

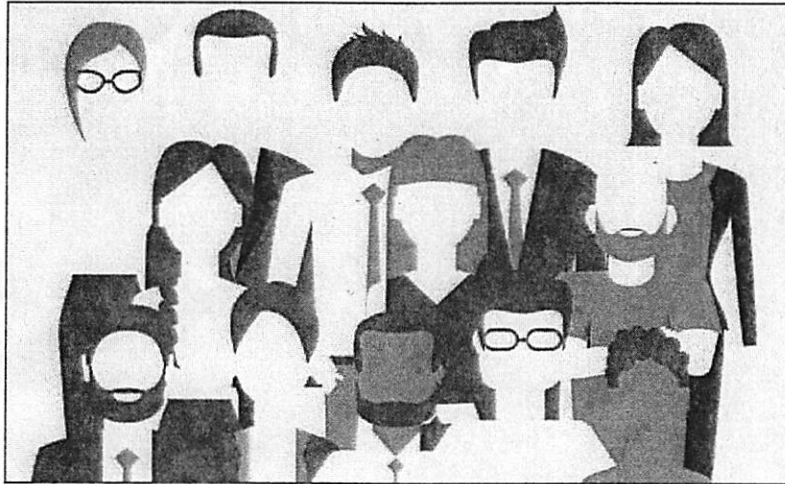
Cultural Competence/Global Awareness

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Anthropology



This lesson plan on the soft skill of Cultural Competence/Global Awareness is a short unit on Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism. These two important topics undergird all anthropological thinking, and train students to think in a way that supports communication and empathy with people of diverse and intersectional backgrounds.

The important aspects of this lesson are to

- identify ethnocentrism and learn how to recognize it in ourselves
- understand cultural relativism and how to use it to understand other cultural practices that are different from our own
- develop a clear understanding of the differences between subjective and objective judgment
- gain awareness that our own beliefs and behaviors are just one set of many valid, diverse cultural norms in the world.

The applications of this lesson include

- developing strategies for getting along with others who may be different from one's self
- understanding and working with different types of diversity in the workplace
- being marketable for distant or overseas job placement
- understanding and respecting subcultural or individual differences, for instance, in relation to people on the gender and sexuality spectrum (use of pronouns, etc.).

Food as a Window to Culture

Exploring Ethnocentrism

Food is a cultural creation; that is, human beings define what is and is not food. Consider, for example, the items listed below, all of which serve as food among one group of people or another. Which of these would you eat and which would you not eat? If there is any you would not eat, try your best to explain *why*.

Yes

No (Explain)

eel

kangaroo tail

dog

sheep organs (*heart, lungs, stomach, liver*)

horse

chimpanzee

cow

liver

lobster

Where do you draw the line?

Exploring Cultural Relativism

You and your partner in this exercise are anthropologists. In the course of your fieldwork, you have discovered some practices that are very different from what you are used to at home. Do you have the right to judge these practices? Are there certain practices that we can say are universally wrong? Where do you draw the line?

On the back of this sheet you'll find a list of cultural practices that are found (or have been found) throughout the world. Alternate with your partner, to find out how each of you would rank the scenarios from 1-4. You will write down your partner's answers.

- 1 = This is fine with me. I would have no trouble observing and writing about this practice without judgment of the people involved.
- 2 = This behavior is somewhat disturbing, but I think I might be able to maintain my objectivity.
- 3 = This behavior is heinous. I would have serious trouble maintaining my objectivity and would feel very guilty doing so. I might feel compelled to write an article on this practice, exposing the group to the scrutiny of the American media.
- 4 = This behavior violates the core of my being. There is no way I could possibly remain silent while this was taking place in a society that I was studying, when I think there may be something I could do to help. I would definitely act.

Where do you draw the line?

In the Maasai tribe of Kenya, East Africa, teenage boys undergo a voluntary circumcision. The circumcision is done with no anesthesia; in fact, if the boy shows any sign of fear or discomfort, he may be ridiculed or, worse, not allowed to join the adult men's group.

In Afghanistan, under the 20 year rule of the Taliban, severe restrictions were placed on women in public life. During this time, women were banned from laughing loudly in public, playing sports, and using cosmetics. Windows were painted so that women could not be seen from outside their homes. Women were not allowed unaccompanied in the streets without a close male relative.

In North and East Africa (including the countries of Egypt, Somalia and Sudan), girls from the ages of 4-8 are "circumcised," a process referred to by anthropologists as FGM, or Female Genital Mutilation. Their clitoris may be removed completely. In extreme cases, their labia will be sewn up, leaving a small hole for urine, until marriage. Girls are often considered unmarriageable until this procedure is performed; however, it also leads to pain and serious health problems.

In ancient Aztec life, prisoners of war were routinely sacrificed to the gods. Their beating hearts would be taken from their bodies and then the bodies would be ritually burned. The Aztecs believed that without this constant intake of nutrition, the gods would stop the motion of the sun in the sky, darkness would fall on the earth, and all life would cease.

In Pakistan, women have a responsibility to maintain the family's honor. If they are promiscuous or commit adultery outside marriage, they may be stoned to death or killed secretly. These killings, often by members of the family, may go unpunished by the law. They are called "honor killings" because they reflect the restoration of honor to the family.

In the United States, women and men undergo painful surgical procedures on their faces and bodies in order to increase "attractiveness." For this same purpose, women may implant balloons filled with saline or silicone in their breasts or buttocks. Some studies claim that metals in implants may be neurotoxic or carcinogenic.

Written Response

Discuss the ideas of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism, including the following points:

- Define cultural relativism and ethnocentrism.
- Explain why it is important for people in a workplace not to be ethnocentric.
- Even though anthropologists examine beliefs and behaviors in an objective way (to understand, not to judge), it is possible that some behaviors are wrong in a universal sense, for all people, everywhere. What are some examples of behaviors that -- beyond your own cultural views -- would be wrong in any society in the world? Why did you choose these examples?

Music Response

Subjective or Objective?

Listen to the piece of music, and write some words to describe it. If you think they are non-biased words, put them in the Objective column, and if you think they are opinionated words, put them in the Subjective column.

OBJECTIVE

SUBJECTIVE

OBJECTIVE	SUBJECTIVE

Mini-Ethnography Assignment: Eating Out in San Diego

Ethnography (n.) – a study of a cultural group

Imagine you are seeing Americans eat for the first time in a public place. What do you notice? What patterns do you see? Importantly, what does it say about Americans' attitudes toward eating and toward each other?

These are the questions you will ask as you undertake a short **ethnographic study** of a public dining area in San Diego. You will record data on **gender** and **ethnicity**, as well as how they eat their **food**.

Your objective is to collect enough objective data (evidence) to draw some conclusions. By the end of the mini-study, you should be able to make some initial interpretations about dining behavior. What can you tell about social or cultural patterns by watching people eat?

If you examine this setting (people eating a meal) as a text made up of significant symbols that tells you something about the meaning Americans assign to certain areas of their life, what might you conclude about the following:

GENDER

- *Who sits with whom in terms of males, females, or gender non-conforming (GNC) people? That is, do diners sit more in single-gender or mixed-gender groups? (The more tables you record for this item, the better your sample will be).*
- *What are the observable relations between males and females (and GNC if any are present)?*

ETHNICITY

- *Who sits with whom? Do diners sit in single-ethnicity or mixed-ethnicity groups? Use only apparent ethnicity – if you are not sure, then you can use the term “non-white” or state that you are making a guess. (The more tables you record for this item, the better your sample will be).*
- *What ethnicities appear to be dominant in the dining area/restaurant?*

FOOD

- *How do the groups you observe relate to food?*
- *What are their customs regarding eating?*
- *What observations do you make that would give you insight into their beliefs about eating?*

YOUR ANALYSIS

- *Overall, what conclusions can you draw based on the observed behavior of your study subjects in each of the above three categories? Analyze the behavioral patterns you saw (or discuss the lack of patterns).*

TIPS

Plan your observation at a time when there will be many groups of people eating in the restaurant. If you do not find at least **six groups** to observe, return another time to the same location for additional data gathering.

Ethnography relies heavily on “thick description” or contextualization of the data. What do you see, smell and hear? As an introduction, please give ethnographic **details** to allow the reader to evaluate the scene: specify which restaurant you went to, the time of day, and give the approximate number of people that you see in the restaurant/food court, etc. Also specify how many groups you observed, and the makeup of each of these groups in terms of gender, apparent ethnicity, and relative age. You may make a table if it helps clarify your data.

Look for patterns in diners’ behavior that you can use to make inferences about their customs and beliefs. Be certain to specify the **key clues** that help you draw your conclusions. Your interpretation must be based on **observable signs**. (For instance, “I saw the adult male at the table reading a newspaper while his female companion was talking to him. Therefore, I believe that interaction between diners is not always important.”)

Format: Please type or neatly handwrite this assignment. The length of the assignment is 2-3 pages (double-spaced) minimum, but you may write as many pages as you find data to fill.

Presenter Bio:

Laura T. González has been a Professor of Anthropology at San Diego Miramar College for 13 years. She has served on too many committees to count, but currently is the Chair of the campus LGBTQ+ Alliance, and the faculty advisor for Club SPECTRUM, student peer-to-peer support group. In 2018, Laura won the American Anthropological Association/Oxford University Press Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching of Anthropology, and was recently named one of California Assembly member Dr. Shirley Weber’s Women Leaders of the 79th District.

She is the author of *Through the Lens of Cultural Anthropology* (forthcoming 2019), a textbook published by University of Toronto Press, and co-author of its precursor, *Through the Lens of Anthropology* with Robert J. Muckle (2e, 2018). Her current research focuses on transgender and non-binary youth in the community college setting. Laura lives in Chula Vista with her husband, a SPAWAR engineer, two daughters, 17 and 19, three yappy chihuahuas, and a tortoise named Tortilla.