

CRB Training Module

Cultural Awareness

Learning Objectives

After studying the information in this training module, you should be

- More knowledgeable about the diverse ethnic and cultural groups and socioeconomic classes represented in the United States.
- Able to recognize the commonalities and differences among the diverse groups in the United States.
- Able to examine your own personal thoughts intellectually, socially, and emotionally to enable bias-free thought about groups of which you are a member or non-member.

Introduction

Sensitivity to diversity among ethnic and economic groups makes it possible to judge behaviors appropriately. Yet American formal institutions—government, schools, business, health and welfare agencies—traditionally are socialized by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant influences. Until recently, research on child development has been carried out on middle-class Anglo-Saxon children. Consequently, society’s norms of child development and behavior reflect that group alone and do not consider the ethnic, cultural, and economic context of other groups in America.

Ethnically Diverse Families

Data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census in 2000, the New Mexico 2000 Census, and the NM Citizen Review Board indicate the ethnic diversity of U.S. society in general and New Mexico society in particular:

Ethnicity	United States 2000 Census	New Mexico 2000 Census	Children Reviewed by NM CRB
White (Anglo)	70 %	45 %	26 %
Hispanic (all races)	13 %	42 %	51 %
Native American	1 %	10 %	15 %
African American	12 %	2 %	8 %
Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders	4 %	1 %	<1 %

General History and Characteristics of White Majority Families

In the United States the most powerful group is white Anglo-Saxon Protestants whose heritage is English, Canadian, Scottish, Australian, or Northern European. Non-Anglo-Saxon white groups are, by heritage, mostly Catholic Italian, Irish, French, Polish, Czech. Russian immigrants are mostly Jewish. Historically these non-Anglo-Saxon groups have suffered prejudice because of their ethnic and religious origins and have occupied the lowest-level occupations. Today all white groups (nearly 194 million) are fairly well assimilated into the mainstream.

The degree to which individuals in the United States subscribe to the values listed above depends in large part on their ethnic and economic background. The majority population reinforces these values, and the minority population is influenced to the degree that they interact with the majority population and its institutions.

Researchers tell us that the following are basic values are shared by this majority culture:

- Emphasize active mastery rather than passive acceptance—individuals are responsible for what happens to them.
- Value the work ethic—industriousness, ambition, competitiveness, individualism.
- Base status on occupation, education, and financial worth.
- Have more interest in the external world of things and events than in the internal world of meaning and feelings. Success is measured by quality of goods purchased.
- Emphasize chance, flow, movement—new and modern are better than old, and the future is more important than the present or past.
- Emphasize peer relationships rather than superior-subordinate relationships. Relationships are horizontal rather than a hierarchy.
- Focus on individual personality rather than group identity and group responsibility. Idealization of outgoing, adaptive personalities.
- Communicate directly or are confrontational in relationships.
- Personal life and community affairs governed by principles of right and wrong rather than shame, dishonor, or ridicule.

General Characteristics of African American Families

African Americans (35 million) are the oldest non-majority racial-ethnic group in the United States. They began to arrive in 1619. All came as slaves and had little in common with each other as they were gathered from many tribes. Although the Civil War ended their slavery in 1865, the subordination of African Americans continued through the Jim Crow period. An era of "Black Pride" that began in the sixties brought many positive changes. However, today the majority of African Americans live in segregated urban housing or in the rural South. Two-thirds are working class. Only one in five African American youth attends college, and one in five African American male youth is in jail,

on probation, or on parole. Still, a sizable middle class is emerging today and one-fourth of all African Americans live in the suburbs.

Research identifies the following characteristics as generally common to African American families:

- View things in their entirety, not in isolated parts.
- Have strong awareness of body language in others and in themselves.
- Are proficient in nonverbal communication, but inventive in verbal speech.
- Prefer inferential reasoning rather than deductive or inductive reasoning.
- Appear to focus more on people's behaviors than on objects.

General Characteristics of Hispanic Families

The largest group of Hispanics in the United States is of Mexican heritage (21 million); the next largest group is Puerto Rican (3.5 million); and Cubans represent the smallest group (1 million). Another half-million come from Central or South America; another 10 million are listed in the 2000 Census as other Hispanics or Latino. Most have a Catholic heritage. Geographically, Mexican Americans mostly occupy the Southwest, Puerto Ricans the Northeast, and Cubans the Southeast. Their general tendency is to live in segregated neighborhoods where the language may be Spanish, English, or Spanglish. Hispanic occupations vary from the lowest to middle-class employment.

Research identifies the following characteristics as generally common to all Hispanics:

- Has strong loyalty to family, community, and ethnic group. Achievement for the family is considered more desirable than achievement for the individual.
- May not place a high priority on academic achievement.
- Show special respect for church, government, and authority figures.
- Hold many beliefs passed down through the family.
- Have pride in their heritage, language, and culture.
- Have a commitment to helping others that includes sensitivity to verbal and nonverbal communications. Conversely, have difficulty with direct expression of their own need for help.
- Clearly define gender roles, and all roles. Consider respect for the individual's role in the family and for following that role most important.
- Learn best in groups and through concrete experience.

General Characteristics of Native American Families

Native Americans (2.5 million), the earliest inhabitants of North America, comprise five thousand native groups that are diverse in tribal customs, language, religious beliefs, and ways of earning a living. Their traditional cultures have been eroded by forced movement to reservations in unfamiliar geographic locations. Today there is considerable interest in Native American culture both within individual tribes and throughout the United States.

The development of the casino industry on reservations has brought economic improvement for many Native Americans.

Research identifies the following characteristics as generally common to Native Americans:

- Base education in tribal societies on an extensive kin network. Those who misbehave are told that evil spirits will punish them.
- Use traditions and rituals to stimulate learning. Storytelling is important to imparting knowledge.
- Place highest importance on the extended family, which offers psychological support; all members are close. Families are respectful of elders and cooperative with each other.
- Consider sharing and group ownership superior to individual possession.
- Do not reward children for curiosity; children are expected to observe and be patient.
- Teach children to drop their heads as a sign of respect.
- Base status on family identification rather than individual identity.
- Begin activities when all are ready, not by clock time; time is present-oriented rather than future-oriented.

General Characteristics of Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Families

Asian Americans (11 million) include persons from China, the Philippines, Japan, Asian India, Korea, Vietnam, Hawaii, Samoa, Guam, and the Pacific Islands. The Chinese were the first to arrive, beginning in 1842. They worked in the California gold mines, or building railroads, but became unwelcome when those jobs were completed. By 1882 they became the victims of the Chinese Exclusion Act. About that time, Japanese began to arrive to become farmers, only to be the victims of legislation that prohibited them from owning land. They countered by putting their land in the names of their native-born children, or by forming corporations with whites. During World War II two-thirds of the Japanese in the United States were interned and lost their property. After the war in Vietnam, many Vietnamese came to the United States. They were originally scattered throughout the States but many have migrated to southern California. California remains home to the majority of Asians in the United States.

Research identifies the following characteristics as generally common to Asian families:

- Emphasize tradition, conformity, and respect for authority.
- Place emphasis on loyalty to the family; control behavior through guilt and shame.
- Recommend restraint in personal relationships and in display of affection and emotions.
- Greatly respect education. Relationships with teachers are formal; achievement is the goal.

- Value achievement for the group as superior to individual achievement. Achievement is an honor for the family.

* * * * *

Characteristics of Upper, Middle, Lower, and Under Classes

Socioeconomic class is based on educational attainment, income, occupation, and power. Where the family falls on this continuum affects how the family lives, thinks, and acts—and, significantly, how society reacts to them.

General Characteristics of the Upper Class

The upper class has generally inherited wealth and has held a prominent social position for generations. Emphasis is placed on the extended family, which may be patriarchal or matriarchal. Fulfillment of adult roles, often in family business, is considered in child rearing. Only high-status occupations are valued. Many upper-class children attend private schools from kindergarten through college.

General Characteristics of the Middle Class

Most middle-class families have earned their status through education and hard work. Emphasis is placed on the nuclear family, and harmonious relationships are valued within the family. Achievement, respectability, and the ability to get along with others are considered important to success. The upper middle class includes executives and professionals. The lower middle class includes salespeople, contractors, artisans, and farmers.

General Characteristics of the Lower Class

Lower-class families are composed of unskilled and semiskilled workers. Patriarchal patterns are most common, and ties are maintained with the extended family. Survival is important, as the lower class is strongly affected by economic fluctuations and these families are often in debt or on welfare. Children often leave school to help financially. Traditionally, many of the lower class have been recent immigrants.

General Characteristics of the Underclass

The underclass differs from the groups identified above in feelings of hopelessness for upward mobility. They comprise families that are often female-headed, the homeless, alcoholics, drug users, the mentally ill, destitute elderly, illegal aliens, and some isolated rural families. They suffer from insufficient education, housing, health services, child care services, protection from crime, as well as from extreme poverty. Society ponders how the underclass developed and how to bring about positive change.

Remember that **each individual is unique** and that there are great variations within each of the groups described above.

Implications for CRB Members

As participants in CRB we need to consider each child in the context of his or her individual culture and history, rather than to impose our own cultural norms. To do so we need to understand the diverse cultures the children represent. The information presented in this training module is intended to help toward that end.

Although the descriptions presented are general, they can help CRB members understand that the values and norms of the families being reviewed may be acceptable within their own cultural context even if different from those of the reviewers. For example, education and individual achievement may not be valued as highly—or may be valued more highly. Lack of punctuality to appointments may be indicative of a chaotic, out-of-control lifestyle—or a different cultural orientation toward time. Inability to request help with needed services may be because of a cultural reluctance rather than because of carelessness or irresponsibility.

Sources: Roberta M. Berns, *Child, Family, School, Community: Socialization and Support* (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt College Publishers, 2001); T. Curry, R. Jiobu, and K. Schwirian, *Sociology for the Twenty-First Century* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2002); US Census Data for 2000 Census (<http://factfinder.census.gov>).

* * * * *

If you are ready to take the test for this training module, click on the link below. Once you submit the test, your answers will be e-mailed to you and forwarded to Terri Newman for scoring.

[Click here to take the test](#)