



Multiculturalism and the New Understanding of Diversity

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In this context I adopt a broad definition of culture. Culture is not viewed as synonymous with ethnicity but rather as a larger category that includes ethnicity, as well as other sociocultural contexts for example race, gender, education and economics, are some of the sociocultural contexts of membership. From the multicultural perspectives assumed here there is a multiplicity of sociocultural contexts which influence values over time. These values influence all levels – individuals, families, communities and institutions. From the multicultural perspective, diversity is a valuable resource for growth and enrichment of all societies.

This perspective is multidimensional because it incorporates the many contextual dimensions that contribute to cultural values. To clarify the difference between this multicultural perspective and the evolution of views of multiculturalism in the United States, I briefly summarize how multiculturalism has been understood over time [1].

The “melting pot” ideology was prevalent for the first part of this century (up to World War II). This ideology viewed acculturation as a one-way process toward assimilation (that is, total elimination or suppression of the immigrant’s cultural identity by the mainstream American values prevailing at that historical time). However, with the continued influx of immigrant groups throughout this century, cultural pluralism was a reality before it became a theory [2]. Define cultural pluralism as a “state of equity, mutual respect, and interdependence among several populations that form a single society.” In terms of this definition, it would perhaps be too optimistic to say that the United States is pluralistic [3]. However, distinguished between pluralistic and multicultural societies. Pluralistic societies contain diverse cultural groups, which retain cultural identities while contributing their values to the mainstream of their society. In a multicultural American society, by contrast, each cultural group not only would maintain its original identity and contribute its values to the mainstream society but also would be perceived as American. The difference is that pluralism, while emphasizing everyone’s views, does not address the issue of belongingness.

The sense of belonging experienced at the level of the individual is very important in a multicultural framework. Belongingness engenders trust and cooperation, it allows individuals and whole communities to come together Los Angeles are the prototype of the ethnically diverse American city. However, there are many of the minority groups vying for political and economic power and entire neighborhoods of the city are embroiled in struggle. For example, in parts of Los Angeles, considerable tension exists between Blacks and Hispanics. Officials trace the tensions to years of suspicion between the two groups. Blacks fear losing the political influence they have enjoyed in recent decades as they increasingly compete with Hispanics for economic advancement. Many Hispanics, frustrated by their failure to secure political clout to match their growing numbers, see Blacks as standing in their way. Overall 40 percent of the nation’s second-largest city is Hispanic, not including undocumented immigrants. A steady wave of immigration and the nation’s highest birth rate will probably give Hispanics a clear majority in the city within 20 years.

Obviously, we have reached neither a multicultural nor a pluralistic state of evolution. Many immigrants and native American groups are

neither seen as equal in nor respected by the dominant society. African-Americans, despite their presence for many generations in this country have had fewer opportunities for participation in the mainstream and are not respected by the dominant group. Native Americans, the original inhabitants of this continent, have been marginalized for many generations.

There is recognition that the multicultural perspective rests on an ideal that is far from realized, but one can choose to view reality from a perspective that encourages us to be better than we are now and the best that we can be. Statistics provide a compelling reason for adopting a multicultural perspective. The Census Bureau, which once assumed that all racial groups in the U.S. would eventually have similar fertility rates, now expects African-American and hispanic women will keep bearing children at higher rates than white women. If the projections prove true, a nation that is now three-fourths non-Hispanic white will be 53% non-Hispanic white in 2050. By the year 2000, 46 percent of the population of California will consist of individuals of Latin American descent. By the year 2010, this future will have increased to 55%. By the year 2020, one in three children in the United States will be a member of a minority group. Minorities (including women) will be the majority entering the work force (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2009 and 2011).

Two levels of sociocultural context contribute to diversity. The first, cultural transition, has two temporal dimensions: historical/generational sequences (cultural evolution), and immigration/acculturation. Historical/generational sequences and immigration/acculturation patterns evolve over time, as a result of changing ideologies or circumstances that influence the second level of sociocultural contexts: economics, education, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, race, minority/majority status, and regional background.

To amplify on multiculturalism in relation to material presented in prior sections I focus on multiculturalism as it pertains to economics. Economics is a sociocultural context that has a dramatic impact on everyday life. In this context, distinctions (say among the lifestyles of the poor, the middle class, and the very rich) typically have greater impacts than differences in other contexts. There are more similarities between the poor in Chicago and the poor in other parts of the world than between the poor and the rich in Chicago, New York or Los Angeles. Working-class families report experiencing the greatest burden at times of economic change (whether in a recession, or in an inflationary, robust economic revival). These families also experience

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a sense of disenfranchisement because they frequently do not fit the requirements for supportive social programs. Middle class families experience themselves as being overtaxed and underserved. At the same time, their high degree of conformity to the consumer ethic of our society ends up constraining the quality of their lives.

The economic context is embedded in a political context, and the poor are increasingly losing out. Of the 33 million poor people in this country, 13 million are children and 500,000 of those children are homeless. Edelman [4] examines the disturbing trends emerging with poor families in this country. According to Edelman, "Young families of all races, on whom we can count on to raise healthy children for America's future, are in extraordinary trouble. They have suffered since the early 1970s a frightening cycle of plummeting earnings, a now doubling of birth rates among unmarried women, increasing numbers of single-parent families, falling incomes -- the median income of young families with children fell by 26% between 1973 and 1985 -- and skyrocketing poverty rates. Forty percent of all children in families with a household head under 30 are poor. While many middle-class youths and young families see the future as a choice between a house and a child, many undereducated, jobless, poor youths and young adults trapped in the inner city war zones see the future as a choice between prison or death at the hands of gangs and drug dealers.

More than 16 million children in the United States -- 22% of all children -- live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level -- \$23,550 a year for a family of four. Research shows that, on average, families need an income of about twice that level to cover basic expenses. Using this standard, 45% of children live in low-income families. Children represent a disproportionate share of the poor in the United States; they are 24% of the total population, but 36% of the poor population. In 2010, 16.4 million children, or 22.0%, were poor. The poverty rate for children also varies substantially by race and Hispanic origin, [5] as shown in the (Table 1).

Most of these children have parents who work, but low wages and unstable employment leave their families struggling to make ends meet. Poverty can impede children's ability to learn and contribute to social, emotional, and behavioral problems. Poverty also can contribute to poor health and mental health. Risks are greatest for children who experience poverty when they are young and/or experience deep and persistent poverty.

Research is clear that poverty is the single greatest threat to children's well-being. But effective public policies -- to make work pay for low-income parents and to provide high-quality early care and learning experiences for their children -- can make a difference. Investments in the most vulnerable children are also critical. (National Center for Children in Poverty, January 2013) A Children Defense Fund analysis of new state data released by the U.S. Census Bureau reveals that child poverty rates remain at record highs and Black, Hispanic 100 and children under six suffer the most. Only two states (Texas and Illinois) experienced significant decreases from 2011. Child poverty rates actually increased in three states (New Hampshire, Mississippi and California) and remained at 2011 levels for the remaining 45 (Children's Defense Fund 9 January 2014).

At the beginning of this twentieth century, this nation stood for principles that made no distinction between the class a child was born into and his or her opportunity. This tradition has been disappearing with every new generation of poor families. In a special edition of *Newsweek*, [6] examines how the American dream is failing. Immigrants flocked to this country to provide educational opportunities

for their children. Now, there is a chasm between the dream and the reality. Kozal gives us a powerful indictment of the role of economics in today's society: "Today it is not law but economics that condemns the children of the very poor to the implacable inheritance of a diminished destiny. And with the advent of the Great Recession of 2007 -- 2008 things only got worst. Baby Boomers Come of Age and Generational Conflict. The pattern of ongoing redefinition of beliefs, which unfold during cultural evolution and defines the generational sequence, has a spiral pattern [1]. As the Mayans did, one can conceptualize temporal patterns as cycling simultaneously backwards and forward: people draw on experiences from the past, considering the way they fit the present, and use them to plan for the future. This view allows us to value all temporal positions -- those that maintain stability, and those that are in the process of transformation.

Generational differences are certainly a major source of diversity in this country. The everyday impact of generational change and differentiation is more visible now than ever before, because of rapid dissemination of information propelled by technological advances. The media, particularly television and the internet, have a great impact on how different countries perceive one another. The media also inform us about our own cultural evolution. These historical/generational sequences evolve over time, through consensus about and individual participation in creation of predominant beliefs for each generation. Some of these sequences can be traced through decades, others, through generations [1].

I will briefly summarize some of those themes, beginning with the "Gray Flannel Generation (1950s) and ending with the so-called "X" Generation (1990s). The former group's priorities were working hard, buying a house in the suburbs, marrying young, and have children early. This theme brought about a counter-cultural challenge that involved gender roles and expectations.

Betty Freidan is famous among these dissidents. The *Feminine Mystique* (Freidan [4]) challenged traditional roles and had a strong impact on the evolution of cultural beliefs for generations to come. Hugh Hefner and *Playboy Magazine* expressed another form of dissidence, validating men's sexual needs while devaluing marriage. The Beat Generation emerged objecting to both marriage and work and supporting machismo (Ehrenreich, [4]).

Doing one's own thing and taking care of one's own growth was regarded as cool. During this historical/generational sequence almost every belief previously held in this society was challenged, bringing to the fore a series of social issues; civil rights, women's rights, the antiwar movement, and the hippie generation. This group emphasized androgyny and challenged consumerism, introducing an era of hedonism and drug consumption. Inevitably the pendulum swung, once more, back to a generation (including baby boomers) that embodied materialism and consumerism. A male liberation movement was spawned in reaction to the feminist movement. This time also was the beginning of a movement toward legitimizing gay rights, which is still going on. The last decade, the 1980s, saw the women's movement struggling with the Equal Rights Amendment and polarization around abortion and a woman's right to control the reproduction process.

As we enter the 1990s there are clear historical challenges ahead for this society. Strauss [7] argue that the so called baby bust generation (those born between 1961 and 1981) will be left with the "dirty work" of fixing inherited problems that other generation -- the one they see as selfish baby boomers and greedy seniors -- lack the vision and political courage to resolve. One of the things that grates this latest generation

in the societal hegemony of the baby boomers, who now have one of their own as president. It is an article of faith that this dominance is caused in great measure by the sheer size of the baby boom cohort (those born between 1946 and 1961). Another factor that motivates the baby busters is their dread that the American Dream is over, at least for them.

They fear they are likely to be the first generation to fail to match their parents' economic success. In the economic growth decade between 1980 and 1990, the median income of Americans under age 25 declined by 10.8%. For all others, however, income grew by 6.5%. Some experts foresee a breach of the social contract that has provided for social insurance programs for the elderly in this society. Young people see the workplace rigged against them. They will pay a higher percentage of their income to social security taxes than any other generation before them, but less than 30% expect that they will even draw out of social security what they put in.

Most of all post-boomers -- including the emerging yet ill-defined "X" generation -- make up a survivor population. They are the children of divorce (some 40% grew up in broken families) (U.S. News & World Report, February 22, 1993). According to Strauss [7] many of them as children were allowed to grow up unskilled, unschooled and unwanted in the 1970s and 1980s. Many carry those problems with them. The wealth and income disparity among them will change the focus of class politics -- from raising low-income families to the median to preventing the rootless poor from sinking into a total abyss. And with the advent of the Great Recession things on got worst in terms of Generational conflict [8].

The Organization in the Age

Max Weber, the great sociologist modern m saw the inevitable consequences of the modern mind' disenchantment of the world, saw the unsettling void of relativism left by modernity's dissolution of traditional world view, and saw that modern reason, in which the enlightenment had places had placed al its l hope for human freedom and progress, yet which could not on its own terms justify universal values to guide human life, had in fact created an iron cage of bureaucratic rationality that permeated every aspect of modern existence [9].

"No one knows who will live in this cage in the future or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might will be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved."

Weber's organizational paradigm which heretofore had been very influential made interesting assumptions but in today's economic, political, and social environment, it no longer holds up. Some of these assumptions are as follows:

- organizational decisions are made on a rational basis
- goals help define boundaries by clarifying who is and who is not working toward "the organizational goal"
- functional unity, common interests, and consensus is vital in order to maintain survival of the system
- people have power because of the position they hold in

organizations

-those who have power are easily defined because of the limited number of positions with power

-Humans are non-volitional, sponge-like, malleable organisms who absorb their organizational environments and adapt to them.

The economic reality that this country now confronts has changed the structure, size and dynamics of organizational life Human longevity is rising but corporate longevity seems to be shrinkingonts. For example, twenty years ago Fortune 500 companies accounted for 20% of all American workers, now it's barely 10%. The behemoths like Sears, Xerox, General Motors, have been clobbered by huge debt, rising costs, international competition and the stock market's demand for maximum profit. One way to cope is to replace people with machines; another is to move overseas; another is just cut cost by cutting jobs. These big companies have lost nearly 2 million jobs over the last four years. Another 2 million jobs have vanished at smaller firms.

The above situation has been countered by small, fast growing firms' latching on to narrow, even faddish, markets from health care to cookies. Those firms are growing faster than the behemoths' decline. Over the same period small businesses have added millions of jobs to the economy. The result is a net increase of 4 million new jobs. The upshot of such economic turmoil is that young workers' disillusionment has grown. Caught in the clash for a few new jobs many have trimmed ambitions. Some have learned one of life's toughest lessons: how to get more out of family, friends, and leisure hours than the job. So, too, older workers worry more about losing their health coverage, about having to work until late in life for financial reasons, and about whether the company will abide by the old rule that respected seniority and loyalty when budget cuts come.

What at first appears to be a crisis for most Americans is also an opportunity and organizational life is being redefined and revolutionized to empower the American worker. The new paradigm can be described as follows:

-organizational elements are often loosely linked; consequences of activities are often uncertain

-there is a diversity of goals among organizational members and at best organizations are loose coalitions which move toward this multiplicity of individual goals; this diversity results in competition, opposition, and conflict. However, with appropriate incentives and the motivation positive sum and synergistic effects are achievable.

-process determines structure

-organizations are constantly changing and renegotiating entities

-organizations have a plurality of power and holders draw their power from multiple sources - people who have power create and control organizations

-individuals are volitional, self-and other- interested actors who can and do change their organizational environment

-action is a result of human shaping and molding their destinies from the meaning they develop in interactional processes (action-based meanings) individuals hold differing meanings and therefore will act differently.

The emergence of the organization of the new age has forced the individual into a deep quandary, but one which augurs both hope and promise. Bureaucratic structure provided an iron-clad rationality that

staked a claim on objective truth. Today we confront multiple realities. Truth is no longer a theoretical matter but has been transformed in to practice (the antithesis of theory). Today we are no longer inclined to say what is or is not. We are inclined to see that either response will have a series of consequences. We compare both series of possible consequences. If one of the series, say the first, is more favorable, then that would be the truth.

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