**What is Identity?** Identity means knowing who you are. Culture and identity are frequently linked but they should not be seen exactly as the same concept.

In general terms questions of identity refer to three basic ideas:

1. Who am I? – how, for example, do I define myself?

2. Who are you? – how do “I” define other people?

3. How are my beliefs about my identity affected by my beliefs about your identity?

**What is Culture?** Culture is the way of life of a group of people, social life happens to be structured in a particular way.

Culture can also be defined as “a collectively held set of attributes, which is dynamic and changing over time” and the idea that societies develop mechanisms for the transmission of cultural signs, symbols and meanings.

When paying attention to culture, it can be stated that this is a term, which carries a profound meaning. Simply, it encompasses everything that makes up the lifestyles of a society**.** This includes traditions, value, food, religion, attire, clothing, etc. This highlights that culture is a very broad concept. In other words, culture is about the making of a man or an individual.

Each society has a culture of its own that is transmitted from one generation to another, through socialization. From the birth itself, we are socialized to be a part of a culture, which is further reinforced through not only the informal institutions at play, but also the formal ones.

Culture influences the individuals of society in the creation and growth of identity.

**Cultural Identity**

We all have an identity as to who we are individually and also as a group. Cultural identity is important for people's sense of self and how they relate to others. A strong cultural identity can contribute to people's overall wellbeing.

This concept of identity can be defined as**the manner in which we define ourselves.** A person’s identity is created due to both personal factors as well as external factors. The influence of culture through the process of socialization powers this development. We all have different identities. This can be mainly categorized as personal identity and group identity.

**Personal identity** refers to how we define ourselves as an individual. **Group identity**, on the other hand, allows us to define ourselves in relation to others. The various ethnicities, nationalities, religions, gender, class, caste are some of the categories under which we formulate our group identity. Identities not only promote a sense of belonging, which is essential for humans as social beings, but allow people to fit into a group and be identified as part of it.

It is interesting how a single person can belong to a number of groups in forming his or her identity. Imagine a man who is married, has children and works as an engineer for a corporation. His identity is created as a father, as a husband, as an employee so on and so forth. This brings to focus that an identity is not a single factor or trait, but it is a combination of things. Also, while some identities of a person remains the same throughout the life span, some change with time as he or she embraces new perspectives and shares new experiences as well.

**What is the difference between Culture and Identity?**

• Culture includes traditions, values, norms, food, religion, attire, clothing, etc. which makeup the lifestyles of a society. Identity can be defined as the manner in which we define ourselves.

• Culture is transmitted from one generation to another through socialization, but not identity.

• The relationship between the two stem from culture being the foundation on which identity is created.

**Social Harmony**

Social Harmony is defined as a process of valuing, expressing, and promoting love, trust, admiration, peace, harmony, respect, generosity and equity upon other people in any particular society regardless of their national origin, weight, marital status, ethnicity, colour, gender, race, age and occupation etc.

The importance of social harmony is indispensable. It promotes equitable and rapid economic development. Secondly, social harmony improves peace and cohesion among the nation. Lastly, social harmony helps the citizens to abide by the law and respect rights and freedom of others as well as the Constitution.

**Comopnents of Culture:**

A culture has various elements or components. They are:

1. Behaviour patterns of group such as mores, folkways, customs, traditions, laws, morals, stereotypes, taboos, legends, fashion, myth etc.

2. Literature including prose, poetry, drama, story, etc.

3.Art includes music, dance, sculpture, paintings, architecture, photography etc.

4.Religion includes worship, observance of rituals, sacrifice, prayers etc.

5. Ethics.

6. Educational and recreational institutions like library, museum, school, cinema, theatre, cultural clubs.

7. Socio-economic and political institutions.

**Characteristics of Culture:**

|  |
| --- |
|  |

1. Culture is the sum total of acquired traits which man acquires by socialization process. Thus, culture comprises good behaviour patterns of people in the society.

2. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation. Each generation is free to modify the cultural heritage and then transmits it to the next generation.

3. Culture is a social heritage of man. It represents group’s expectations. Man cannot create it bereft of group’s influence. Therefore, it has not its individual connotation. A culture which does not meet the recurring needs and demands of mankind is obsolete and outmoded. As such, a culture is good if it gratifies the social and ethical needs of man.

5. Culture is not static but dynamic. It receives good things from other cultures. Thus, there is a cultural synthesis or integration. As a result, culture gets refined and influences the life styles of individuals. It is subject to change and grow. So, culture is adaptive in nature. Culture changes as civilization changes.

6. Culture has the quality of becoming integrated. Various parts of culture are integrated with each other. It welcomes new element to be incorporated in it.

7. Culture is the manifestation of individual’s mind in different environments and circumstances. Man is interwoven with cultural mainstreams and becomes part and parcel of it.

8. Culture is idealistic as it stands for ideals, norms and patterns of behavior.

9. Culture is diffused among various groups. As a result, there is seen how one group accepts another’s culture in their styles of living.

**Culture and Religion**

Culture is said to be dynamic - it can take many forms and has many levels. It is therefore not surprising that there are varied notions of what constitutes the essence of culture. Culture forms the foundation of what groups regard as right and wrong. It encompasses value and belief systems - a shared and frequently unspoken understanding of individuals.Moreover, culture underpins the way in which individuals perceive and interpret ideas and concepts. Culture forms a pertinent part of life as it is experienced on a day-to-day basis and can consequently not be escaped.

Religion is generally understood as being based on faith, belief and practices. It comprises doctrines, teachings, ethical standards and principles, all containing specific views of the world.In attempting to better understand the constitutional right to freedom of religion.

It becomes evident that the right to freedom of religion becomes compromised when there is a limitation on an individual's ability to act on his/her religious beliefs.Many writers are of the opinion that there seems to be a notable overlap between culture and religion. The key components thus shared between culture and religion include ideas, values, and the behavior of individuals or a group. It is contended that culture has a religious affiliation and component to it, and that culture and religion might even be a subset of each other.  Culture and religion indeed often overlap, and in fact frequently co-exist.

**Multiculturalism:**

Multiculturalism describes the manner in which a given society deals with cultural diversity. Based on the underlying assumption that members of often very different cultures can coexist peacefully, multiculturalism expresses the view that society is enriched by preserving, respecting, and even encouraging cultural diversity.

**Cultural** **Diversity**

Cultural diversity is important because our country, workplaces, and schools increasingly consist of various cultural, racial, and ethnic groups. We can learn from one another, but first we must have a level of understanding about each other in order to facilitate collaboration and cooperation. Sociologist Dr. Caleb Rosado, who specializes in diversity and multiculturalism, described seven important actions involved in the definition of multiculturalism:

* **Recognition** of the abundant diversity of cultures;
* **Respect** for the differences;
* **Acknowledging** the validity of different cultural expressions and contributions;
* **Valuing** what other cultures offer;
* **Encouraging**the contribution of diverse groups;
* **Empowering** people to strengthen themselves and others to achieve their maximum potential by being critical of their own biases; and
* **Celebrating**rather than just tolerating the differences in order to bring about unity through diversity.

**Why is cultural diversity a “good thing”?**

Culture is the lens with which we evaluate everything around us; we evaluate what is proper or improper, normal or abnormal, through our culture. If we are immersed in a culture that is unlike our own we may experience culture shock and become disoriented when we come into contact with a fundamentally different culture. People naturally use their own culture as the standard to judge other cultures; however, passing judgment could reach a level where people begin to discriminate against others whose “ways of being” are different than their own—essentially, we tend to fear that which we do not understand.

Cultural diversity is important because our country, workplaces, and schools increasingly consist of various cultural, racial, and ethnic groups. We can learn from one another, but first we must have a level of understanding about each other in order to facilitate collaboration and cooperation. Learning about other cultures helps us understand different perspectives within the world in which we live, and helps dispel negative stereotypes and personal biases about different groups.

In addition, cultural diversity helps us recognize and respect “ways of being” that are not necessarily our own, so that as we interact with others we can build bridges to trust, respect, and understanding across cultures. Furthermore, this diversity makes our country a more interesting place to live, as people from diverse cultures contribute language skills, new ways of thinking, new knowledge, and different experiences.

**How can you support cultural diversity?**

* Increase your level of understanding about other cultures by interacting with people outside of your own culture—meaningful relationships may never develop simply due to a lack of understanding.
* Avoid imposing values on others that may conflict or be inconsistent with cultures other than your own.
* When interacting with others who may not be proficient in English, recognize that their limitations in English proficiency in no way reflects their level of intellectual functioning.
* Recognize and understand that concepts within the helping profession, such as family, gender roles, spirituality, and emotional well-being, vary significantly among cultures and influence behavior.
* Within the workplace, educational setting, and/or clinical setting, advocate for the use of materials that are representative of the various cultural groups within the local community and the society in general.
* Intervene in an appropriate manner when you observe others engaging in behaviors that show cultural insensitivity, bias, or prejudice.
* Be proactive in listening, accepting, and welcoming people and ideas that are different from your own.

Cultural diversity supports the idea that every person can make a unique and positive contribution to the larger society because of, rather than in spite of, their differences. Imagine a place where diversity is recognized and respected; various cultural ideas are acknowledged and valued; contributions from all groups are encouraged; people are empowered to achieve their full potential; and differences are celebrated.

*“Diversity is the one true thing we have in common.*  
*Celebrate it every day.”*  
*–Anonymous*

**Intercultural dialogue**

Intercultural dialogue is valuable in maintaining international peace and security, and for that reason, it is essential to treat all cultures and faiths with equal respect, strengthen intercultural dialogue in an inclusive spirit, and settle conflicts by peaceful means.

**Objectives and Conditions**

In a general sense, the objective of intercultural dialogue is to learn to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world and to develop a sense of community and belonging. Intercultural dialogue can also be a tool for the prevention and resolution of conflicts by enhancing the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. More specifically, the following goals have been outlined:

* To share visions of the world, to understand and learn from those that do not see the world with the same perspective we do;
* To identify similarities and differences between different cultural traditions and perceptions;
* To achieve a consensus that disputes should not be resolved by violence;
* To help manage cultural diversity in a democratic manner, by making the necessary adjustments to all types of existing social and political arrangements;
* To bridge the divide between those who perceive diversity as a threat and those who view it as an enrichment;
* To share best practices particularly in the areas of intercultural dialogue, the democratic management of social diversity and the promotion of social cohesion;
* To develop jointly new projects.

Intercultural dialogue is a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organizations with different cultural backgrounds or world views. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes.