Cultural Minorities

Culture includes the following:

- ethnicity
- religion
- race
- social status
- education level
- sex
- gender
- sexuality

There are as many cultural minority groups as there are cultural traits.

Healey (2006) asserts, "Minority status has more to do with the distribution of resources and power than with simple numbers." Every society has inequalities, and many are based on minority status.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is not the same as culture or race. While culture encompasses all characteristics of everyday life, and race is a very particular genetic quality, ethnicity is a middle ground encompassing culture and genetic lineage.

Ethnicity is based on one's "common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background" (Ethnic, n.d.).

Ethnic groups express their cultural heritage through the following:

- food
- ceremonies
- traditional customs
- dance
- music
- sayings
- dress

Some examples of ethnic groups in American include the following: Irish, Mexican, Native American, Jamaican, and Polish. Throughout history, ethnic groups have been discriminated against.

Religion

Although people from particular ethnic groups may have similar religious beliefs, it
would be considered a stereotype to assume that they all believe exactly the same ideas. Because religion is a part of culture, and cultures are constantly evolving, one cannot assume any individual's religious beliefs based on his or her ethnicity. Religious groups have been discriminated against throughout history.

**Race**

Race is defined as "a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits" that are passed genetically from generation to generation, including skin color, hair color, and eye color (Race, n.d.). Race is considered "a family, tribe, people, or nation" having related biological genes (Race, n.d.). Race is one of the most conflict-ridden social problems in the United States.

Culture is quite often equated with race. Although they are not the same, both have been used for political, economic, and social purposes internationally.

**Social Class**

One of the primary concepts of social interaction is social status. Every society is made up of a hierarchy of social classes. A social class is "a group [of people] sharing the same economic or social status" or rank (Class, n.d.). Social classes include the lower class, middle class, upper class, and elite.

Members of each class have a particular level of economic security or academic achievement. Most, if not all, modern and historical societies provide for social status to be passed from generation to generation. This is an example of ascribed or acquired social status and allows families of status to maintain their role within their society. In contrast, if a person's family was very poor, but that person went to college and medical school and became a doctor, he or she would have achieved or earned his or her social status.

**Sex, Gender, and Sexuality**

A person's sex is determined as "female or male especially on the basis of their reproductive organs and structures" (Sex, n.d.). Many societies are patriarchal and organized with male-dominated lineage and power structures. Because of this, throughout history, women have been treated unequally or discriminated against—also known as sexism.

Gender, however, does not distinguish the physical being but is "the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex" (Gender, n.d.). From birth, parents are responsible for forming a child's gender distinctions by their differential treatment. This is reinforced through the parent's selection of clothes, toys, and chores for the child throughout his or her entire lifetime. Other societal influences that form gender-role stereotyping can occur through education, peers, sports, and media. Those who do not conform to normal societal traits are often discriminated
against. For example, men who like to decorate are considered too effeminate, and women who like tools and cars are considered too masculine.

Though most people view the terms *sex* and *gender* as interchangeable, most sociologists believe that there are differences. Sexism is the inequality between the sexes based on biological differences while gender inequality is due to the roles placed upon them socially.

Sexuality is how one person relates sexually to others and is yet another trait that helps define people. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and heterosexual are all types of sexual orientation. In most societies, the overarching accepted norm is heterosexuality while all others are treated unequally.

As you can see, social inequalities are derived from a number of different factors including the following:

- ethnicity
- religion
- race
- social status
- education level
- sex
- gender
- sexuality

Unfortunately, each trait provides excuses for individuals in the majority to discriminate against the minority.

**References**


