



2017

Know Thyself: Managing Cultural Difference

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Introduction

Maureen Linker, Ph.D. in philosophy from the City University of New York, Graduate Center. Currently a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Michigan – Dearborn where I have been teaching since 1997. My most recent book is *Intellectual Empathy: Critical Thinking for Social Justice*, published by University of Michigan Press in 2015. In addition to writing and classroom teaching, I have led workshops on “Diversity Fatigue,” “Finding Common Ground through Intellectual Empathy,” and “Managing Cultural Competency” for a variety of professional organizations, community and religious groups, as well as academic and educational conferences.



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The goals of our work together:

- ◆ Identify the factors that contribute to undermining self-awareness
- ◆ Actively promote self-understanding about cultural differences
- ◆ Reflectively assess our social and cultural beliefs
- ◆ Create initiatives that will energize people around diversity and cultural competence



Why does cultural difference matter to your work?

1. It matters for retaining talent

“Respondents were most likely to report a positive work culture if their firm shares their values and if they find their work meaningful.

Respondents who felt that their firms failed to prepare them for their work, or who report no office friendships were most likely to report a negative work culture.”

(2016 Equity in Architecture Survey)



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2. It matters for advancing the architecture profession

“Theorists tell us men and women look at problems differently, work differently and value different skills. If we can create a profession where all architects thrive surely this diversity will broaden how our buildings and cities are designed. It may not be a better world but it would be a different one. I for one would love to see the result since it will protect the legacy of a next generation.”

(Diana Griffiths, Architect in *Parlour*, 2012)



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3. It Matters for Communicating the Value of Design in Society

“To acknowledge the full history of our government’s relationship with African Americans means turning away from the brightly rendered version of your country as it has always declared itself and turning toward something murkier and unknown.”

(Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*)

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In his September 2016 review of the African American Museum, Christopher Hawthorne (architecture critic for the Los Angeles Times) wrote:

“The triumph of the design by Adjaye, Freelon and their colleagues is that the museum building embodies both that “something murkier” and that “turning toward.”



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Cultural Difference: Know Thyself

Interviews



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Understanding Social Identity

- Gender
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Economic Class
- Religion
- Sexual Orientation
- Dis/Ability
- Education Level

SOCIAL IDENTITY IS
INTERSECTIONAL : *Systems of
privilege and power intersect to
create complex lived
experiences.*

*IDENTITY is not simply how
we perceive ourselves but
also how we are perceived by
others.*

Forming Beliefs:

Yet our language and our social systems organize our experiences within monolithic categories like:

Male/Female

White/Person of Color

Hetero/Homosexual

Abled/Disabled

Wealthy-Middle Class/Poor

Christian/Non-Christian

And social benefits and disadvantages are taken as “Additive” rather than “Intersectional.” - *The Oppression Olympics*



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Forming Beliefs - continued

Implicit Bias – Measurable through the “*Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT)*” developed by Dr. Mahzarin Banaji (Harvard) and Anthony Greenwald (University of Washington).

- The IAT measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report.
- <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>

Color Blindness is not realistic nor is it necessarily a good thing.

We have inherited systems of social privilege and disadvantage even if we did not create them. Ignoring them allows them to continue. (The Path of Least Resistance)

Social Privilege does not feel like privilege to those who have it. It is also not the same thing as personal happiness. Social Disadvantage is not the same thing as unhappiness.

Our identities are intersectional meaning that we do not experience privilege and disadvantage simply and absolutely. Our identities are complex and so are the systems of privilege and power.



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Language, Culture, History and Our Own Implicit Biases





WHITE PEOPLE

They all look the same.

StuffIStumbledUpon.com

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CASE STUDIES:

- 1) Controversy erupts in a neighborhood after benches, designed to prevent the homeless from laying down, are put up around a building . Colleagues are discussing the controversy. One team member admits that his sister is homeless and that there is little public space for those in poverty. He recounts some of the prejudice his brother faces daily. **He is judged to be too “emotionally invested” in the poor by his colleagues.**
- 2) A new colleague working with you and your team on a project, is hearing impaired. While you are working on a project he points out the importance of flashing alarms, rather than solely auditory alarms, for fire and emergency notifications. Your team incorporates his recommendations into the design work. As you prepare for a conference he lets you all know that he will need to book an interpreter to travel with him since the varied and complex conversation at a conference (plus presenting publicly) will be too challenging. **One of the team members says to you, “He is not much of a team player is he? I mean he doesn’t really seem to fit in here and I don’t think he likes it.”**

INSPIRED BY A PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT WITH DISABILITIES



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CLEARING A PATH
FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
CLEARS THE PATH FOR EVERYONE!

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SELF UNDERSTANDING

- Recognize that Social Identities Matter and Make Up Part of Our Belief System
- Pay Attention to Biases that Steer You Away From Judging Others as Less Credible/Less of a “Team Player.”
- Understand that Social Identities are Complex and Intersectional – No One is Completely Privileged or Completely Disadvantaged
- Remember that Social Privilege and Disadvantage are not the Same as Personal Happiness and Unhappiness
- Be Open to Being an Ally and Using Your Privilege for Good
- Be Open to Having Allies and Forming Unlikely Coalitions.

WHAT INITIATIVES CAN YOU TAKE?

- Create an environment in which people feel safe to express culturally based values, perceptions, and experiences
- Host social events at which music, food, & entertainment reflect cultures represented
- Hire staff and leaders who reflect the community's cultural diversity
- Partner with cultural organizations and institutions



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THANK YOU!

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