UNDERSTANDING OPPRESSION AND PROMOTING EQUITY

Z. RUBY WHITE STARR

Segment Learning Objectives

As a result of this session, participants will be better able to:

1. Develop a shared vocabulary of concepts related to culture and oppression.
2. Examine their own identity and analyze how that impacts their relationships with others.
3. Explore the relevance of culture in systems and organizing spaces.

What is Culture?

"Historically and anthropologically thought to be a stable pattern of beliefs, values, thoughts, norms, etc... that are transmitted from generation to generation for successfully adapting to other group members and their environment." (*as cited by Warrier, 2013*)

However, this definition is outdated

What is culture? (2)

A critical definition of culture refers to shared experiences or commonalities that have developed and continue to evolve in relation to changing social and political contexts, based on:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- National origin
- Sexuality
- Gender
- Religion

- Age
- Class
- Language
- Disability status
- Immigration status
- Education

Geographic location (space)

Rural, urban

Time

Other axis of identification

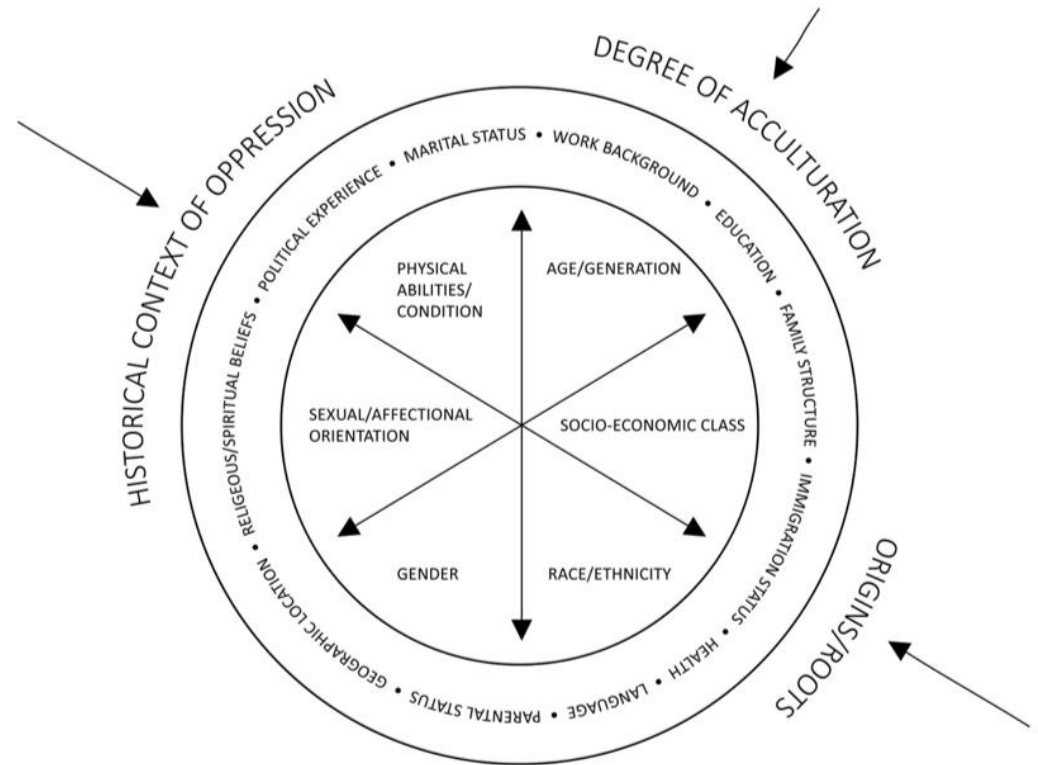**AND** within a historical context of oppression

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Warrier, S. (2013). "*Death by Culture": Engaging Cultural Differences in Creating Compassionate Communities* [PowerPoint slides].
Adapted by Ruby White Starr

Dimensions of Diversity

This illustration includes multiple characteristics that make up a person. We are influenced by the historical context of oppression, the degree of acculturation, and our origins and roots.
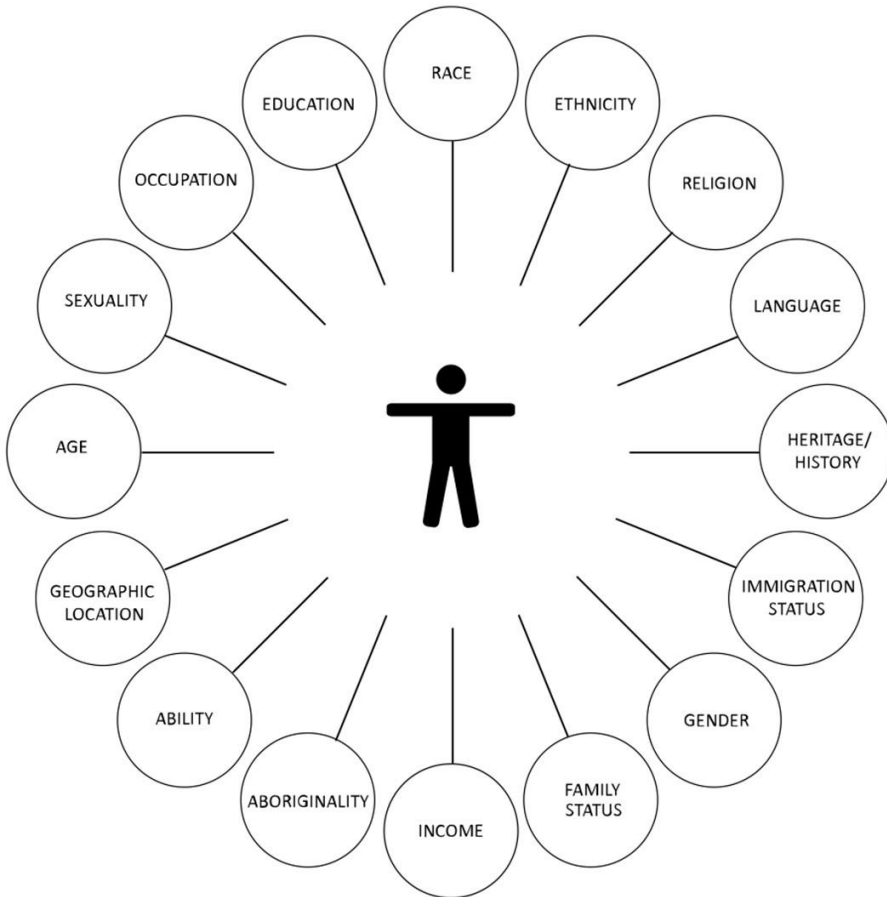

© Z. Ruby White Starr Adapted by Ruby White from works of Marilyn Loden, as published in Loden, H. and Rosener, J.B. Workforce America, Homewood, IL Business One Irwin, 1991

Degree of Acculturation

Integration	Assimilation
Identification with U.S. or dominant culture: **HIGH**	Identification with U.S. or dominant culture: **HIGH**
Identification with heritage or identity culture: **HIGH**	Identification with heritage or identity culture: **LOW**
Separation	**Marginalization**
Identification with U.S. or dominant culture: **LOW**	Identification with U.S. or dominant culture: **LOW**
Identification with heritage or identity culture: **HIGH**	Identification with heritage or identity culture: **LOW**

© Developed by Z. Ruby White Starr in Culture Matters

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Culture in the Context of Intersectionality

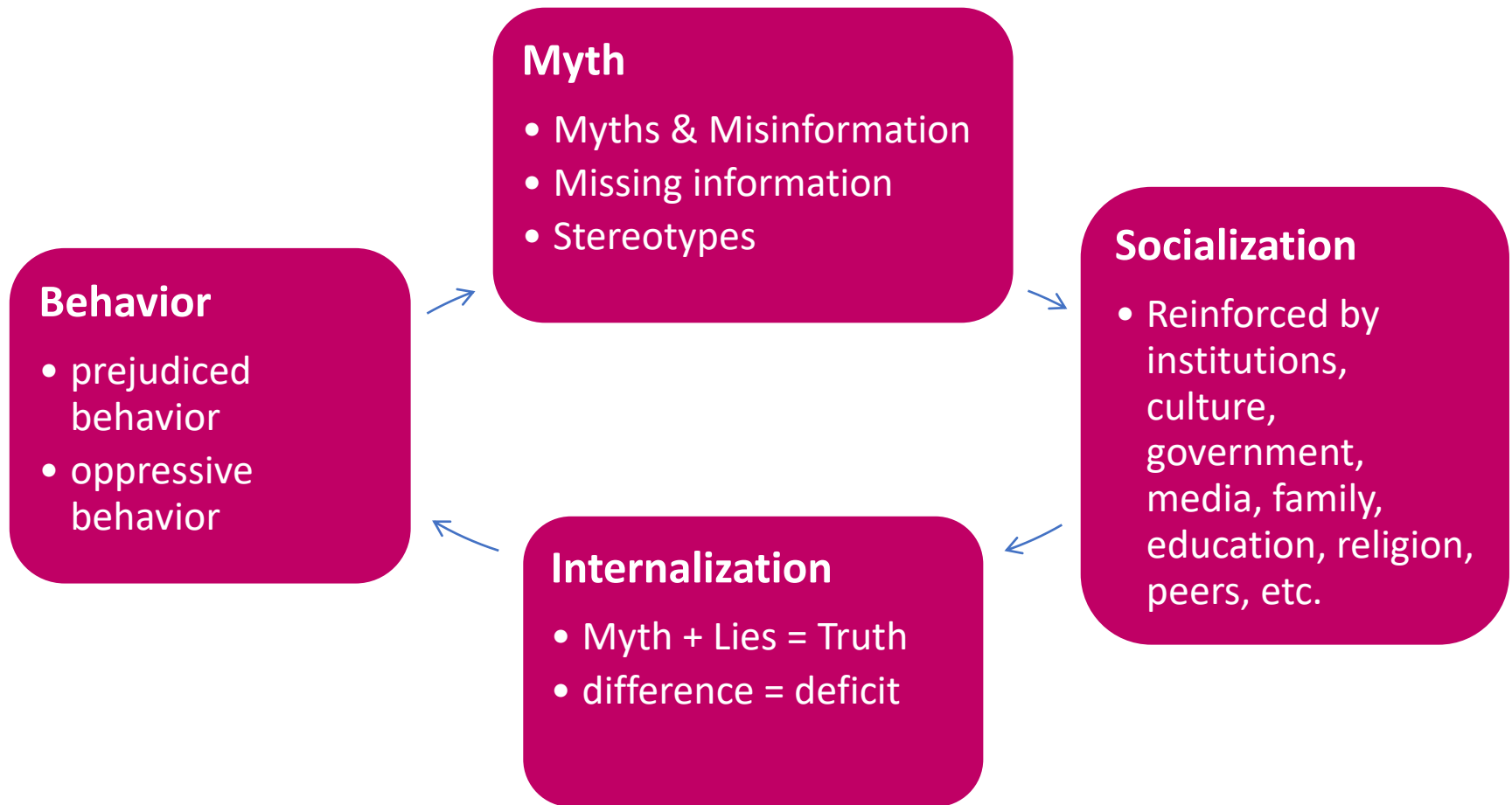This illustration shows multiple identities, including:

- Race, Ethnicity, Religion, Language, Heritage/History, Immigration status, Gender, Family status, income, aboriginality, ability, geographic location, age, sexuality, occupation, and education

Privilege & Access

- In all cultures, contexts of privilege and access are created by certain norms against which all other sub groups are compared.
- In the U.S., attributes of the dominant culture include English as a primary language, "whiteness," Christianity, physical ability, male, middle class, cisgender, and heterosexual.

Cycle of Oppression

Myth
- Myths & Misinformation
- Missing information
- Stereotypes

Socialization
- Reinforced by institutions, culture, government, media, family, education, religion, peers, etc.

Behavior
- prejudiced behavior
- oppressive behavior

Internalization
- Myth + Lies = Truth
- difference = deficit

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Cycle of Oppression (2)

Behavior

Scrutinized more closely; more frequent & severe sanctions/conviction rates; WOC more represented but underserved because "don't want help"; children removed

Myth

Domestic violence is more prevalent in communities of color because those cultures condone violence.

Socialization

Taught by parents, norms; jails and child welfare filled with POC; POC the "bad guys" in movies; raised to avoid "certain" people

Internalization

Women from other cultures accept violence as the norm; Workforce afraid of MOC; not nurturing/use physical discipline; silence, anger=truth=inferior

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Individualism & Collectivism

Individualism	Collectivism
The individual identifies primarily with the self	One's identity is in large part a function of one's membership and role in a group.
Taking care of oneself and being self-sufficient guarantees the wellbeing of the group.	The survival and success of the group ensures the wellbeing of the individual.
Independence and self-reliance are greatly stressed and valued.	Harmony and the independence of the group members are stressed and valued.
Tendencies are to distance themselves psychologically and emotionally from each other. They may join groups, though they may not be essential to their identity.	Group members are relatively close psychologically and emotionally, but distant toward non-group members. They are more likely to join groups that are a large part of their identity.

U.S. Culture

- No one American in the U.S. is quite like any other American, but a handful of core values and beliefs do underlie and permeate the national culture.
- These values and beliefs don't apply across the board in every situation, and we may, on occasion even act in ways that directly contradict or flaunt them, but they are still at the heart of our cultural ethos.

U. S. Culture

- What values underlie American Culture?

- How might these values manifest in our organizational cultures?

Meaning is assigned

We interpret other people's behavior through our own cultural filter, i.e., what our culture *tells* us is happening.

What is Culture?

The learned and shared knowledge, beliefs, rules, customs, values, languages, arts, and faith or religions of a particular people used to generate social behavior at a given point in time.

- Culture makes us who we are
- Everyone has culture
- Organizations/Systems have distinct cultures
- Communities have different cultures influenced by its members, the environment, and socioeconomic conditions
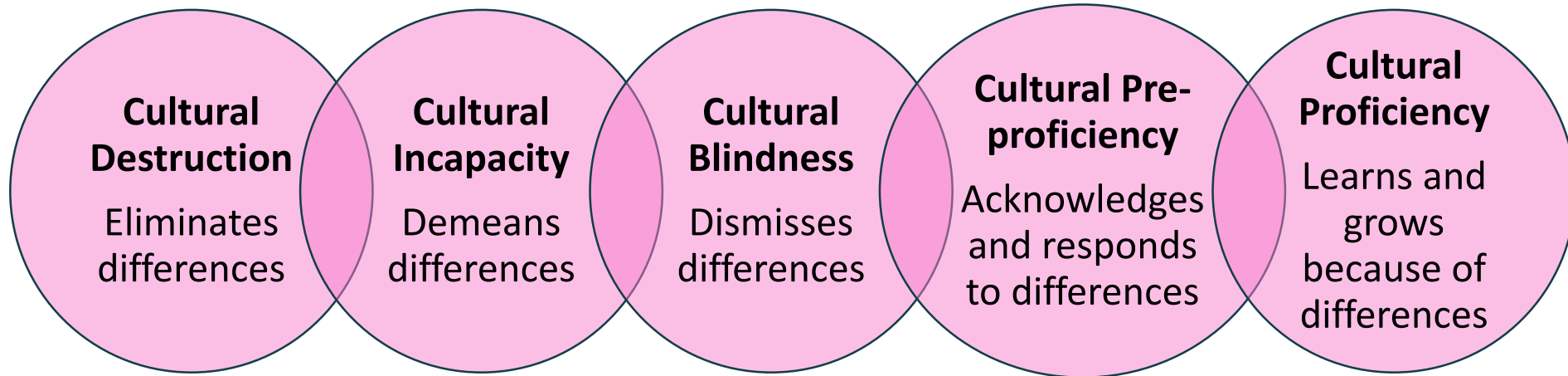
Cultural Competence Continuum

Mandated by Tolerance

Harmful Views of culture

Chosen for Transformation

Favorable views of culture

Cultural Destruction
Eliminates differences

Cultural Incapacity
Demeans differences

Cultural Blindness
Dismisses differences

Cultural Pre-proficiency
Acknowledges and responds to differences

Cultural Proficiency
Learns and grows because of differences

Adapted from Terry L. Cross, et. al., 1989

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Violence is present in all cultures

- Culture should never be used to deny or excuse violence.
- Violence is not "normal" in certain groups.
- People who use violence in every culture have ways of subjugating survivors.
- Cultural differences must be considered to address disparities in practice, increase access to relevant services, and improve outcomes related to race, gender and other variables.

Culture and Domestic Violence

People of non-dominant cultures may have:

- Fewer options and less access to services and to the justice system
- Bad experiences with "helping" systems
- Different perceptions of what options they have available to them

Culture and Domestic Violence (2)

Culture is central to how survivors organize their experiences. It influences:

- How they seek assistance

- What they value in raising and parenting their children

- What they define as a problem and their perceptions on the relevance and quality of "help"

- Their attitude about sharing emotional problems, and with whom

- The number of stressors to which they are exposed

Culture and Domestic Violence (3)

Culture is central to how survivors organize their experiences. It influences:

- Their expectations for treatment and what they believe is the best method of addressing the difficulties they encounter due to abuse
- What they understand as the causes of psychological difficulties and the unique subjective experience of being a survivor
- How they view violence and the extent to which they associate hopefulness or pessimism with intervention

Concerns in Underserved Communities

- Institutional racism and systemic bias in the delivery of services by the criminal justice system
- Mistrust of mainstream formal systems
- The under-representation of people of color, LGBTQ+, and other non-dominant groups among service providers and in positions of leadership
- Formal systems that do not include relevant or alternative resources
- Balance between disproving the stereotypical beliefs that only poor and minority survivors are battered and pushing them aside

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Concerns in Underserved Communities (2)

Personal and cultural barriers to living free from violence such as:

- Risks of system intervention
- Intense loyalty to the extended family
- Deference to individual needs for family unity and strength
- Religious beliefs or spirituality
- Social unacceptability of separation or divorce, stigmatization
- Fear of coming out/being outed

Concerns in Underserved Communities (3)

Personal and cultural barriers to living free from violence such as:

- Concentrations in low paying jobs
- Language barriers and immigration issues
- Privacy and self-blame seen as virtuous to maintain family honor
- Unfamiliar and uncomfortable surroundings (in help-seeking)
- Within-group diversity
- Other

Increasing Cultural Capacity

Does not mean knowing everything about a culture. Instead:

- Be aware of your own biases, prejudices and knowledge

- Recognize professional power and avoid the imposition of those values

- Gather information provided by individuals within the context at hand

- Listen and ask questions Validate individual strengths

- Develop cross-issue linkages/collaborate with culturally-specific groups

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Questions for Reflection

- Why might communities mistrust formal systems?

- What are some elements of bias in your system?

- What are ways that personal and cultural barriers may be reflected as deficiencies?

- What alternate and culturally-relevant resources exist in your community?
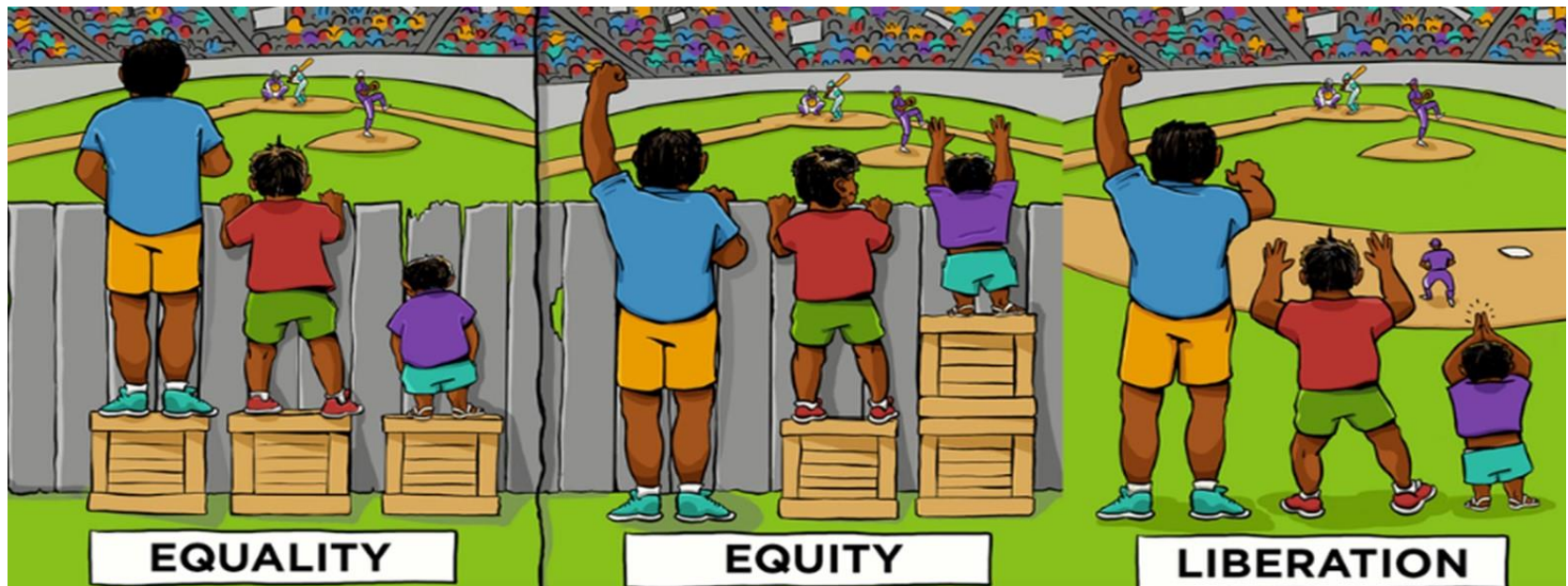
What practices and approaches can you change to promote equity?

Learning Points

- Discomfort is a prerequisite for learning.
- Increasing awareness of your own culture, biases, privilege, and
  identity will help you to understand how they impact your relationships with others.
- Meaning is assigned by the observer, based on their own cultural lens.
- Effective interventions must work from inside the worldview and culture
  of those being helped.

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