

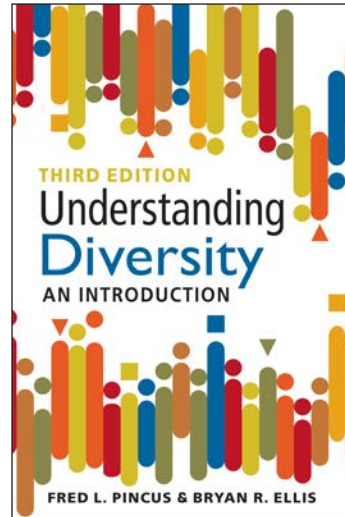
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Understanding Diversity: An Introduction

THIRD EDITION

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1

What Is Diversity?

Issues of population diversity in the United States are filled with contradictions. A 2019 national survey of adults found that more than three-quarters of them said it is “very good” or “somewhat good” that the United States consists of people of many different races and ethnicities (Horowitz 2019a). Nevertheless, the nation saw months of protests after the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, by a White Minneapolis police officer on May 25, 2020.

According to *Forbes* magazine, 614 billionaires resided in the United States in 2020, the highest number ever (*Forbes* 2020). However, more than 39 million Americans were officially defined as poor in 2019 (US Census Bureau 2020c).

Since 2010, five women justices (Sandra Day O’Connor, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, and Amy Coney Barrett) have served on the US Supreme Court, the most in US history. Still, women made only 82 cents for each dollar that a man made in 2019 (US Census Bureau 2020b).

We have more federal laws than ever to protect people with disabilities from workplace discrimination. Yet, 26,838 complaints were filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 2017 by people with disabilities (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2020a).

The US Supreme Court ruled in 2015 that same-sex marriage is legal. Yet North Carolina and several other states prevent transgender people from using bathrooms associated with their gender, and former president Donald Trump reinstated the policy of banning transsexuals from serving in the military.

Immigrants are essential workers in industries such as construction, food services, hospitality, and meat processing and a 2019 poll showed

that 62 percent of Americans believe that immigrants “strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents” (Jones 2019). Trump, however, made restricting immigration a key policy in his presidency.

These are some of the many contradictions when considering diversity in the United States in the third decade of the twenty-first century. There is growing diversity along with increasing inequality. Is the glass half full or half empty? Addressing these issues is the goal of this book.

Despite all of the talk about diversity, most of us grow up in a world that seems fairly homogeneous. Our neighbors and schoolmates are generally from the same race and social class we are. Between 5 and 10 percent of the people in our neighborhoods are probably gay or lesbian, although many of us don’t know who they are. People with disabilities make up 15 to 20 percent of the population.

Upon entering college—before, during, and after Covid-19—students often feel unaccustomed to diversity, especially those who live in campus residence halls. Suddenly, roommates or floormates can be of different races, ethnicities, and religious and economic backgrounds. Some are from different regions of the United States and even from different countries. The sounds of their voices, smells of their cooking, and visuals of their clothes and hairstyles are often unfamiliar. Men and women may live on the same floor. A gay person might live a few doors down or in the same suite. Sexual relations with the opposite sex (or with the same sex) are not supervised, and alcohol and drugs are everywhere.

When one walks around campus, one might see tables and signs promoting the women’s union, Black Lives Matter, the LGBTQ support group, and international student organizations. You can take courses such as Black history, women’s literature, and queer film studies.

On the one hand, this campus diversity might be exciting because there can be new and stimulating experiences every day. On the other hand, it can be disconcerting. Are people who speak Spanish talking about you? Is that gay person down the hall checking you out? Do you feel embarrassed that someone of the opposite sex sees you in your nightclothes or without makeup? Why are those guys down the hall so loud, or so quiet? That music is awful; how can they like it? Are those people going to rob you? Maybe you’re uncomfortable seeing that girl in the wheelchair every morning. It’s not always easy to be around people different from you.

For better or worse, *diversity* has become one of the buzzwords of the early twenty-first century. More than two-thirds of colleges and uni-

versities have diversity requirements in their curricula, and many have ethnic and women's studies programs. Several of the national college-rating publications contain diversity criteria or indicators. *U.S. News and World Report* has an index ranging from 0–1 showing the racial and ethnic diversity of each campus. The *Princeton Review* ranks schools in terms of LGBTQ friendliness, opportunities for race and class interaction, and the number of religious students.

Increasingly, large corporations have diversity departments that include recruiters, trainers, and troubleshooters. DiversityInc rates corporations on various aspects of diversity. Politicians and the media often extol the history of immigration to the United States, a pluralistic society characterized as a melting pot, a salad bowl, or a patchwork quilt.

There is another side to the diversity picture, however. Colleges and universities are accused of being too “politically correct” or “pandering” to people of color. The “cancel culture” is accused of censoring conservative ideas. Instructors often issue trigger warnings that the material covered could be traumatic to some students before they discuss controversial issues. Corporations are accused of hiring “unqualified” minorities and women to satisfy federal affirmative action guidelines. In the eyes of many White Americans, reverse discrimination against White males has replaced discrimination against people of color.

For decades before Trump was elected in 2016, many mainstream politicians and media commentators, especially conservatives, were concerned about how contemporary immigration is allegedly threatening the integrity of American culture and the English language.

Gay marriages are still controversial even though they are legal. Labor unions have been redefined as special-interest groups, and politicians who talk about growing economic inequality are often accused of fomenting class conflict, whereas corporations are thought to represent the interests of the entire country. Women have also been defined as a special-interest group, and pro-choice advocates have been called “baby killers.” In contrast, antiabortionists and those who believe a woman's place is in the home are said to be protectors of “family values.”

Defining Diversity

What is diversity? According to *Merriam-Webster's* (2020), **diversity** means “the condition of having or being composed of differing elements: variety; especially: the inclusion of different types of people (such as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization.”

Synonyms include “assortment, diverseness, heterogeneity, heterogeneity, manifoldness, miscellaneousness, multifariousness, multiplicity, variety, variousness.” This definition can apply to cultures, species, and a number of other topics. From a social science perspective, this definition is not helpful because it is much too broad.

Social scientists use the concept of diversity in at least four ways. **Counting diversity** refers to empirically enumerating differences within a given population. In a given country (or state, city, school, workplace), we can count the members of different races, ethnicities, religions, genders, and so on. A particular country can be described as relatively *homogeneous* if most people are of the same race (religion, ethnicity, etc.) or relatively *heterogeneous* if they are more diverse.

The 117th Congress, for example, took office in 2021 and had 27 percent female members and 23 percent people of color (Blazina and DeSilver 2021; Schaeffer 2021). Although these numbers are high relative to previous congressional classes, women and people of color are still underrepresented relative to the general population at 51 percent female and almost 30 percent people of color. Congress is still predominantly White and male. These numbers, of course, say nothing about *why* women and people of color are underrepresented in Congress.

Culture diversity refers to the importance of understanding and appreciating the cultural differences between groups. The focus here is on how rich and poor, White people and people of color, men and women, people with and without disabilities, and homosexuals and heterosexuals have different experiences, worldviews, modes of communication, behaviors, values, and belief systems. Those who use this definition of diversity tend to seek lower levels of discrimination and higher levels of inclusion so to even the playing field. Usually, the implicit assumption is that appropriate attitudinal changes can take place without large-scale structural changes in the economic and political systems.

Problems can arise when groups don’t understand each other’s cultures. White people, for example, sometimes wonder why Black people can use the “N word,” whereas Whites are not supposed to. *Nigger*, of course, is a derogatory term White people have used for centuries as part of the systemic oppression of Black people. The word is now objectionable to most. *Some* Black people, however, have begun to use *nigga* as a term of endearment and a sign of ingroup solidarity. So, a Black person saying, “What’s up, Nigga” to another Black person has a totally different meaning than if a White person said the same. Not understanding these cultural differences can lead to fraught interracial interactions.

Good-for-business diversity refers to the argument that businesses will be more profitable and government agencies and nonprofit organizations will be more efficient with diverse labor forces. Supporters of this definition would argue, for example, that a female car salesperson would be more effective than a male in selling cars to women customers. Along the same lines, a Hispanic police officer would do a better job than a White police officer in interacting with the Hispanic community. Not having diverse employees, according to this view, is simply bad for business.

Morgan Stanley, the huge investment bank, ran a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* on August 18, 2020, posing the question “Can Gender Diversity Drive Bottom-Line Growth?” A smiling, young, White woman is identified as Jessica Alford, head of global sustainability research. Her answer: “The trend line is clear: Over the past eight years, stocks in more diverse companies have outperformed their benchmarks. . . . The relationship between gender diversity and performance is likely to become more pervasive as women play increasingly prominent roles in the workplace, and in turn, the global economy.” In short, Morgan Stanley is saying gender diversity leads to higher profits.

The website DiversityInc, founded in 1998, describes its mission as bringing “education and clarity to the business benefits of diversity.” Each year it publishes a list of the top fifty US companies based on their successful diversity policies. “We have spent millions of dollars incorporating our methodology into SAS [software] and can positively correlate best practices, like senior-executive accountability, diversity councils, resource groups, and mentoring with specific results as expressed by human-capital and supplier-diversity results.”

Finally, **conflict diversity** refers to understanding how different groups exist in a hierarchy of inequality in terms of power, privilege, and wealth. Scholars who use this definition emphasize the way in which dominant groups oppress subordinate groups who seek liberation, freedom, institutional change, and/or revolution. According to this perspective, calls to celebrate diversity within a fundamentally unjust system are insufficient; usually its proponents talk about dismantling the hierarchy.

For example, believers in conflict diversity would view heterosexuals as oppressing homosexuals through discriminatory laws, organizational practices, and individual behavior. They consider hate crimes against LGBTQ people an example of oppression.

Although these definitions are not always mutually exclusive, this book uses the conflict diversity definition described above. We will analyze the conflicts in the United States based on class, race, immigration, gender, sexual orientation, and disability in subsequent chapters.

The Study of Diversity

Studying group conflict within the population is nothing new. Sociologists and historians have been studying immigration and race relations for more than a century. W. E. B. DuBois and Robert Park conducted empirical studies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and other scholars debated whether the appropriate metaphor for American racial and ethnic relations was the “melting pot,” the “salad bowl,” or “Anglo-conformity.” Karl Marx and Max Weber wrote about class inequality in the nineteenth century. Both race relations and social stratification have for decades been recognized as legitimate sociological specializations. Although a few scholars had been studying male-female conflicts before the twentieth century, the social scientific study of gender inequality exploded in the 1960s, soon to be followed by a dramatic growth in the study of gays and lesbians and people with disabilities.

Black/African American studies programs began to develop in the late 1960s, with Hispanic, Asian, and Native American studies emerging as well. Women’s studies programs were first institutionalized in the 1970s, followed by gay and lesbian studies. Working-class and disability studies came later.

Most of these earlier approaches, however, tended to focus on only one group or category at a time. Race relations, for example, tended to focus on racial differences without considering class and gender. Stratification studies tended to ignore gender and race. Almost all academic programs ignored sexual orientation and disabilities.

Eventually, increasing numbers of scholars, especially women, grew to understand the necessity of going beyond single categories because many people belong to more than one of these groups. Predominantly White socialist feminists began to use both class and gender in their analyses, and Black feminists began to incorporate class, gender, and race. Multiculturalists, especially in the field of education, crossed the boundaries of ethnicity, nationality, race, and religion.

Not until the late 1980s did social scientists begin to systematically discuss class, gender, and race, and sexual orientation *together*. The first edition of Paula Rothenberg’s *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study* (now in its eleventh edition) was published in 1988. The scholarly journal *Race, Gender, and Class* began publication in 1993. Even in specialty areas such as criminal justice, Barbara Price and Natalie Sokoloff used a class-gender-race approach in the second edition of their anthology *The Criminal Justice System and Women* (1996).

Theoretically, there is a variety of ways to understand conflict diversity. Some scholars take a single-issue approach and tend to see

one aspect of diversity as more fundamental than all others. Marxists tend to emphasize class, feminists tend to emphasize gender, critical race theorists tend to emphasize race, and so forth. These scholars don't ignore other aspects of diversity, but they view society through the lens of their most fundamental concern.

Other scholars refuse to engage in debates about whether Hispanics are more oppressed than women or whether poor people are more oppressed than people with disabilities. Intersectionality theorists, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), assert the existence of parallel systems of oppression (gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.) that sometimes reinforce each other and sometimes contradict each other. Although intersectionality proponents agree that no aspect of diversity is most fundamental, they also argue that in different contexts, different aspects of diversity are more important than others. In discussing rape, for example, gender is the most important factor, and poor women of color are the most vulnerable. In discussing the economic inequality endemic to capitalism, class is the most important, and Black and Hispanic men and women are overrepresented among the poor.

Levels of Analysis

Understanding conflict diversity is incredibly complex. After teaching about these issues for many years, we have come to realize there are no simple causes of, or solutions to, group conflict. In 1992, twenty-eight years before George Floyd was murdered by a White Minneapolis police officer, a jury acquitted the White police officers videotaped beating Rodney King, another Black man. A four-day uprising exploded in Los Angeles, resulting in 52 deaths, 8,000 injuries, 12,000 arrests, and \$800 million in property damage. During the melee, a distraught King asked, "Why can't we just get along?" A simple question without a simple answer.

As with most social phenomena, it is necessary to look at group conflict using different levels of analysis. In the United States, we are used to *individualizing* group conflict and other social problems. It is also necessary to look at group conflict from the *structural* level by looking at the society in which the conflict takes place.

We can illustrate these two levels of analysis using the Me Too movement, which burst upon the national scene in 2017 when film producer Harvey Weinstein was accused by an actress of sexual assault. Dozens of other women subsequently accused Weinstein of similar crimes, followed by thousands of women with their own stories of

sexual misconduct by hundreds of powerful men. Me Too was founded in 2006 but was little known before the Weinstein scandal.

At the individual level, we can ask why a specific man perpetrates sexual violence and what he gets from it. Similarly, we can ask why a specific woman did or did not report the violence to the police or some other authority. Are there personality measures that can predict whether a specific man will become a perpetrator? Finally, we would want to know how to help victims heal and how to prevent perpetrators from committing additional crimes.

It is also necessary to analyze sexual violence from the structural level by looking at the larger society. How do power differences and patriarchal culture influence sexual violence? How does the criminal justice system react to crimes of sexual violence? Are the dynamics of sexual violence different in different economic and racial communities? How can we prevent more sexual violence? These questions address the nature of the entire society, not just the individuals involved in a particular event.

To understand both the individual and structural levels of analysis, we must look at group conflict in an interdisciplinary way. We can't be limited by any one discipline.

The Covid-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, provides an excellent example. To understand the nature of the virus and to find treatments and vaccines, we need a broad range of scientists. Before treatments and vaccines were available, physicians, nurses, and other medical workers were exposed on the front lines in hospitals. Public health officials talked about how to mitigate the virus by wearing masks, washing hands, and social distancing.

Social scientists also had their roles. Psychologists tried to understand the resistance of some people to wearing masks. Sociologists looked at inequities in terms of who was more likely to get sick and die from the virus. Political scientists looked at why the Trump administration refused to develop a national plan to combat the virus. Economists studied the financial fallout from the pandemic, the worst since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Educators had to quickly adapt to online pedagogy because schools at all levels eliminated face-to-face instruction. Events such as the pandemic are multifaceted, and a variety of approaches is needed to confront it.

The need for an interdisciplinary and multilevel analysis puts a great burden on those of us who teach and write about diversity from a group conflict perspective. Most have been trained to look at social phenomena from only one discipline, so we must educate ourselves about intellectual approaches we didn't learn in graduate school. It is often

difficult to find faculty to teach diversity courses because of the intellectual challenges these courses pose.

It also puts a great burden on students trying to understand the world in which they live. Many students enroll with the hope they will find an answer to Rodney King's question, "Why can't we just get along?" They find that the answer is much more complicated than they could have ever imagined.

The Rest of the Book

This book is intended to be a companion to one of the many anthologies that address class, race, ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, and disability. The strength of anthologies is their breadth in providing descriptions and analyses of many different intersectional groups. They have articles on prejudice toward several different racial groups, not just Black people. There might be one article about discrimination against working-class White women and another about discrimination against middle-class Asian women. An article about the health problems of gay men could be contrasted with another about the process of going through a sex-change operation.

However, these same anthologies often do not provide a careful discussion of basic concepts or systematic comparisons between groups or up-to-date statistical data, as we intend to do in this short book.

Chapter 2 introduces some of the basic analytical concepts used in the study of diversity. Students also using one of the anthologies will benefit from having these concepts clearly defined in a single chapter. However, because social scientists don't always agree on these important concepts, the definitions in this book might not always be the same as the definitions in an anthology. One can find the key terms used in this book at the back of the book.

Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 will cover the issues of class, race, immigration, gender, sexual orientation and gender diversity, and disability, respectively. Each of these chapters:

1. show how the concepts discussed in Chapter 2 apply and introduce new concepts;
2. present descriptive statistics about differences in wealth, income, unemployment, education, occupation, and so on;
3. discuss the research on prejudice and ideology; and
4. discuss the research on discrimination and structure.

Chapter 9 addresses the issue of social change and emphasizes the importance of collective social action. We also provide a list of activist organizations students can join.

Some of the material might be unsettling. Students will no doubt agree with some things and strongly disagree with others. We encourage you to plunge in and keep an open mind. We invite you to question and challenge the issues discussed in this book. If you don't understand something, ask your instructor. If you disagree with something, ask your classmates what they think.

We also encourage you to disagree with your instructor and your classmates—in a respectful manner, of course. We hope your instructor has provided a safe and comfortable atmosphere in which to discuss some of these issues. Many of the students in our classes say it was the first time they were able to discuss diversity issues with people different from themselves. Pincus invited a lesbian speaker to one class to answer questions about sexual orientation; three students came out on that day. Another student told Pincus he was going to be absent for two weeks because he was going on a *hajj* (Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca). This student conducted a wonderful question-and-answer session with the class when he got back.

We encourage you to peruse news media with a new, critical perspective. When you watch television sit-coms, you will be able to see gender stereotyping. On crime shows, what are the economic and racial characteristics of the criminals, and how do they compare with those of the police and the lawyers? How are gays, lesbians, and people with disabilities presented, if at all?

Before moving on to the next chapter, consider that Donald Trump didn't want you to read this book or any other books on diversity. On September 22, 2020, Trump signed an executive order that criticized the entire field of diversity studies and training. The order prohibited federal agencies and all federal contractors from conducting diversity training that used concepts we discuss such as “systemic racism or sexism,” “White privilege,” and other “divisive concepts.” Fortunately, President Biden overturned this policy on January 25, 2021.

As you go through the course, try to evaluate former President Trump's critique of diversity studies. We promise that by the end of the book, you will have a much different understanding of diversity and group conflict than you do now. Perhaps you will begin to look at the world in a different way. That's how change begins.