

A Friendly Approach to Differences

Definitions and Assumptions

“Social Location” and “Unexamined Assumptions”

- Humans are social creatures.
- As social creatures, humans are continuously aware of *social location* during interpersonal interactions – how individuals compare with each other in terms of status within a group.
- Some social locations provide individuals with more access to resources and authority (privilege), while other social locations deprive individuals from gaining access to resources and authority (oppression).
- Individuals’ social locations are solidly tied to their cultural backgrounds.
- Any human society carries “mainstream” definitions of “true, beautiful, right, and good.” The individuals with “high” social location in a society predominantly set its definitions of “true, beautiful, right, and good.”
- Mainstream views of “true, beautiful, right, and good” are intrinsic to the culture and institutions of a society. They are the air we breathe. Generally, they are *unexamined assumptions* that bind us to our group.

Friends and “Multiculturalism”

- Quaker faith informs us that a deeper reality co-exists with the social reality that shapes our human perspectives. Our faith informs us of this: “that of God” within each of us can find unity with “that of God” in others.
- At the same time, we live as social creatures. Our view of “that of God” in others is necessarily obscured by our “creaturelyness.” Our traditional Quaker practices serve as tools that can help free us from the unexamined assumptions that can blind us to deeper truths – our Quaker practices of:
 - waiting worship,
 - corporate discernment,
 - seasoning,
 - recognition of the spiritual wisdom of certain ministers and elders, and
 - a corporate willingness to change course (continuing revelation).
- Our Quaker unity thrives more fully when it draws more fully from multicultural perspectives. This is more than a call to seek unity among “diverse” individuals. It is a call to recognize, understand, and value the differences among individuals with different backgrounds – truly drawing upon a *multicultural* view of our life together as Friends.

Who's Who?

All of us are “privileged” in some respects and “oppressed” in other respects. These categories are set by mainstream society, and they shift over time. Currently, in the U.S., the categories look like this:

Privileged / Agents Statistically more likely to have access to resources and authority in the U.S.	Oppressed / Targets Statistically less likely to have access to resources and authority in the U.S.
Whites	People of color
Men	Women
Middle-class, owning class	Poor, working class
Formally educated, managers, professionals	Informally educated, manual laborers, office clerks, retail sales clerks
Protestant Christians	Catholics, Muslims, Jews
Young adults	Elders (40+)
Adults	Children, youth
Heterosexual	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered
Able-bodied	Physically or mentally challenged
U.S. born	Immigrant
Native speaker of English	Non-speaker of English or ESL

A Multicultural Approach to Unity

Rather than producing a “melting pot” of Quaker unity, Friends’ unity in the Spirit can produce a “salad bowl” of rich awareness.

	Diversity Approach (Melting Pot)	Multicultural Approach (Salad Bowl)
The ultimate vision served by the approach	Support the status quo	Transformation of cultures, institutions, interpersonal relationships, and individuals
Approaches / Techniques	“Let’s all get along.” No acknowledgement of current social inequities	Building unity and equity for individuals and institutions
Level of impact	Individuals	Institutional structures
Measures of success	Numbers: recruitment of people based on single aspects of their identities, finite results	Institutions: retention, systems that support multiple identities, ongoing processes

Source: Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquin and VISIONS, Inc., <http://visions-inc.org/>

Practically Speaking

Friends on either side of a “social location divide” can:

When privileged / an “agent”:	When oppressed / a “target”:
Provide help when requested; don’t “rescue.”	Stand up to the problem; don’t merely “rail against” it.
Engage in problem-solving rather than blaming.	Engage in problem-solving rather than blaming.
Notice differences instead of denying them.	Share information about your culture and differences.
Learn about, ask about, and notice the impacts of oppression on others.	Notice, learn about, and share about the impacts of oppression on your life.

Source: VISIONS, Inc., <http://visions-inc.org/>

Guidelines for Open, Friendly Communication

- It’s OK to disagree. It’s not OK to blame.
 - That is, it’s not OK to identify “who is wrong,” not the other person and not yourself.
- Remember to pause and quiet your mind before responding.
- Practice “both/and” thinking; reframe ideas that seem to be “either/or.”
 - “Try on” the other person’s point of view.
 - State the part of their view that you agree with. Even one small thing.
 - At the very least, always state that you can see how they would look at things the way they do (and make sure you do see that).
 - Be ready to learn something new or change your mind.
- Practice stating only the truth that you can see yourself, no more and no less.
- Be aware of intent and impact.
 - Regardless of your good intentions, you are bound to step on other people’s toes; you will hurt others without meaning to.
 - Apologize simply when you discover that you have hurt someone. Don’t make your apology meaningless by including an explanation of the good intentions behind your mistake.
- Maintain confidence and confidentiality.
 - Tender conversations should be left behind when they are done.
 - Do not discuss them with people who were not involved.
 - Ask permission before you reopen a tender conversation that you have had with someone earlier.
- Have fun on this adventure together!!