Equal Pay Act claim, you may want to pursue remedy under both Title VII and the Equal Pay Act. The EEOC recommends talking to a field staff to discuss your options.

Key point: filing deadlines will generally not be extended to accommodate an alternative dispute resolution process—for example, following an internal or union grievance procedure, arbitration or mediation. These resolution processes may be pursued concurrently with an EEOC complaint filing. The EEOC is required to notify the employer that a charge has been filed against it.

If you have 60 days or less to file a timely charge, refer to the EEOC Public Portal for special instructions or contact the EEOC office closest to you.

Claim Assessment

The EEOC is required to accept all claims related to discrimination. If the EEOC finds that the laws it enforces are not applicable to a claim, that a claim was not filed in a timely manner or that it is unlikely to be able to establish that a violation occurred, the agency will close the investigation and notify the claimant.

Claim Notice

Within 10 days of a charge being filed, the EEOC will send the employer a notice of the charge.

Mediation

In some cases, the agency will ask both the claimant and employer to participate in mediation. In brief, the process involves a neutral mediator who assists the parties in resolving their employment disputes and reaching a voluntary, negotiated agreement. One of the upsides of mediation is that cases are generally resolved in less than three months—less than a third of the time it takes to reach a decision through investigation. For more perspective on mediation, visit the [EEOC's Mediation web page](#).

Investigation

If the charge is not sent to mediation, or if mediation doesn't resolve the charge, the EEOC will generally ask the employer to provide a written response to the charge, referred to as the "Respondent's Position Statement." The EEOC may also ask the employer to answer questions about the claims in the charge. The claimant will be able to

log in to the Public Portal and view the position statement. The claimant has 20 days to respond to the employer's position statement.

How the investigation proceeds depends upon the facts of the case and information required. For example, the EEOC may conduct interviews and gather documents at the employer site or interview witnesses and request documentation. If additional instances of discriminatory behavior take place during the investigation process, the charge can be "amended" to include those charges or an EEOC agent may recommend filing a new charge of discrimination. If new events are added to the original charge or a new charge is filed, the new or amended charge will be sent to the employer and the new events will be investigated along with the prior events.

EEOC Decision

Once the investigation has been completed—on average, a ten-month process—the claimant and employer are notified of the result. If the EEOC determines the law may have been violated, the agency will attempt to reach a voluntary settlement with the employer. Barring that, the case will be referred to EEOC's legal staff (or, in some cases, the Department of Justice), to determine whether the agency should file a lawsuit.

Right to Sue

If the EEOC decides not to file suit, the agency will give the claimant a Notice of Right to Sue, allowing the claimant to pursue the case in court. If the charge was filed under Title VII or the ADA, the claimant must have a Notice of Right to Sue from EEOC before filing a lawsuit in federal court. Generally, the EEOC must be allowed 180 days to resolve a charge. However, in some cases, the EEOC will issue a Notice of Right to Sue in less than 180 days.

Final Thoughts on Workplace Diversity

Although decades of advocacy and diversity training have had an impact, the results have been mixed. The upside: Deloitte's research into the current state of inclusion found that 86% of respondents felt they could be themselves most or all of the time at work (Jacobson, 2019). That statistic represents a significant improvement over a relatively short period of time. A survey conducted six years prior found that 61% of "respondents felt they had to hide at least one aspect of who they are" (Deloitte, 2019). At that time, the conclusion was that "most inclusion programs require people to assimilate into the overall corporate culture" and that this need to "cover" directly impacts not only an individual's sense of self but their commitment to the organization (Matuson, 2013).

On the downside, bias remains a constant, with over 60% of respondents reporting bias in their workplace. Deloitte reports that 64% of employees surveyed "felt they had experienced bias in their workplace during the last year" (Deloitte, 2019). Even more disturbing, 61% of those respondents "felt they experienced bias in the workplace at least

once a month." The percentages of respondents who indicated that they have observed bias in their workplaces during the last year and observe it on a monthly basis are roughly the same at 64% and 63%, respectively.

Research suggests that bias is now more subtle—for example, an act of "microaggression" rather than overt discrimination. It is, however, no less harmful. Deloitte's 2019 research found that bias impacts not only those who are directly affected, but also those who observe the behavior. Specifically, of those who reported experiencing or observing bias: 86% reported a negative impact on happiness, confidence, and well-being; 70% reported a negative impact on engagement and 68% reported a negative impact on productivity (Deloitte, 2019). Executive coach Laura Gates observes that the price of not addressing corrosive interpersonal behavior is too high. She notes that "if people don't feel safe, they can't be creative. If they aren't creative, they can't innovate. If they don't innovate, the business eventually becomes obsolete."

Although we are generally aware that our perceptions are subjective, we are largely unaware that there can be a disconnect between our conscious thoughts and our unconscious beliefs or biases, primarily a product of socio-cultural conditioning.

Summary

- Understanding diversity can help us to work better in group or team situations and gives us insight into the behavior of an organization.
- The Progressive Era began in the late 1800s and focused on both political and ethical reform.
- External diversity can include but is not limited to, gender, age, ethnicity, and sometimes even religion
- Internal diversity includes individual experiences and backgrounds.
- Equal employment opportunity isn't just the right thing to do, it's the law. Specifically, it's a series of federal laws and amendments designed to eliminate employment discrimination. Employment discrimination laws and regulations are enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), an agency established by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII).

Discussion Questions

1. What challenges have you experienced related to diversity in the workplace?
2. What policies has your workplace implemented to address diversity in the workplace? How well were those policies received? Were the effective?
3. Take a look at the [Fortune 500](#) list and choose any company that has a CEO who is part of a minority group. Then, go to that company's website and determine the diversity of that company's senior team. How did this company do in the current year—did they perform better than in the previous two years? Do they have any space on their careers page dedicated to diversity?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix of [Employment Legislation](#) (Introduction to Business – Lumen Learning) and [EEO Best Practices](#), [EEO Complaints](#) (Human Resources Management – Lumen Learning) added to [Introduction to Social Diversity in the Workplace](#) (Organizational Behavior and Human Relations – Lumen Learning).
- Added images and provided links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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