



Diverse Issues

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***Diversity in People: Living in a Society of Increasing Income Inequity:
Helping Youth Respond in a Positive Manner***

The Dream

We like to think of the United States as a classless society, that we all belong to the middle class. And those who do not, should because opportunities are boundless and anyone who works hard and diligently can move from rags to riches. This is the American ideal. Unfortunately, it is not reality for many Americans.

Indeed, there are class distinctions in America. Those distinctions are growing stronger. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the long-term trend has been toward increasing income inequity. As reported by Cyrus (1993), Congressional figures suggest that the richest 5% of the American population own up to 83% of the wealth of this country. Further, between 1979 and 1987, the standard of living of the richest 20% of the population increased by 24%, while that of the poorest 20% fell by 12% (Cyrus, 1993). In 1997, 13.3% of the population lived below the poverty line.



Who Are The Poor?

More than 38 million Americans live below the poverty line. Of these poor, the largest groups are women and their children. Female-headed households are five times more likely to be poor than are families with two parents. Rising divorce rates, lower pay for women, the notion on the part of women that they will be taken care of by a man, and the increased acceptability of keeping a child outside of marriage all contribute to a high rate of poverty for women and children.

What Does it Mean To Be Poor In A Rich Society?

To live below the poverty line, in “absolute poverty,” means not having enough money for adequate food, shelter and clothing. Many more people live in “relative poverty.” They are considerably poorer relative to those around them and often only one emergency away from dire straits. Poverty can weigh heavily on those who are just getting by; those who are not getting their share of the American dream.

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Being poor can be particularly difficult for youth in a society where what you have, to a large part, defines who you are. Youth are bombarded with messages that suggest that higher income people are “normal” Americans, while those with lesser income have less value. Messages come from the media, from the expectations of teachers and other influential adults, and from peers in school and social groups.

Too often those with more privileged status assume the myth that most poor people have brought this situation onto themselves. It is assumed they are poor because they lack the Protestant ethic. The truth is that many poor people are hard working men and women. They are the chambermaids in hotels; the adults who cook in fast-food restaurants; the cafeteria workers in school lunchrooms; the nurse aides who make sure patients have clean rooms and clean bodies. For those people, poverty is not a result of a lack of motivation or an unwillingness to work hard.

Without the money to purchase the symbols of status that others enjoy, youth from poor families find themselves in situations where they may be joked about, put down, ridiculed, or ignored by more privileged peers. It seems that many youth, similar to many adults, need to feel superior to someone else in order to feel good about themselves. Poorer youth may go to great lengths and sacrifices to acquire the “in” brand of running shoes or jeans in order to feel a positive identity and sense of belonging.

The effects of classism can have long-term impacts on both the poor and the more privileged. Lower income youth may be reinforced in a sense of inferiority that may translate into hostility toward the more privileged. Feelings of inadequacy and resentment may persist into adulthood. Middle and higher income youth may develop a false sense of superiority.

As educators, we can play an important role in helping all youth to feel valued, see the value in all kinds of work, and develop a sense of respect

for all classes of people. One goal can be to help less privileged youth maintain a positive outlook for their future. A second goal can be to help youth develop the ability to empathize (not sympathize) with others. To empathize with another is to identify with, and understand what another person is feeling. While sympathy or pity sets people apart, empathy brings people together. Some suggestions might include:

- * Plan visits or field trips to a homeless shelter, a food pantry, a children’s hospital or other place where people have lives and needs that are different than one’s own.
- * Encourage older youth to volunteer in organizations and agencies that serve low income families and individuals.
- * Ask youth to imagine themselves being someone whose family has low income, someone who uses a wheelchair, someone who has just arrived in this country and does not speak English. After serious reflection, ask youth to write down how they would feel.
- * Make a point to address negative comments that youth may make about people who are less privileged. Silence condones.
- * Encourage youth to read books about empathy.

The following are suggestions:

Belle Prater’s Boy by Ruth White (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1996) Ages 12 & up.

Blubber by Judy Blume (New York: Schuster Children’s Books, 1982). Ages 9-12.

Pink and Say by Patricia Polacco (New York: The Putnam Publishing Group, 1994). Ages 9-13.

A Separate Peace by John Knowles (New York: Bantam Books, 1994). Ages 13 & up.

Visiting Miss Pierce by Pat Derby (New York: Sunburst Books, 1989). Ages 11-14.

Sources:

Cyrus, V. (1993). *Experiencing race, class, and gender in the United States*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Lewis, B. A. (1998). *What do you stand for? A kid’s guide to building character*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

Diversity Activity: New Penn State University Cooperative Extension Publication

Diversity Activities for Youth and Adults is a new publication hot off the press.

Learning about diversity can be fun. The activities in this publication can help participants:

- ◇ Recognize how we place self-imposed limits on the way we think;
- ◇ Discover that, in many ways, people from different cultures and backgrounds hold similar values and beliefs;
- ◇ Become more aware of our own cultural viewpoints and stereotypes we may have inadvertently picked up;
- ◇ Accept and respect the differences and similarities in people.

The activities in this publication are appropriate for use by teachers, youth leaders, child care professionals, and human service professionals. While most of the activities are appropriate for older youth (middle school and above) and adults, some of the activities may be adapted for younger children. Decisions should be based on the facilitator's knowledge of the group's cognitive level and needs.

This publication may be obtained through the Publications Distribution Center, 112 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802. For information call (814) 865-6713.

Just What Is Diversity Anyway?

The second grade school teacher posed a simple enough problem to the class. "There are four blackbirds sitting in a tree. You take a slingshot and shoot one of them. How many are left?"

"Three," answered the 7 year old European with certainty. "One subtracted from four leaves three."

"Zero," answered the 7 year old African with equal certainty. "If you shoot one bird, the others will fly away."



The problem, as it turns out, was not so simple after all. Indeed in some ways it gets to the very heart of what the fuss is all about regarding cultural diversity and the need to recognize it, understand it, value it, and finally, manage it.

Source: Audrey Edwards, *Working Women*, January 1991.

Diverse Issues is available on the Web

Web Address:

<http://www.cas.psu.edu/docs/casdept/familyliving/pi/pimenu.html>

Diversity in the Workplace: Male-Female Conversational Styles: Different Planets or Different Cultures?

“If women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence, then communication between men and women can be like cross-cultural communication, prey to a clash of conversational styles. Instead of different dialects, it has been said they speak different genderlects.” (Tannen, 1990, p. 42)



From early on, boys and girls are socialized differently, even boys and girls who grow up in the same household. Boys tend to play outside in hierarchically structured groups. One boy often takes the leadership and tells the other boys what to do. This is a way of gaining status. Taking center stage by telling jokes or challenging the jokes of others is another way of taking center stage and gaining status. In boys games, someone is the winner and someone is the loser. Boasting and arguing over who is the best are frequent.

Girls, on the other hand, often play in smaller groups or pairs. Often a girl may have one treasured best friend. Games are less likely to have winners and losers. Cooperation and intimacy are the goals. Instead of giving orders to each other, girls are more likely to make suggestions to each other. Center-stage is not the desired goal. Girls are more likely to be concerned with developing relationships.

Boys are on the look-out for signs of being put down or told what to do. Boys are constantly monitoring who gives the orders and who takes them. Shifts in these two activities mean shifts in status. Girls on the other hand, monitor friendships for shifts in alliance. Popularity and connectedness with others are measures of status.

These early rules and expectations of boys and girls at play tend to translate into different communication styles in the workplace. “To a man, conversation is a debate to win. To a woman, conversation is glue holding relationships together.” (Schrank, 1994, p.3).

Women, for example, are more likely than men to use linguistic hedges such as “sort of” or “kind of” or sentences beginning with “I guess...” or “I wonder...” These and other typical female styles may be interpreted by males as a sign of weakness and uncertainty.

Women tend to use more “tag endings.” Tag endings are questions tagged on the end of sentences. Saying “That was a good example, wasn’t it?” instead of “That was a good example” may make the speaker appear more tentative.

Women are more likely than men to use an upward inflection at the end of a sentence. The statement may be interpreted as less authoritative. Women use more emotional words than men. “The agenda should be limited to one hour” is a stronger statement than “I feel the agenda should be limited to 1 hour.” Additionally, women tend to use more disclaimers and hedges than men. “I’m not certain but...” tends to weaken the statement that follows. Men in the workplace tend to speak in more direct, objective, and confrontational manners. (*Continued to page 6*)

Diversity Resource: Growing Up In America: Many Families, Many Cultures

How many times do you have the feeling of wasting the hours you spend driving long distances in your car? Why not use that “wasted” time to explore America’s diverse cultures? ***Growing Up In America: Many Families, Many Cultures*** is a 12-part audio series about the complex, often ambivalent relationship between American families’ ethnic and religious traditions and the larger society’s dominant values.



Each half-hour tape focuses on a different ethnic group including African American, Jewish, Puerto Rican, Chinese, Italian, Anglo, Irish, German, Polish, Arab, Scandinavian and Native American. The programs demonstrate that ethnicity is complex and continues to have a profound influence on American family life. Joe Giordano, the series creator and producer, interviewed 15 renowned family therapists from around the country. He asked them to draw upon their vast clinical and personal experiences to societal values and how this tension gets resolved.

For review copies, contact Joe Giordano at (914) 961-1940. The audio series is produced by Ethnic Productions, Incorporated.

Troubles

The carpenter I hired to help me restore an old farmhouse had just finished a rough first day on the job. A flat tire made him lose an hour of work, his electric saw quit and now his ancient pickup truck refused to start.

While I drove him home, he sat in stony silence. On arriving, he invited me in to meet his family. As we walked toward the front door, he paused briefly at a small tree, touching the tips of the branches with both hands. When

opening the door he underwent an amazing transformation. His tanned face was wreathed in smiles and he hugged his two small children and gave his wife a kiss.

Afterward, he walked to the car. We passed the tree and my curiosity got the better of me. I asked him about what I had seen him do earlier.

“Oh, that’s my trouble tree,” he replied. “I know I can’t help having troubles on the job, but one thing for sure, troubles don’t belong in the house with my wife and children. So I just hang them up on the tree every night when I come home. Then in the morning I pick them up again.”

“Funny thing is,” he smiled, “when I come out in the morning to pick ‘em up, there aren’t nearly as many as I remember hanging up the night before.”

Source: “6th-Sense” - “The Sense of Humor”

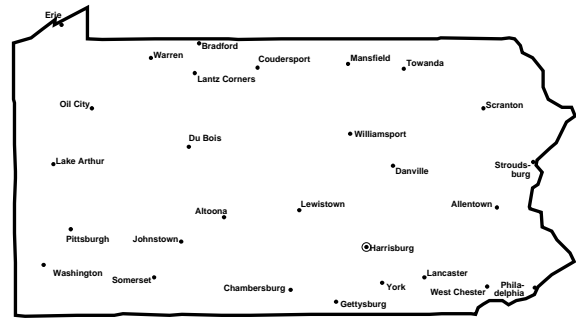


Diversity Around The State: Mary Miller Helps Teens “Get It Together!”

Mary Miller, 4-H/Youth Development Agent in Montgomery County helps teenagers “*Get It Together*” in a six to seven lesson program. Topics include: Values, Communication Skills, Setting Goals, Problem Solving Techniques, Diversity Awareness, Team building, and Stress For Teens. The program has been successful with teens in a variety of settings including a Latino community program, high school classes, and girls (13 - 17) who have been remanded to a leadership and community service program through the court system. This program is held in conjunction with the YWCA.

The Diversity Awareness lesson helps youth to recognize the stereotypes we have of other cultures, of people of color, and in reference to age and gender. Youth discuss how hurtful stereotypes can be in teen relationships. Labeling is an important part of this lesson. Teens learn that putting labels on a person without knowing that person on the inside can result in barriers to getting to know each other. Teens practice rewriting negative labels with a more positive focus. Most of the learning takes place through hands-on activities.

When the lesson is over, the learning has not ended. Each teen is asked to make a commitment to do or try something differently within the next 30 days that will help to increase their understanding of diversity. Each teen signs a commitment form and shares it with a buddy.



The buddy is responsible for checking on their progress within the 30 days.

--Thanks to Mary Miller, 4-H/Youth Development Agent, for sharing this challenging program.

(Continued from pg 4 “Diversity in the Workplace”)

Differences in style can lead to misinterpretation. As women rise higher in business and professional circles, they are less likely to use female conventions. However, recognizing that there are differences in style is important. This recognition may reduce the chances of misinterpretation and miscommunication between men and women. The meaning behind the message may be the same, but the manner in which it is delivered may sound very different.

Sources:

Schrank, L. W. (1994). *Gender and Communication: She Talks - He Talks*. Lake Zurich, IL.: The Learning Seed.

Tannen, D. (1990). *You Just Don't Understand.: Women and Men in Conversation..* New York: Ballantine Books.

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