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What Does Diversity Mean?

A dandelion seed head with a thick stem, set against a light green background. The seed head is dark green and has many fine, radiating lines. The stem is thick and dark green, extending from the bottom right towards the center of the seed head.

Examining Diversity and The
Mythical Norm

Overview of Session



- What Diversity Means to Me
- Defining Diversity Through the Mythical Norm
- Mythical Norm in Higher Education
- Mythical Norm in Faculty Study
- What Diversity Means to Students

What Diversity Means to Me

Diversity is defined as difference. It is how I see myself, how others see me, and experiences that inform how I interpret the world.



What Diversity Means to Me

RACE: African American; 15%

SEX: Female; 71%

RELIGION: Christian; 31%

CLASS: Middle-upper class; 79%

Gender: Cisgender; 65%

Nationality: U.S. citizen; 96%

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: Heterosexual; 85%

Ability: Temporarily mind and able-bodied; 89%



The Mythical Norm

- Diversity is often defined by divergence from the Mythical Norm (Tatum, 2003)
- Mythical (idealized)
- Norm (typical)
- White, male, cisgender, U.S. citizen, heterosexual, English as first language, Christian, upper class, older individuals without a disability



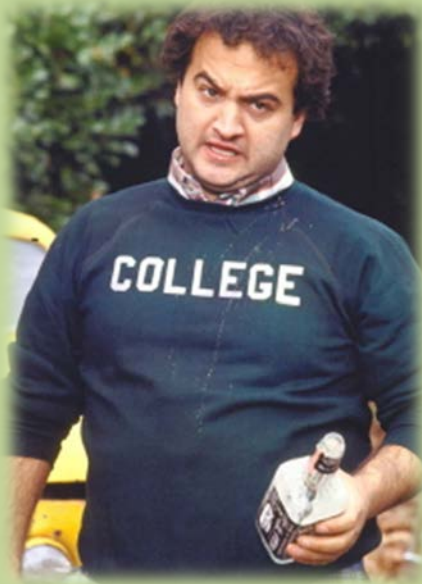
The Mythical Norm

Accrue unearned...

- Benefits
- Power
- Advantages
- Access to Resources



The Mythical Norm



Diverse



“Diverse” individuals may experience...

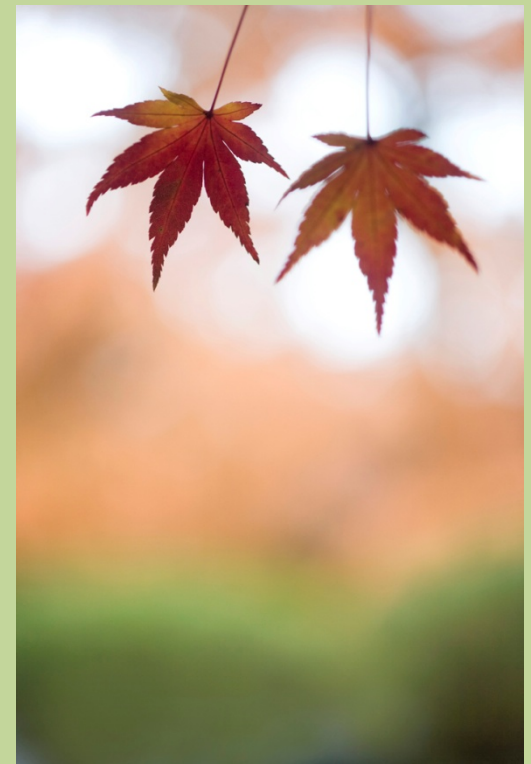
- Limitations
- Discrimination
- Oppression
- Restrictions
- Lack of Access
- Lack of Resources

Diverse



Higher Education & Diversity

- Diversity is defined as different from mythical norm in higher education
- The mythical norm holds privilege and power in higher education
- Higher education was designed and still operates largely for students, faculty and administrators who most closely resemble mythical norm



Faculty: Mythical Norm



- Faculty who teach diversity courses
 1. What are the experiences of faculty who teach diversity courses?
 2. How do faculty approach teaching diversity courses?

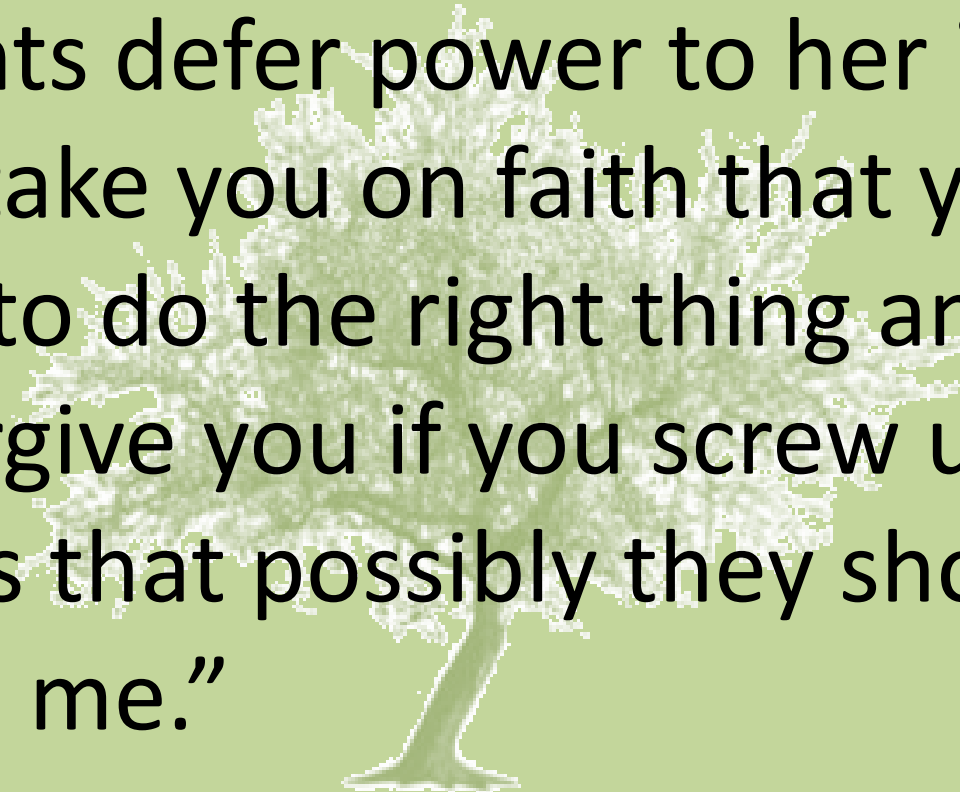
Faculty: The Mythical Norm

- Students deferred power and authority to him in class as he is “a person who identifies with a great many privileged categories” and “can’t be assured that my students are always gonna challenge me.”



Faculty: The Mythical Norm

- Students defer power to her in that they “take you on faith that you’re trying to do the right thing and then will forgive you if you screw up even in ways that possibly they shouldn’t forgive me.”



Faculty: The Mythical Norm

“Usually students tell me if they have to leave early and so on, but for some reason she just left. So later I received an e-mail from her and she says to me that she did not enjoy the class because she didn’t feel like talking about White privilege had anything to do with a diversity class. . . . I felt disrespected also because I started to think again on my position as a woman of color teaching this class—there’s perceptions that people hold of me and I wondered how this would have been perceived by this woman had I been maybe a White professor who’s male.”

Faculty: The Mythical Norm

- Expose mythical norm of faculty as falsehood
- Dialogue about power and privilege coming to those thought of as “norm” and not to those labeled “diverse”



Students: The Mythical Norm

- Students volunteered to share aspects of their identity and answer the question...
what does diversity mean?



<https://youtu.be/vknsn4PM3I>

Race/Nationality: The Mythical Norm

- Hmong American
- Nigerian American
- Sudanese American
- Japanese American
- Bi-Racial American
- Mexican American
- Black
- White
- Multiracial



Ethnicity/Nationality: The Mythical Norm

- Indian
- Bulgarian
- Hapa (partial Asian descent)
- Peruvian
- Latina/o
- Puerto-Rican
- Chicana
- Brown



Sex/Gender: The Mythical Norm

- Proud Female
- Woman who is more than her Body Mass Index
- Plus-Size Woman
- Confident Woman Leader
- Cisgender
- Woman
- Male



Belief System: The Mythical Norm



- Orthodox Christian
- Woman of Faith
- Catholic
- Agnostic
- Spiritual
- Christian

Sexuality: The Mythical Norm

- Queer
- Pansexual
- Gay woman
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Heterosexual
- Married



Ability & Class: The Mythical Norm



- Dyslexic
- disABLED
- Able-bodied
- Low Socioeconomic Status
- Middle Class
- Raised Low Income
- Lower-middle class

What does diversity mean?

- Intersectional (woman of color; gay woman)
- Visible (race, gender)
- Invisible (sexuality)
- Vulnerability
- Not a quota
- Not a statistic
- Not a photo op
- Space for every story
- Ensuring one is heard
- Equality
- Empowerment
- Courage
- Compassion
- Love of human variance



Equity Rather than Labels



- Examine oppression of “diverse” students, faculty and administrators
- Acknowledge power and privilege in maintaining “mythical norm”

Guest in Someone Else's House

- Those who uphold and most closely resemble the “mythical norm” have power and privilege to call higher education home
- Those who experience and are labeled “diverse” are treated as guests in someone else's house (Turner, 2015)



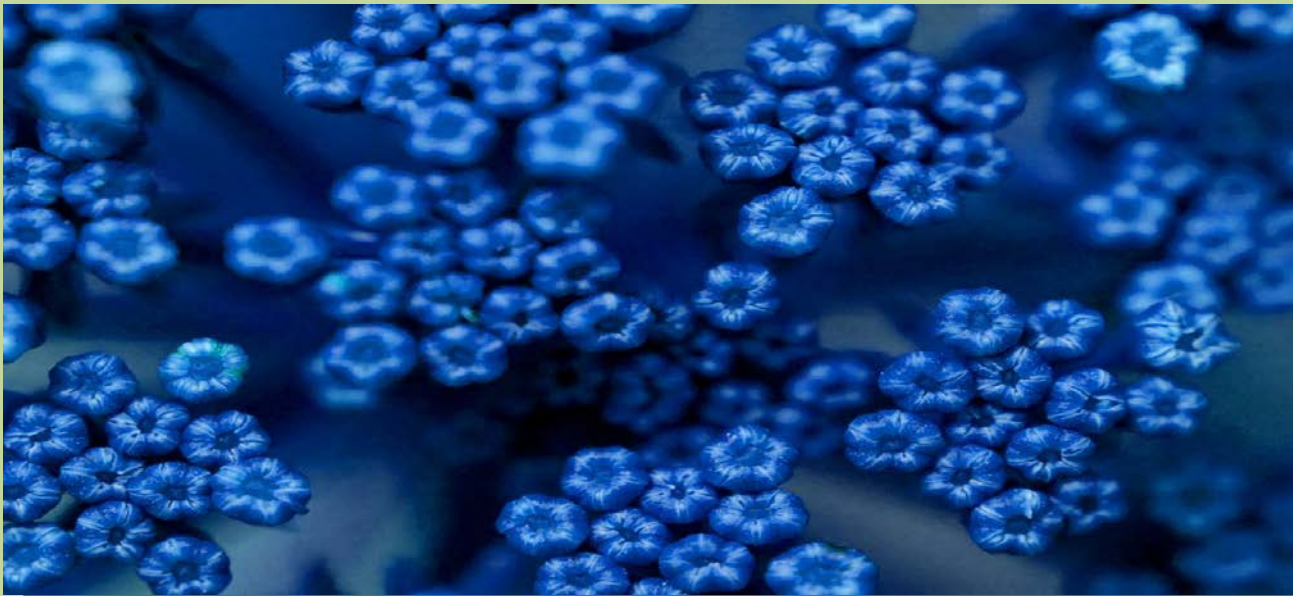
From Guests to Homeowners

- Interrupt notions of mythical norm
- Interrogate label and experience of diverse
- Actively disrupt system of power and privilege



Take-Away

- What did you learn?
- What will you take back to your campus?
- Who will you contact to partner/collaborate?



Contacts & Resources

Bridget Kelly, Ph.D.; bkelly4@luc.edu

Kelly, B. T., & Gayles, J. G. (forthcoming). Confronting systems of privilege and power through classroom discussion: Uses of power. In S. Watt (Ed.), *Designing transformative multicultural initiatives: Theoretical foundations, practical applications, and facilitator considerations*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Gayles, J.G., **Kelly, B.T.**, Grays, S., Zhang, J. & Porter, K. (accepted). Difficult dialogues: Faculty experiences teaching diversity in graduate preparation programs. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*.