

# Intersecting Variables: Is it Personality or Culture?

Crystal Taylor-Dietz, Psy.D.  
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## Facilitator Introduction



Crystal Taylor-Dietz, Psy.D.



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## Why this topic?

- The ever-growing diversity of the Church and our world provides increased opportunities for cross cultural engagement and can present challenges to understanding those that are different from ourselves and our cultural norms.
- In cross-cultural interactions people often wonder “is it cultural or personality” that contributes to a particular behavior or communication style.
- Identity development, or the way we define ourselves in relationship to the world around us, is influenced by a number of cultural and personality factors.
- Our identity and personality is formed over time and increased knowledge of the cultural variables that contribute, increases our understanding of ourselves and others.



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## Learning Objectives

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- Explore different dimensions of identity, including personal and cultural aspects
- Learn more about the role of personality and culture in identity formation
- Identify how attending to intersecting aspects of identity can result in an increased understanding of individuals and their formation needs.



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## Identity

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*“Who am I?”*

**General definition:** the qualities, personality, beliefs and expressions that make a person or group.



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## Identity & Its Complexities

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Identity is shaped by:

- macro-level factors (culture, gender roles, history)
- individual-difference characteristics
- characteristic adaptations
- personal life narrative



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## Different Aspects of Identity (Personal)

- Personal Identity: one's goals values and beliefs (Schwartz, 2001)
  - moral standards
  - social and political beliefs
  - occupational choice
  - family relationships
- Culture influences the development and expression of personal identity

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## Culture

- Traditions of thought and behavior that can be socially acquired, shared and passed on to new generations (i.e., Catholicism).
- “culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others (Holfsted, 2001)”

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## Cultural Identity

- The extent to which an individual has considered the personal significance of and feels a sense of solidarity with a particular group.
  - There are times where an individual is born into a given cultural identity and does not agree with the norms and beliefs of the group
    - This leads to marginalization

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## Different Cultural Identities

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- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Ethnicity/race
- Nationality
- Social Class
- Spirituality

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## Gender Identity

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The process by which one comes to understand their subjective experience of their gender and includes personal attributes, social roles, social customs, activities, and behaviors.

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## Sexual Identity

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The process by which one comes to understand to whom they are sexually attracted and includes development of sexual orientation.

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## Ethnic/Racial Identity

- The process by which an individual develops a sense of personal investment and attachment to one's ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007).
  - Individual beliefs and attitudes about their group membership as well as the process by which these develop over time (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).
    - Research shows that often individuals from ethnic minority groups place more emphasis on their ethnic identity than those from majority ethnic groups

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## Spiritual Identity

- The process by which one develops an understanding of their subjective feelings, thoughts and behaviors that relate to the search for the sacred (Hill et al., 2000).
- This includes one's connection to a higher being and can include attachment to a specific religious institution or group.

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## Identity Development

- Is not necessarily a linear process
  - Individuals place emphasis on different parts of their identity
- The diverse aspects of identity all form within a socio-cultural context
- Everyone's identity development follows its own pace, based on personality and life circumstances.

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## Individual Difference Characteristics-Personality

- Personality refers to individual differences in characteristic patterns of behaving (American Psychological Association)
- In identity formation it is related to:
  - Emotional tendencies
  - General approach to the social world
  - Dispositional levels of self-control(Schwartz, et. al.)

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## Big Five Personality Traits

- Universal 5- factor model for personality traits
- Research found support for the traits in over 50 countries
- Personality can be described by variations across five dimensions
- Culture impacts the ways in which the traits are expressed and valued

(APA, 2013)

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## Big Five Personality Traits

- Extraversion: level of energy and motivation socially
- Agreeableness: prosocial tendencies and empathy
- Conscientiousness: impulse control, motivation for following rules, ability to pursue goals and plans
- Neuroticism: emotional lability and susceptibility to negative feelings
- Openness: preferences for new experiences and artistic and intellectual pursuits

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## Characteristic Adaptions

- In identity formation this includes:
  - Goals
  - Life plans
    - Personal agency
  - Attachment styles
- These aspects are also culturally informed

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## Personal Life Narrative

- The story one constructs of their life that provides a sense of purpose and meaning
- “narrative identity gives individual lives their unique and culturally anchored meanings” (McAdams & Olson, 2010, p. 527)

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## Additional Cultural Aspects Important to Narratives

- Privilege
- Oppression
- Immigration
- Acculturation
- Assimilation

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## Privilege

the right or immunity that gives the individual a distinct advantage or favor

- many of us carry privilege in some area (educational level, vocation, income, etc.)
- it's important to recognize when our privilege might make it difficult for us to understand the perspective of someone who is different than us and does not share our same areas of privilege.

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## Oppression

The state of being burdened spiritually or mentally, suppressed or crushed by an abuse of power.

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## Immigration

“International movement of people into a destination country of which they are not natives or where they do not possess citizenship”

- Involves separation from country of origin, family members and familiar customs, navigation of unfamiliar cultural contexts.

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## Acculturation

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- The transfer of values and customs from one group to another
- A cultural exchange that happens with continuous first-hand contact
- The minority member learns aspects of the main culture but also retains aspects of his/her own culture

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## Assimilation

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- The cultural absorption of a minority group into the main cultural body
- The individual that assimilates loses aspects of his/her culture, which can result in a loss of self-identity

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## Seeing Through a Lens of Intersection

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The filter through which we experience and perceive interactions with others occurs at the intersection of the multiple aspects of our identity and theirs.

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### The Problem With Trying To Separate Culture & Personality

- Attempts to see a person as fragmented parts, instead of an integrated whole.
- The “full picture” is needed to understand who the person is and what contributes to the expression of their self
- Dismisses or minimizes important details that will help us empathically connect with the individual and foster healthy relationships.



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### CASE DISCUSSION

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### Tips for Understanding and Supporting the Whole Person

- Requires holding a space and showing empathy for difference
- Understanding how deeply embedded identity factors are
- Being curious and open to learn about the aspects of identity that are central to the individual
- Not simply expecting the individual to assimilate to the majority cultural norms



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### Tips for Understanding and Supporting the Whole Person

- Schedule opportunities for cross-cultural sharing where individuals of different backgrounds can share important aspects of their identity
- If you are having trouble understanding the expression of particular cultural influences, consult with a trusted individual that shares the same core cultural aspects



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### Tips for Understanding and Supporting the Whole Person

If you experience behaviors by someone that you don't understand:

- First think about what aspects of your own identity are contributing to your experience and interpretation of the behavior
- Bring up concerns in an empathic manner
- Pay particular attention to trying to understand the other's perspective and intersecting variables



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## QUESTIONS

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## Contact Us

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