

# **Why Cultural Diversity Matters: Becoming Culturally competent**

**ACAT**

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# Why Cultural Diversity Matters:

The best way to achieve excellence is through diversity

## Becoming culturally competent:

Institutions need to provide professional development opportunities so that faculty and staff become culturally competent

Scientists must understand that science is a social construct

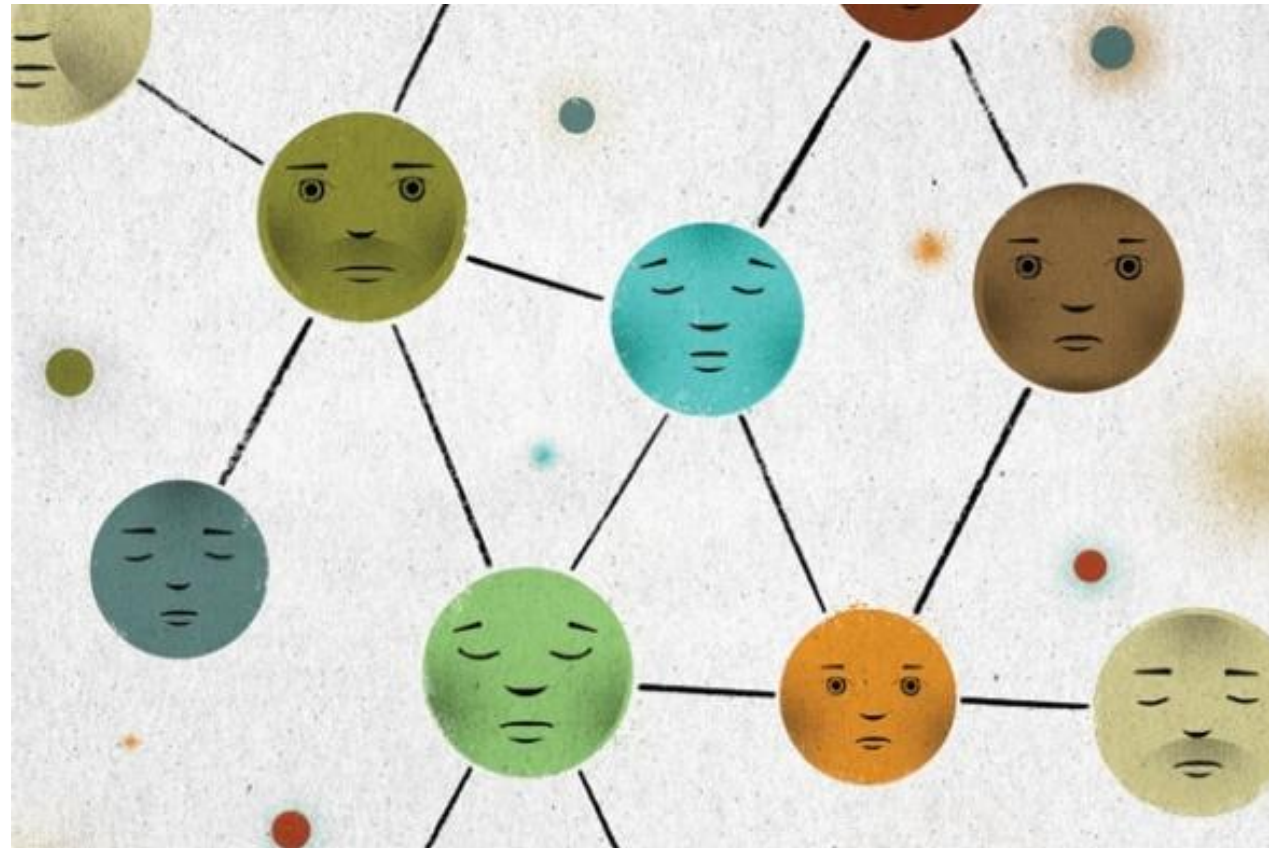
Science is not neutral to cultural diversity

Cultural diversity matters

# How Diversity Makes Us Smarter

By Katherine W. Phillips on October 1, 2014

- [www.scientificamerican.com](http://www.scientificamerican.com)



# What is the Upside of Diversity?

- What good comes from diversity of **race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation**?
- Decades of social science research provides answers.

# Key Benefits: Diversity Enhances Creativity

- Diversity encourages the search for novel information and perspectives
- Diversity leads to better decision making and problem solving
- Diversity can improve the bottom line of companies
- Diversity leads to unfettered discoveries and breakthrough innovations
- Even simply being exposed to diversity can change the way you think

# Diversity appears to lead to higher-quality scientific research

- Richard Freeman and Wei Huang found that papers written by diverse groups receive
- More citations and have higher impact factors than papers written by people from the same ethnic group

# Socially Diverse Groups are More Innovative

- Decades of research by organizational scientists show that
- Socially diverse groups are more innovative than homogeneous groups.

# Socially Diverse Groups are Better Problem Solvers

- Social science research also shows that
- Socially diverse groups are better than a homogeneous group at solving complex, non-routine problems



# Diversity Forces Us to Prepare Better

- Simply interacting with individuals who are different forces group members to prepare better
- To anticipate alternative viewpoints and to expect that reaching consensus will take effort

# This is how diversity works:

- By promoting hard work and creativity
- By encouraging the consideration of alternatives even before any interpersonal interaction takes place
- We need diversity in teams, organizations and society as a whole if we are to change, grow and innovate.

# Why do we resist group diversity?

- Because, as research has shown, social diversity in a group can cause
  - Discomfort
  - Rougher interactions
  - A lack of trust
  - Greater perceived interpersonal conflict
  - Lower communication
  - Less cohesion
  - More concern about disrespect
- When individuals are not culturally competent

# **Diversity is not achieved by adding one URM member to a department**

- My career spans 4 decades at R1 universities: the challenge of being the "only one" in a department
- Biomedical sciences: Number of URM PhD's/yr increased ~9-fold over past 20 years
- Number of Assistant Professors hired increased ~2.5-fold

# Being the Only One

- It is very difficult to bring about change of institutional culture when there is only one.
- The stakes are raised for the URM faculty member when the environment is not culturally responsive and affirming.
- How does one survive in this climate? (Too many do not!)

# Reasons to “tough it out” at an R1 university

- To be successful one needs state-of-the-art lab facilities, equipment, infrastructure
- Access to excellent graduate students and postdocs
- The prestige and reputation of R1 universities— influences funding opportunities and professional growth
- Moral obligation: to right a wrong - to walk through the door that was closed to generations of black scientists before me.

# The cost: What does one have to do to “stay the course?”

- Learn to work in cultural isolation: since scientists are guilty of poor work/life balance, i.e., long hours in the lab, the environment takes its toll.
- Learn how to “code switch” and survive in that space: “go along to get along”. You must deflect microaggressions, insults, insensitive statements and attitudes of cultural/racial superiority.
- Recognize that you are not the problem; the secret to avoiding the emotion of anger.
- Master the art of “double consciousness”

# *The Souls of Black Folk – W.E.B. DuBois 1903*

- Du Bois describes “double consciousness” as follows: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.
- Recognition of the two-ness problem allows you to maintain a solid footing and pride in self; a sense of dignity



# What else?

- Become conversant in the social science literature on:
  - Whiteness and white privilege
  - White fragility
  - Microaggression (othering)
  - Stereotype threat
  - Implicit bias
  - Social capital
  - Self-efficacy
- Modify behavior to counter black male stereotype:
  - Learn how to appear non-threatening
  - Modulate voice
  - Never show anger
  - Never take equipment out of the building without a white escort

# URM Scientists Need to:

- Develop an awareness of and knowledge about factors that may impede your progress
- Understand the social science of cultural competence & inclusive excellence
- **Remember that** historically white institutions remain underprepared to support URM groups

# My family history

- Great-Great Grandfather – James Langford
  - Born a slave in 1805
  - Bought freedom 1850 – Free man
  - Bought freedom of wife and children
  - Purchased land and donated lots to community to build a school and a church
  - Northampton County, NC

# First in My family

- Grandfather – first in my family to be born a free person
- I am the first in my family to attend a historically white institution and earn the PhD

# The Greatest Gift

- If my Great Great Grandfather could find a way to earn money to buy his freedom and jumpstart a life out of slavery for himself and his family,
- I felt obliged to use that gift to fulfill my dream of becoming a scientist and participating in the scientific revolution that is our future.
- The sustaining benefit of my Great Great Grandfather's gift is that science belongs to me as freedom belonged to him.

# My American Cultural Roots

- Is represented by the “Fight for Freedom” – the Resistance Movement
- Fight to end slavery – abolitionist movement
- Fight to end Jim Crow and segregation – civil rights movement
- Movements that made it possible to elect a black President – Barack Obama
- A history of courageous people – a legacy that I am very proud of.

# Institutional Culture Change is Needed

- When culturally aware program elements are in place
  - Persistence increases
  - Performance improves
- What is the time course for institutional culture change?
  - The perceived wisdom was that institutions would be up to speed in one generation.
  - Not true. Institutional change must be systemic and long-lasting.

## Was Justice O'Connor Right in 2003?

- In her opinion in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor concluded that affirmative action in college admissions is justifiable, but not in perpetuity: “We expect that **25 years** from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest [in student body diversity] approved today.”



# Justice Anthony Kennedy - 2016

- Supreme Court upheld the use of race by the University of Texas as part of its admissions policy aimed at educational diversity. The decision by Justice Anthony Kennedy makes no mention of the eventual disappearance of affirmative action, as Justice O'Connor did in 2003.

# Institutional Culture Change Imperative

- When historically white institutions do the hard work to develop culturally aware campuses that celebrate and affirm the rich cultural heritage of URM groups, everyone benefits
- Social Science research has generated a rich body of literature that provides a mechanism for institutional culture change

# Conclusion:

## Institutional Culture Change:

- Very hard work
- Benefits of diversity are enormous
- One is not enough

**Thank You**