

# CULTURAL *Awareness*

Culture can be seen as a collection of customs, beliefs, values and institutions that create a general identity and ways of behaving for a given people. Culture provides a history that describes who we are and, for each person, it reflects his or her own unique form of identity. Our behaviours and interactions with others are generally seen as forms of expressing culture. Cultural generalizations can be helpful in that they enable us to make predictions about people and situations and cope with every day decision making in our lives. However, they should not tempt us to have a stereotype and inhibit our ability of gazing at objects individually.

## Culture provides a history that describes who we are

### ***Values, Bias and Prejudice***

Values are the core of one's beliefs and are manifested in all behaviours. Everyone has biases and prejudices based on their values.

Bias is a tendency to affiliate with one side, showing a preference or choice.

Prejudice is a preconceived opinion, thought or feeling which is held on to despite the availability of contrary information, experience or without any valid proof or supporting evidence.

### ***Discrimination and Stereotypes***

When our prejudices are "acted out", resulting in some form of negative treatment of disliked groups and their members or preferential treatment for one's own reference group, discrimination occurs.

Discrimination, unlike prejudice, is more than an attitude or feeling. It is action and intimately connected to power.

Stereotypes are preconceived notions about groups of people. They often include strong tendencies to overgeneralize about individuals solely on the basis of their membership in particular racial, ethnic, or religious groups, and an unwillingness to consider new information which might lead to alterations or revisions in one's opinions.

### ***Cultural Stereotypes***

Cultural stereotyping causes us to overlook individual characteristics which do not match our preconceived ideas. We must be ready to revise and change these generalizations when dealing with individuals from a particular cultural group, as we gain more information about them.

Keeping standardized pictures of people from other cultures will lead us to over-simplified opinions, attitudes or judgements. The pictures may be based upon real cultural differences. However, many individuals from these cultures may not fit these standard generalizations. Making assumptions can interfere with communications and prevent us from knowing the real person who is unique as a human being.



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