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## Engaging Cultural Differences: The Multicultural Challenge in Liberal Democracies (review)

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However, one similarity across class categories is that black children all encounter racism. Mention is made of how black children and parents in each class category face discrimination. These confrontations with race make childhood and how children see their futures different for black and white children, regardless of class. Further, the interesting dynamic may be less in comparing the relative impact of two closely intertwined social forces and more about how the two intersect. For example, do middle-class black parents make a more “concerted” effort to teach their children strategies for dealing with racism than working-class or poor black parents? Also, does either child rearing approach seem more or less beneficial as it interacts with the child’s race? Attention to these issues would contribute to knowledge about how class and race interactively shape childhood experience and family life.

All in all, this is a thought-provoking book sure to become a classic for scholars working to understand how inequality is reproduced. In addition, its readability and clear expression of basic sociological ideas about social class, inequality, and family life make it ideal for use in undergraduate classes covering any of these topics.

**Engaging Cultural Differences: The Multicultural Challenge in Liberal Democracies.**

*Edited by Richard Shweder, Martha Minow, and Hazel Rose Markus.* Russell Sage Foundation, 2002. 485 pp. Cloth, \$49.95.

*Reviewer:* DOUGLAS HARTMANN, *University of Minnesota*

Because of its reliance on consent and moral regulation as well as its ideals of tolerance and inclusion, liberal democracy has always had problems with cultural difference. But in recent years — with the social changes brought by global trade and mass communications, massive transnational migration, the liberalization of citizenship laws, and the appearance of democratic institutions and ideals in many new places — these problems appear more acute and multifaceted than ever. So, how now to deal with them?

Scholars, it seems to me, have at least two distinct contributions to make in answering this question: One involves producing knowledge about the form and content of various cultural differences; the other with clarifying the practical and moral choices (and their consequences) these differences give rise to. Needing both, we are fortunate that three noted scholars from the fields of anthropology, law, and the behavioral sciences have collaborated to bring us this wonderful new collection of essays on the challenge that multiculturalism poses in contemporary liberal democracies.

*Engaging Cultural Differences* is composed of 21 individual contributions — primarily case studies of some type — grouped into four parts. Part 1 focuses

on the legal status of groups that exercise beliefs and customs that threaten established national practice; part 2 on cultural accommodation and its limitations; part 3 on debates about human rights; and part 4 on how difference is understood and practiced in different (albeit mostly U.S.) social contexts. There is also a brief, 15-page introduction from the editors.

Neither the organization of the volume nor the theoretical framing is particularly memorable. Indeed, I was surprised to see the volume characterized as “concerned with the aims of tolerance” since this formulation is far less provocative than the active language of engagement employed in the title. (It is also in stark contrast to the way these essays were packaged when a handful of them previously appeared in a special issue of the journal *Daedalus*.) Additionally, I was disappointed there wasn’t more on how cultural diversity is conflated with and complicated by the realities of social inequality. The intersections between difference and inequality receive considerable attention in many related fields, including the ethnic and racial studies with which I am most familiar. Indeed, the more critical strains of this work (e.g., whiteness studies, critical race theory) suggest that liberal democratic ideals are not so much opposed to prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion as in fact required by them. (A concluding chapter written by Rose Markus along with Claude and Dorothy Steele called “Colorblindness As a Barrier to Inclusion” seems intended to address such notions; however, it concentrates almost exclusively on educational practice and is a bit too-little, too-late.)

But what I think may be missing from the volume should by no means detract from the mountain of rich, stimulating material that is collected here. There are contributions on topics ranging from women and religion to interethnic relations, the culture of property, and debates about circumcision and asylum. And who would have guessed that hearings about an eighteen-year old Norwegian girl “kidnapped” by her parents and brought back to Morocco would have created a national and international spectacle? (See “Nadia’s Case” by Unni Wikan.) This sheer range aptly demonstrates the complexity of the multicultural challenge, and the various chapters impressively chart how this challenge can be engaged. A discussion of each individual piece is obviously not possible here, but I know that I will be using David Chambers’s chapter on marriage customs in post-apartheid South Africa, the piece from Karen Engle on the tortured role the American Anthropological Association has played in the evolution of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Victoria Plaut’s study of cultural models of diversity in the U.S. in my own teaching and research. Shweder’s piece on female genital mutilation is a model of empirically grounded, morally engaged cross-cultural exposition. You will not agree with all the arguments and conclusions of the contributors (indeed, they sometimes contradict each other), but they all bring concrete empirical research to bear on their questions and make clear the moral decisions and stakes implicated therein.

The more I think about it, the absence of a singular theoretical frame may be the ultimate point and contribution of this volume. It forces readers to realize that there are no easy answers to the omnipresent multicultural challenge. The challenge cannot be “solved” by some omniscient power or all-encompassing moral system, only continually “engaged” with as clear an understanding of the social facts and moral choices involved in each case and context as possible. This may be the best that liberal democratic theory and research has to offer.

**Female Genital Cutting: Cultural Conflict in the Global Community.**

By Elizabeth Heger Boyle. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. 188 pp. Cloth, \$36.00.

Reviewer: KAMMIL SCHMEER, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

Female genital cutting is an institutionalized cultural practice that has been the source of international conflict for several decades. Although female genital cutting is normative in the communities where it is practiced (mainly in Africa), many outsiders view the practice as barbaric and oppressive to women and have pushed for its eradication. In *Female Genital Cutting: Cultural Conflict in the Global Community*, Boyle explores the development of an international anti-female genital cutting movement, and nations' and individuals' responses to it. In applying a neoinstitutional theoretical framework, Boyle finds the diffusion of anti-female genital cutting norms to be largely a top-down globalization process driven by international standards that reject the practice on medical and human rights grounds. However, Boyle also provides evidence that the adoption of anti-female genital cutting norms differs across countries and individuals and correlates with their structural locations and local contexts. Boyle uses qualitative and quantitative data at the international, national, and individual levels to demonstrate the complexities and conflict around changing institutionalized cultural practices such as female genital cutting. In doing so, Boyle provides both an in-depth understanding of anti-female genital cutting efforts, and a unique multilevel approach to evaluating global cultural conflict.

Boyle's specific purpose is to use the anti-female genital cutting case as an example of how (1) global norms drive national policies, (2) the structural location of groups affects their actions related to adapting internationally institutionalized norms, and (3) conflict around norms creates space for changing institutions. After describing the development of international norms against female genital cutting, Boyle demonstrates the power of these norms in defining national policies and actions in many countries. The influence of international norms is also evident in Boyle's analysis at the individual level.