



## *Diversity in People: Rural, Urban, and Suburban Communities*

Take a guess. Match the following stereotypes on the left with the type of community on the right.

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <p>_____ “soccer moms”, financially well-off, Whites, swimming pools in the backyard, commuters, college-educated, snobs, two dogs and a cat, home-owners</p> | a. rural    |
| <p>_____ “crime-free”, “the good life”, hard-working, warm and friendly, Normal Rockwell virtue (simple, pure, and wholesome)</p>                             | b. urban    |
| <p>_____ criminals, minorities, low-income, renters/tenants, physical and moral decay, loud music, a store on every corner</p>                                | c. suburban |

The chances are very good that you were able to complete the above task with perfect accuracy. We all know the stereotypes that are associated with where people live in America. But how accurate are these stereotypes and to what degree do they impact our judgements about the people who live in different types of communities? Many stereotypes about different types of communities contain some elements of the truth, yet often represent gross exaggerations of reality.

### **Rural, Urban and Suburban Communities**

#### Rural Communities

Many Americans hold a largely nostalgic and romantic image of rural living. Willits, Bealer, and Timbers (1989) coined the phrase the “rural mystique” to describe the public’s favorable regard for rural communities. That is, that a rural environment is more wholesome, more democratic, more natural, less hectic, more peaceful, more “American,” more conducive to a sense of community, a better place to raise children, and an indication of greater individuality than the urban lifestyle (Bealer & Willits, 1989, cited in Walsh, 1997).

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In fact, in a study of urban residents' attitudes toward rural communities, Walsh (1997) found that nearly twice as many survey participants indicated that they would prefer to live in rural areas as opposed to living in urban environments. However, since most rural-oriented urban people have not relocated to rural areas, it is reasonable to assume that urban residency must represent a level of attractiveness to many urban residents.

### Cities

Seventy-five percent of the nation's



communities are rural and home to about 60 million people (Gillis, 1989, cited in Walsh, 1997). However about 78% of the nation's population live in urban (including suburban) areas (Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Cities stir up mixed feelings. For some, they are the best of all that is good in society. "...cities are seen as providing a wide variety of lifestyles, a great range of choices for both work and play, and a stimulating atmosphere." (Walmsley, 1988, p.1) For others, however, cities are perceived to be the "dens of iniquity."

On the one hand, an individual is able to act on his or her choices and desires free from the constraints that operate in closely knit communities. Cities have exciting public spaces and a diversity of people, educational, and cultural opportunities. Services are conveniently located and public transportation makes them easy to reach.

Yet, on the other hand, the individual may develop a more limited sense of identity and security that comes from being a part of a larger group. One may sometimes feel like just a faceless being in the crowd. Additionally, city dwellers live in a state of information overload. High-density living, transitory contacts, and noise are just some of the sources of information overload. One coping strategy is to limit the amount of information that one pays attention to.

Examples might include speaking to neighbors but limiting other contact with them; having an unlisted phone number; and choosing not to do personal favors for people outside of one's group of immediate family and friends. In other words, this inability to cope with the vast amount of information with which people are confronted develops into a practice of "non-involvement."

And in *inner* cities, where information overload can be severe, individuals may withdraw to the point that they become characterized as lacking civility and being indifferent (Walmsley, 1988). Indeed, high levels of crime in big cities have traditionally been explained by alienation and social isolation of residents. Clearly, official records document far higher crime rates in inner cities than in either rural or suburban communities.

### Suburbs

Lower crime rates are one factor that attracts many city residents to the safer, quieter, uncrowded neighborhoods of the suburbs. In addition, lower taxes attract major corporations, and free parking attracts shoppers to the malls located in suburbia. Indeed, as central cities continue to lose population, the population of the suburbs is expected to increase. According to the 1990 census, nearly half of the country's population now lives in suburbs (Schneider, 1992). The suburbs, themselves, are even expanding. In fact, the trend is toward a steady push outward from the city until adjoining metropolitan areas become interconnected and form what is being termed a "megalopolis." An example is the so-called "Boswash" megalopolis that stretches from Boston to Washington, D.C. with little distinction denoting where one area ends and another begins.

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In addition to lower crime rates and quieter neighborhoods, suburban residents enjoy other advantages. When compared to inner cities, family stability is higher, the quality of educational facilities and per-pupil expenditures is higher, the number of newly created jobs is greater, and personal income is higher.

Unlike cities, where there is an excitement about public spaces, people in the suburbs prefer private, secure spaces. Few houses even have front porches; instead, suburban houses have decks which protrude into private back yards. A strong sense of individualism, a relaxed atmosphere, and a laissez-faire spirit that allows one to do what one wants when one wants to are appealing to those in the suburbs.

#### In reality

In reality, all three types of communities offer both advantages and disadvantages to their inhabitants. While rural communities indeed have less congestion, more opportunities to enjoy wide open spaces, and members may have a stronger sense of identity with the total community, they are not as problem-free as the “rural mystique” may suggest.

Many rural communities have experienced tough economic times, poorer employment conditions, and fewer public services. Rural communities have higher percentages of their populations living in poverty, less funding available for educational facilities and technology (Deweese, 1999), and higher school drop out rates (Donnermeyer, 1994). And although, rural areas do have much lower crime rates than cities, they are not “crime-free.” All kinds of crime, including violent crime, is on the rise in rural America. In fact, a recent report by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse reports that 8<sup>th</sup> graders living in rural America are as likely or more likely than those in urban centers to smoke marijuana, use crack cocaine, drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, and use smokeless tobacco (No Place, 2000).

Youth in suburbia have not escaped the criminal element either. The percentage of suburban youth who indicate that drugs are available at their schools is similar



to that of both urban and rural youth. And while the presence of gangs is considerably higher in urban areas than in rural or suburban areas, the percentage of youth who say they are fearful of being attacked at school is similar among all three types of communities (Donnermeyer, 2000).

Of the three types of communities, cities have the highest rates of crime. However, the perception of crime in the city is magnified by the media who choose to focus coverage on violent crimes and disasters. For example, one Detroit TV station was found to devote 54 percent of its newscasts to mayhem, while spending an average of eighteen seconds per night covering politics and government (Thomas, 1998). Such distorted views invoke exaggerated fear of cities. And while cities have their downsides, they are most often the chosen location for most American vacationers every year.

The fact is that rural, urban, and suburban communities each have very desirable characteristics. Each also has less desirable characteristics. Each, in varying degrees, has the potential to meet the needs of our diverse American population.

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### ***Diversity Around the State: Chester County 4-H Initiates Collaborative Efforts with Youth in Mexico***

Cerro Del Guayabo was the site for a 4-H collaborative effort between Chester County, Pennsylvania Cooperative Extension, the Mexican Consul, and Gobierno del Estado, the Secretaria de Educacion in Mexico. Laurie Szoke, 4-H Agent in Chester County, Elizabeth Garuno, a Mexican citizen and high school student in West Chester, and Juan Avila, a Mexican-American volunteer recently spent nine days in Mexico working with local, regional and Mexican state educational personnel and teachers. They presented the 4-H program in leadership, music, photography, and Kids For Character to over 300 students in six schools. The grade levels ranged from kindergarten through secondary.

A new 4-H program in Cerro Del Guayabo was started by Professor German Garduno, Elizabeth's uncle and elementary school principal. Twenty-six 4-H photography and character education projects from the 4-H After School Migrant Education Club of New Garden Elementary School were presented to the youth of the Leona Vicario Elementary School. This work provided an example for the 4-H projects completed in Mexico.

Forty-three examples of photography and character education stories were presented to the American team at the end of the visit. Upon return to the United States, the stories were translated into English by Juan Avila.



The Chester County 4-H program is committed to working with the six schools in Cerro Del Guayabo through the 4-H program. The Mexican contingent is interested in learning more about the "train the trainer" model, character education, photography, and technology. Special appreciation is extended to Elizabeth Guayabo and Juan Avila, as well as Chester County Migrant Education staff, Doris Chavez, New Garden English As A Second Language teacher, Diane Schettone and Milton Machuna of the Temple University Visual Anthropology Program.

*Thanks to Laurie Szoke, Chester County 4-H Agent, for sharing this story.*



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The following is a sample list of statements. Adjust statements to the age of the group or to focus on specific aspects of interest to the purposes/goals of the group.

### Statements

- A. Curfews for those under age 18 will help reduce crime.
  - B. Individual schools or school districts should determine policy on school prayer.
  - C. Charter schools are a good alternative for the community.
  - D. Immigration to the United States should be restricted.
  - E. Stricter gun control laws will help reduce crime.
  - F. A multicultural education curriculum should be in place in every school.
  - G. People over 68 should be forced to retire to provide adequate numbers of jobs for younger workers.
  - H. Our current welfare system encourages laziness.
  - I. The media in this country deliver fair and accurate accounts of events.
  - J. Schools should do away with months like Women's History Month or Black History Month.
7. Have participants return to their seats. Ask them to share their thoughts and reactions using the following suggested questions:
- Which statement was the most difficult for you? Why?
  - Which statement was the easiest for you? Why?
  - If there was a time when you were alone in your opinion, how did you feel?
  - Did you ever decide to change your opinion when you saw you did not agree with most of the group?
  - Was anyone in complete agreement with another person on every statement? Why is this unlikely to happen?
  - What are some ways that people respond to one another when points of view differ?
  - Do we ever change our views? What kinds of things influence us to change our perspective?
8. On a piece of chart paper, write the term **POINT OF VIEW**. Have participants brainstorm a list of things that influence their thinking or point of view. (*Answers might include family, religious/spiritual beliefs, media, education, peers or political affiliation*). Encourage participants to create as comprehensive a list as possible.
- |                      |
|----------------------|
| <b>POINT OF VIEW</b> |
| 1. _____             |
| 2. _____             |
| 3. _____             |
| 4. _____             |
| 5. _____             |
| 6. _____             |
9. Divide participants into groups of four or five. From the list that was generated, have participants share with one another what has and continues to most influence their thinking. Allow time for all participants to share.

*This activity was adapted from Tools for Teachers – A World of Difference Institute Anti-Bias Study Guide.*

## ***Diversity Resource: Diversity-Focused Lesson Plans on the Internet***

The internet can be a good source for ready-made lesson plans that focus on diversity education. The following are descriptions of two web sites with lesson plans designed for elementary through high school aged youth.

**ProTeacher** (<http://proteacher.com>) contains eleven lesson plans for elementary school youth.

A Celebration of Diversity: Immigration and Citizenship – a thematic unit with web links, bibliography, poetry, activity ideas, and literature lesson plans about cultural diversity.

Cultural Appreciation – A thematic unit that covers prejudice, cultural dress, food and dances of different cultures.

Culture Pizza – Directions and a printable pattern for making a graphic organizer depicting person heritage.

Deerlake's Multicultural Lessons: Self-Awareness – A few brief lesson plans that emphasize personal cultural heritage. Designed for upper grades, but adaptable for primary students.

Games from Around the World – Directions and background information about games from many cultures. Games from Angola, Greece, Japan and the United States are listed.

Human Needs and Wants – Students learn about the interdependence of people, basic wants and needs, rights and responsibilities, how people meet their needs differently, and conflict resolution. This unit includes lesson plans and printable worksheets.

Lesson Plans for Exploring Prejudice and Diversity Issues – An instructional unit that teaches about self-identity, hate, prejudice, empathy, and stereotyping. Unit provides lesson plans and activity pages. From the State Museum of Pennsylvania.

Looking at Ourselves and Others – From the Peace Corps, culture related lesson plans by grade level about defining culture, developing global perspectives, and challenges stereotypes and assumptions.

Talk – Short language courses for beginners. Includes classroom activities and printable worksheets for French, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

Teacher's Guide – Hats – A curriculum unit that teaches about the historical traditions and cultural beliefs associated with hats. Click on student resources for classroom activities and enrichment ideas.

Unpacking the Supermarket Bag – A lesson plan using grocery store items to teach students about global diversity.

**The Electronic Magazine of Multicultural Education** (<http://www.eastern.edu/publications/emme>) is a free-access electronic magazine that publishes multicultural instructional ideas, reviews of resources, and practitioner and scholarly essays. Each issue includes one or more diversity-focused lesson plans. Click the Instructional Ideas button.

As an example, Vol. 1, No 4 includes a lesson entitled, My Life In A Bag, developed by John Caruso, Jr. This 45-minute diversity exercise uses cultural artifacts to help students clarify their cultural identities and build pride. The results can form the basis of an ethnic awareness portfolio using the collection, selection, and reflection model.

***Diversity in the Workplace: Terms and Phrases to Avoid Using in the Workplace -- And Why***

The following are words and phrases which may be well intentioned but are best avoided in the workplace (or anyplace else for that matter).

**“You People”** – Reference to a group as “you people” is considered a demeaning term by many. It sets up an “us – them” dichotomy.

**“I don’t see color”** – (1) Research suggests that color is one of the *first* things we notice about other people. (2) Not noticing one’s color means not noticing or downplaying an important part of that person. (3) The intention of the observer may be interpreted very differently by the person being observed. Not noticing color may suggest that there is something negative/undesirable about the person’s color, and that the observer is trying to do the person a favor by not noticing this negative aspect. Why are we trying to fix something that is not broken?

**“Some of my best friends are...”** - People from the group you are referring to are likely to disbelieve you. The proof of your understanding/friendship with people from “that group” will be demonstrated by how you interact with them, not by tales about friends from that group.

**“You don’t act \_\_\_\_\_ or talk \_\_\_\_\_”** – For many people of the \_\_\_\_\_ group, this is not a compliment. Do not assume that everyone from a certain group talks or acts just alike. People are individuals and behaviors differ among people of the same group.



**Recipe for Working With People**

- 1 cup of RESPECT
- 1/2 cup of GOOD HUMOR
- 2 tablespoons of LISTENING
- 3/4 cup of CREATIVITY
- 1 common GOAL
- A pinch of CONFLICT

Blend all together until smooth.  
Serve with enthusiasm.

**This file may be accessed electronically at:  
<http://AgExtEd.cas.psu.edu/FCS/pi/pimenu.html>**

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