

Diversity and Identity Abroad

The Pitzer College Office of Study Abroad and International Services is committed to diversity and supports the participation of students representing different groups based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, ability, nationality, and religion. In addition to the educational, travel, health and safety, and adjustment issues facing all international travelers, many students may have additional identity-related considerations when deciding whether, where, and how to take advantage of study abroad opportunities.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term introduced to the academy by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to describe the confluence of an individual's multiple social identities in shaping who they are. These social identities include race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, ability, religion, etc. This concept provides a working theoretical framework in intercultural understanding as it helps in understanding positionality, power, oppression and social justice. Dr. Crenshaw has several videos on YouTube where she expands this concept, and below are a couple of shorter synopses and an article of what the concept entails.



Intersectionality 101 by Teaching Tolerance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6dnj2lyYjE>

Intro to Intersectionality by Taryn Crenshaw

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWeDatP0cv4>

Intersectionality 101 by Olena Hankivsky, PhD

<https://studylib.net/doc/10714281/intersectionality-101-olena-hankivsky--phd>

Consider How Your Identity Can Impact Your Safety Abroad

Your various identities will influence your study abroad experience. Depending on how you identify, you may experience study abroad differently from your peers of other identities. This doesn't necessarily mean that you'll have negative experiences, but we know students from certain identity backgrounds, particularly students of color, women, LGBTQIA+ students and those of certain religious backgrounds, are more prone to face incidents related to their identity abroad. Therefore, it is important to know what the experience is like in-country for people who share your identity and make sure it's safe. Doing this research ahead of time will help you choose a location that suites your comfortability level and will help you better navigate various experiences while abroad. We encourage you to consult the articles and resources included and invite students to discuss questions and concerns with the Office of Study Abroad.

RACE, CULTURE, AND ETHNICITY

Race, culture, and ethnicity may present both challenges and opportunities abroad in terms of host country attitudes toward racial issues. Many students find differing levels of sensitivity in the host country difficult – in some cultures, it is common to give individuals nicknames based on physical characteristics such as weight, hair color/texture, and skin color. This habit can be disconcerting for those from the U.S., but is often not meant to be offensive, and can even be intended as a term of endearment.

Studying abroad can represent an opportunity to act as a cultural ambassador and to educate host nationals about cultural groups within the United States; there is often great interest in other countries in the history and culture of African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinx. This interest presents great opportunities for conversations regarding your culture(s), media stereotypes, and diversity issues within your host country.

Alongside those opportunities, some students might also

- be essentialized/tokenized as representatives of their racial/ethnic group beyond being put on the spot for their U.S. nationality (e.g., "What do [all] Latinos in the U.S. think about your immigration policies?" Or, "When did you immigrate to the U.S.?" OR, "You speak English very well!")
- be exoticized or stereotyped based on American media portrayals (e.g., expectations of Native American dress, names, technological awareness, or living arrangements based entirely on old Western movies)
- be expected to be highly critical of the U.S. or experts in the experiences of their ancestral homelands (e.g., Native American students expected to hate U.S. for its treatment of their people, third generation Japanese-American quizzed on anime, or African-Americans expected to have detailed knowledge of contemporary African conflicts).

While some students choose study abroad destinations where there are very few persons of color, others might choose countries where communities of color make up the majority. Some students may be interested in “heritage seeking” and will opt to study in a location connected to their religious, linguistic, national, cultural, or ethnic backgrounds. These types of locations present a different set of possibilities and may also include unexpected challenges. For example, community members may have high expectations regarding the cultural knowledge and linguistic capabilities of heritage seeking students.

Regardless of your study abroad destination, you may find that your salient identities shift while abroad. Some students find that they are first viewed as a U.S. citizen rather than a person of the racial, ethnic, or cultural group they identify with, and this can provide an interesting opportunity to explore how these aspects of self intersect. Staying connected with other students from your similar identity who are also abroad can help you process and reflect on your experience as it happens.

Researching your host country in advance can provide a better understanding of potential attitudes towards race and ethnicity in general and your own identities specifically.

LGBTQ + STUDENTS ABROAD

Get ready for your adventure! Studying abroad provides an excellent opportunity to learn about world cultures as well as your own. As an LGBTQ student you may have additional things to consider before departure. Preparing for what to expect in any particular country can make the difference between a wonderful experience abroad and a more challenging one.

You may already identify as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, or queer student, or you may still be exploring your identity. In either case, you will find that the social climate, laws, and personal interactions of other cultures will often differ from the U.S. In preparing for departure, all students should reflect on cultural ideas of gender identity/expression and sexual identity both in the U.S. and in the host country. Consider carefully how your identity as a LGBTQ person coming from the U.S. may influence your relationships with host nationals, your cultural adjustment, and your overall education abroad experience.

- Learning More about Your Host Country Before You Depart
- Questions to Ask
- Legal Issues to Consider Before Going Abroad
- Internet Resources

Learning More about Your Host Country Before You Depart

In some cultures, Western understandings of “gay” and “straight” don’t exist, or don’t carry the same importance as they do in the U.S. People involved in same-sex relationships or who don’t identify with their gender assigned at birth may not see being Queer and/or Trans as personal/cultural identity. In other cultures, understandings of LGBTQ identity may be similar to our understandings in the U.S. In preparing for your study abroad experience, it is important for you to research the LGBTQ culture and political climate of the country you will be visiting.

If you are open about your gender and/or sexual identity, consider the following as you research potential study abroad countries:

- Moving through the world as a queer person may be significantly different in your host country. How will you navigate your experience if you feel less safe than expected?
- If queer/trans people in your host country navigate being queer/trans differently than in the U.S. – how will you adjust to that shift – especially if that difference is due to safety concerns?
- Identify supportive people or places both in the U.S. and on the ground in your host country before leaving. If you need support while abroad, it can help to know who to reach out to in advance.

If you are not open about your gender and/or sexual identity, along with the above, consider the following as you research potential study abroad countries:

- In some countries you may find it easier to come out; make sure that you have a support network during this time. If you choose to come out while abroad, consider how this will affect your return to friends and family.
- If you are not public about your identity, realize that finding that community will be a bit more difficult while abroad. Finding groups or organizations before you go is essential. Check out the links in the campus and international resources sections.

Questions to Ask

As part of your pre-departure preparations, ask these questions of yourself, your study abroad adviser, and your study abroad program.

- Does your right to be LGBTQ in the United States conflict with your host country’s religious or cultural values and traditions?
- How will you reconcile your human rights with the cultural values of your host society?
- Will your (LGBT) legal rights be similar or different from the United States?
- How will you work to understand your privilege as a college student from the U.S. in your host culture?
- Are there safety considerations that you should be aware of?
- How do gender relations operate in the host culture?
- What is considered typical gendered behavior in the host culture?

- What is the social perception of members of the LGBTQ community?
- What roles do trans people play in the host culture?
- Is there a gender binary in the host culture? What do the lives of folks outside the binary look like?
- Does your study abroad program offer LGBTQ friendly housing?
- Does your study abroad program discuss LGBTQ considerations during their orientation?
- What are my safety needs and perceptions, and how can they best be met? Is the program able to make special accommodations for students who request single rooms, private baths, or certain roommates?
- Research how you may be received in your host country thinking about gender/sexuality/race/class. Is this perception something you feel comfortable with?
- Will I need access to any medications, supplies, or services due to my transgender status? Are they available in my host country? If not, will I need any additional documentation to travel with my medication or supplies?

Get to Know Your Destination

Explore LGBTQ travel guides and internet resources. Talk with other LGBTQ and allied people about their experiences in certain countries or regions to gather as much information as possible upon which to make your choices and decisions. Once in your host country, find out what local newspapers, e-magazines or online resources may be available. Some questions to ask include:

- How open will I be about my sexual orientation and gender identity with my teachers, peers, friends, host family and others?
- How important is it to me to find other sexual minority students and friends while abroad? How will I make connections with other sexual minority students, local residents, or community organizations and gathering places?
- What resources are available in my host country for sexual minority people?
- Are there any LGBT-friendly establishments nearby? How can I find them?

Legal Issues to Consider Before Going Abroad

The laws governing LGBTQ relationships and sexual activity differ from country to country. U.S. citizens must abide by the laws of a host country; knowing these laws may help you to decide what countries you might like to visit if you will be out abroad or if you will pursue relationships while abroad. Even if you do not plan to have a sexual relationship while away, you should be informed about specific laws pertaining to sexual behavior and sexual/gender identity. When doing your research, try to ascertain:

- Are there “public decency” laws? Or “public indecency” laws?
- The legality of same-sex sexual behavior (sometimes male-male sexual behavior is illegal while female-female sexual behavior is not), including sodomy laws.
- The age of consent for sexual behavior (which may differ from the age of consent for opposite-sex sexual behavior)
- Restrictions on freedom of association or expression for LGBTQ people
- Anti-discrimination laws (these can be national laws or specific to local areas)

You may find that you can be more open about your identity than in the U.S., or that you would need to hide your sexual or gender identity completely to avoid cultural ostracism or arrest. Understanding this will help you decide where you would, or would not, want to study.

Internet Resources

The following links are a good place to start answering some of the questions posed above. We have tips for LGBTQ travelers provided by governmental organizations, advocacy groups, and other universities. Please note that although much of the information available on the internet claims to discuss LGBTQ experiences internationally, many do not focus on the needs and concerns of gender minoritized folks. Therefore, not all of the resources listed below touch on experiences of trans* and other gender minoritized folks. However, The QRC is always improving our resources and strives to serve the LGBTQQIAA community as best we can. If you know of a good resource for LGBTQ students studying abroad, please contact The QRC Staff with your recommendations.

Resources for LGBTQ Travelers

[US State Department Traveler's Checklist](#): useful checklist for all travelers departing from the United States

[LGBT Student Guide for Education Abroad](#): a 34-page resource including links to international LGBTQ organizations and a country-by-country description of LGBTQ concerns including legal and cultural climate around LGBTQ status, presence/visibility of LGBTQ communities, and national LGBTQ organizations and resources

[Meaningful Travel Tips and Tales](#): LGBTQ traveler's perspectives: A resource dedicated to helping LGBTQ travelers prepare to go abroad and feel more comfortable when they get there. Written by and for queer people.

[Transgender and TSA](#): travel tips for trans* folks with an explanation of TSA policies and resources

[National Center for Transgender Equality Know Your Rights](#): Airport Security

Resources for Travelers with Disabilities

[Mobility International USA](#): provides information for travelers from the United States, as well as visitors to the U.S such as an a-z disability resource list, tips on preparing to travel, and opportunities to learn about global disability culture

College Study Abroad Offices – LGBTQ Resources

[NAFSA Association of International Educators](#): Rainbow Special Interest Group

Ithaca College – [LGBT Students and Study Abroad](#)

Michigan State – [Information for LGBTQ Students](#)

NYU Student to Student Guide – [LGBT](#)

University of Minnesota – (video) ["Orientation for GLBT Students Studying Abroad"](#)

William & Mary College – [LGBT](#)

Diversity Note

[Beloit College – Diversity and Identity Abroad](#): a useful discussion and list of resources related to intersectional navigation of an international experience.

[IFSA-Butler](#) — Unpacked: Unpacked is a new online study abroad guide for students by students, where one section is dedicated to [LGBTQIA+ students](#).

LGBTI human rights

[F&M Global Barometers](#) measure the LGBTI human rights in 203 countries and regions.

WOMEN GOING ABROAD

Posted on May 01, 2019

Being a woman abroad can be an eye-opening experience, because every culture has a different attitude towards women. Before and during your trip, find out about your host country's cultural values and behaviors regarding women.

Across many countries, traditional gender roles often inform how women are expected to act, dress, and even speak to others. What might be perceived as common behavior for women in the U.S. may be misinterpreted in other countries. For example, how does religion play a role in how women are expected to dress? Can smiling or making direct eye contact with strangers imply something more than just a friendly gesture? If men stare and catcall while you walk down the street, how do you react?

Sometimes, what is considered "acceptable behavior" for women in the U.S. has sexual connotations in other cultures, so it's important to talk with other women who have been to your host country to know what type of behavior is most culturally appropriate.

You will also want to find out what the local attitudes are towards American women. There is a preconception abroad that American women are "easy" or "loose." If you are thinking about being sexually active abroad, inform yourself about STD prevention, birth control, and safe sex practices in that country. In addition, how is sex outside of marriage perceived? Do the locals shun women who have sex outside of marriage?

You may become frustrated with local behaviors and attitudes towards women, especially if you feel it prevents you from being yourself. This is understandable when experiencing another culture. To avoid unwanted attention, dress and act like the local women. This can be a great opportunity to befriend local women to learn directly from them about ways to dress or act as they do.

Throughout your trip, remember to put your safety first and always be aware of your surroundings. By observing the locals, you'll learn about gender roles in another culture. You can also use resources like our Diversity Abroad [Destination Guides](#) to help you prepare for your experience abroad.

Must Ask Questions for Women:

Is it safe for me to go out alone? at night? Are there areas or places I should avoid?

How are women expected to behave?

How do men treat women?

What are the cultural norms regarding friendship and dating?

Do people in my host country have stereotypes of American women?

Tips for Women:

Do research on gender roles and their history beforehand.

Put your safety first and be aware of your surroundings.

Dress and act like the local women to avoid standing out.

Be aware of cultural differences, including body language, that may be misinterpreted in your host culture. Talk with other women who have studied abroad to find out more about their experiences.

Diversity Abroad. "Women Going Abroad". Posted on May 1, 2019. Accessed October 27, 2022.

<https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles/women-going-abroad>

Pre-Departure Preparations: Tips from Students

How Accommodations Can Differ

Because the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is an U.S. law which does not have jurisdiction in other countries, students may find that disabilities accommodations are the same, better or worse in their study abroad destination.

- Disability Resource Services, as a student support service, may not be provided at your host institution.
- Attitudes around accommodations may be different in your host country.
- Tutoring may not be a free service at the host university.
- To obtain a visa, some countries require health information, which can delay the process.
- Electricity for equipment or recharging batteries often requires adapters and/or converters.
- Learning disabilities may not be recognized in some countries.
- Sign language interpreters may not be certified or available at all times, and interpreting will generally be in the sign language of the country rather than ASL.
- Some countries quarantine guide dogs before they are allowed into the country.
- Bring mobility aids to use in restrooms without bars or on long train platforms.
- Carry extra spare parts or differing types of casters for a wheelchair.

Medical/Prescription Needs

- If you take prescriptions, make sure you have enough to last throughout the entire stay.
- All medications should be stored in their original containers with their label attached and visible.
- Carry a letter from a physician that describes the medication.
- Always carry medication in your carry-on in the event your checked bag is delayed or lost.
- It is illegal to have medication sent abroad to you via postal mail.
- Confirm your health insurance covers any disability-related medical needs while overseas.
- Ensure your medication is legal in your host country by contacting the consulate or embassy.
- The University of Minnesota requires students maintain their US health insurance whenever enrolled, including while learning abroad. [Learn more](#).

Coping Strategies

- Work early on with your home institution to arrange accommodations at your overseas site.
- Learn to explain your disability in the host language.
- Read about [students with disabilities](#) who have been abroad in order to learn from their experiences.
- Your disability may intersect with your host culture in unexpected ways. It is important to research your host culture before you go, discuss customs with your hosts, and be open to creative solutions.
- Once abroad, on-site staff can help connect you with a student who has a similar disability.
- If your home institution does not offer a list of mentors, contact [Mobility International USA](#)

RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY ABROAD

Religion and culture are intertwined in many countries around the world and studying abroad provides a unique opportunity to learn about world religions and the role they play in different cultures.

Exposure to different belief systems while living and studying abroad may prompt questions about your religious identity and may cause you to reflect more about your religious or spiritual practice. Research about religious life in your host country before you go abroad, and while abroad, keep an open mind about religious practices. In doing this, you'll be able to gain a better understanding of your own belief system(s) and an increased familiarity of those of others.

Things to Consider

Will you be part of a religious majority or a religious minority abroad?

If you are planning to practice your religion abroad, are there any places of worship you can visit? If not, how will you plan to practice your religion?

How tolerant is your host country about religion and spirituality? How are atheists or agnostics perceived? Will it be safe for you to wear religious symbols and/or clothing?

Is there separation of church and state in your host country? Are there laws about religion?

If you have religious dietary restrictions, will they be accommodated in your host country?

If you are living in a homestay, are you open to living in a household with a different religious background than yours?

Are there any religious holidays that are celebrated as public events in your host country?

Are there any places of worship that you will be able to visit, as part of your study abroad program or on your own?

What do you need to know before visiting (such as dress code, etc.)?

FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS TRAVELING ABROAD

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As a first-generation college student, your focus on college may be to simply navigate what it means to be successful in college. There's a good chance that going abroad was never part of your vision for what this success looks like, and that's okay. However, there are so many benefits to studying abroad that will ultimately make you a stronger candidate for opportunities after you graduate. In preparing for study abroad, here are a few tips to help you successfully navigate the process:

Talk to Your Advisors and Fellow Students: When preparing to study abroad, seek advice from people at your current university or college. First, make appointments to speak with your advisors, specifically in study abroad, academic advising and financial aid. If you have a study abroad office at your campus, make an appointment to talk with them and fully understand what programs are available to you. You should also connect with your academic advisors to figure out which courses enable you to earn credits towards your major or degree. And of course, make an appointment to talk with the financial aid office. Doing this will help you realize how much of your financial aid package can be used to go abroad, which will determine how much you may be expected to pay out of pocket.

In addition, talk to students who have already studied abroad. They can give you firsthand advice about the process of living abroad, and will give you the most truthful answers you could want. If you don't know anyone who has studied abroad, ask your advisors to connect you with someone who has recently gone abroad through your campus. You can also use the Diversity Abroad Community Forums to post any questions you have, or read our [Alumni Stories](#) to find a student whose identities and experiences mirror yours.

Do Your Research: Do as much research as possible. Speaking with advisors and other study abroad alumni is a great start, but take the time to look into your options to ensure you make the best decision. DiversityAbroad.com [Destination Guides](#) are a great resource where you can start learning about opportunities, best practices, and better understand what your experience abroad may be like.

Find Support: Making the decision to go abroad, especially if no one you know before you has done it, can be daunting. Your family and friends may not understand your motivations, or may even think it's a "vacation"! It's important to find people in your life who support your decision to go abroad, whether that support comes from friends, family, mentors, or even other students in your study abroad cohort. Having people in your life who understand and respect your decision to go abroad can help you feel more comfortable, and can help you ease into your study abroad program more smoothly.

How to Respond to Discrimination and Bias

Discrimination is the unjust treatment of people based on characteristics such as age, race, gender, sexual orientation, weight, disability, and more. [Discrimination](#) is perpetuated by societal norms, cultural institutions, and through explicit or implicit bias. It can occur in such small ways, both in personal interactions and in how institutions are structured, that it can sometimes be difficult to recognize when we or someone we know is being discriminated against. Since discrimination has a very powerful effect on mental health and well-being, it is vital to understand how to recognize and respond to it in productive ways.

If you do recognize bias in action, it is important to address it if you feel safe doing so. Whether we are the target of discrimination, a witness to the discrimination of others, or noticing our own biases, taking active steps to address discrimination where we see it is a way that we can collectively create more equitable and healthy environments and relationships.

What to Do if You are the Target of Discrimination

Discrimination can be structural, like refusing to rent a home to someone because of their race or refusing to hire someone for a job because of their sexual orientation. It can also be [personal](#), like using derogatory language against someone of another race or reacting disrespectfully because of someone's religious or ethnic practices and symbols. It can also come in the form of **microaggressions**: indirect, subtle, or unintentional comments or actions that are prejudicial toward a marginalized group.

If you feel you are the target of discrimination, consider taking one or more of the steps below.

Take Care of Yourself

Experiencing discrimination and bias can take a toll on your mental health, especially if it is part of your everyday reality. The discrimination we experience can lead to elevated levels of stress, increased risk of depression and anxiety, and even an increased risk of suicidal thoughts. Discrimination can also lead to poor self-image, which can in some cases cause people to internalize the messages that they hear about the groups they belong to—this is called internalized bias.

Since it is not always possible to avoid situations in which we are the target of discrimination, finding ways of coping with what we experience, big and small, is important for our mental health. Try these strategies for coping:

- **Practice positive self-talk.** If you're getting negative messages about your worth, it helps to focus on your strengths and your core values.
- **Avoid dwelling.** It's very hard to shake off discrimination. However, dwelling on negative experiences can actually cause higher levels of stress or anxiety.
- **Practice mindfulness and meditation.** Being the target of discrimination can stir up a lot of negative feelings including anger, sadness, and frustration. Mindfulness and meditation can help you get in touch with your feelings without judgment.
- **Find community.** Experiencing discrimination can be isolating. Having a strong support system among your family and friends can help. It can also be empowering to join groups of people in your community who have had similar experiences.

- **Seek help from a mental health professional.** Part of your support system can be a therapist who is trained in dealing with issues of discrimination.

What to Do if You Witness Discrimination

Research shows that even when discrimination is overt, witnesses are often hesitant to speak up—especially if there are many other people present. This is because of what’s known as the bystander effect: we hope that someone else will intervene because we do not want the pressure and the responsibility of assisting the person in distress. Many of us also fear that we will become the next target if we speak out. These feelings, which can sometimes be subconscious, often stop witnesses from doing anything at all.

And just as it’s sometimes hard to know if you are the target of discrimination, it’s not always easy to spot discrimination when it’s happening to someone else. But there are things we can do to address acts of discrimination and biased behavior as they happen.

What to Do In the Moment

- Do not leave the person who is being targeted alone with the person who is being discriminatory against them. Stay with the person being targeted until they feel they are safe.
- Offer your [support](#) to the person experiencing discrimination.
- If the conflict is not violent, try to calmly step in without escalating the situation.
- Calmly explain why what was said was harmful. Do so without ridiculing anyone, as that could escalate the situation.
- Lead with empathy and encourage others to empathize with the person who is being targeted.
- If the person who is being targeted is able to do so, allow them to speak rather than speaking for them.
- If the discriminatory act is taking place in a business or at a school, take detailed notes of what you witnessed immediately afterwards. Remember to include dates and times.
- **If a crime has been committed, or you or others are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.** If you believe that a hate crime has been committed, additional steps can be taken after reporting the crime to ensure that your concerns are taken seriously.

What to Do If You’re Not Sure It’s Discrimination

If you are unsure if what you witnessed was a biased or discriminatory act against someone else or an unkind or rude gesture, the best approach is to be a [supportive ally](#) to the person who was targeted. Empathize with them, listen to what they need, and offer support when and how you can.

We may not be able to control the actions of other people or institutions, but we can control how we respond when we see or experience discrimination. Having the tools to effectively respond to and cope with discrimination can help us protect our mental health and improve our communities.



Discrimination: What it is and how to cope

For many people, discrimination is an everyday reality. Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation.

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<https://www.apa.org/topics/racism-bias-discrimination/types-stress>

What is discrimination?

Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation. That's the simple answer. But explaining why it happens is more complicated.

The human brain naturally puts things in categories to make sense of the world. But the values we place on different categories are learned—from our parents, our peers, and the observations we make about how the world works. Often, discrimination stems from fear and misunderstanding.

Stress and health

Discrimination is a public health issue. Research has found that the experience of discrimination—when perceived as such—can lead to a cascade of [stress-related emotional, physical, and behavioral changes](#). Stress evokes negative emotional responses, such as distress, sadness, and anger, and can often lead to an increase in behaviors that harm health, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other substance use, and a decrease in healthy activities, such as sleep and physical activity.

Discrimination can be damaging even if you haven't been the target of overt acts of bias. Regardless of your personal experiences, it can be stressful just being a member of a group that is often discriminated against, such as racial minorities or individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

The anticipation of discrimination creates its own chronic stress. People might even avoid situations where they expect they could be treated poorly, possibly missing out on educational and job opportunities.

Discrimination, big and small

Laws are in place in the United States to protect people from discrimination in housing and employment. These laws may not exist in other countries.

- The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of dwellings on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and disability.
- The Civil Rights Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibit discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, sex, ethnic origin, age, and disabilities.

Unfortunately, discrimination still occurs.

Yet experts say that smaller, less obvious examples of day-to-day discrimination—receiving poorer service at stores or restaurants, being treated with less courtesy and respect, or being treated as less

intelligent or less trustworthy—may be more common than major discrimination. Such day-to-day discrimination frequently comes in the form of “microaggressions” such as snubs, slights, and misguided comments that suggest a person doesn’t belong or invalidates his or her experiences.

Though microaggressions are often subtle, they can be just as harmful to health and well-being as more overt episodes of major bias. People on the receiving end of day-to-day discrimination often feel they’re in a state of constant vigilance, on the lookout for being a target of discrimination. That heightened watchfulness is a recipe for chronic stress.

Dealing with discrimination

Finding healthy ways to deal with discrimination is important, for your physical health and your mental well-being.

- **Focus on your strengths.** Focusing on your core values, beliefs, and perceived strengths can motivate people to succeed, and may even buffer the negative effects of bias. Overcoming hardship can also make people more resilient and better able to face future challenges.
- **Seek support systems.** One problem with discrimination is that people can internalize others’ negative beliefs, even when they’re false. You may start to believe you’re not good enough. But family and friends can remind you of your worth and help you reframe those faulty beliefs.

Family and friends can also help counteract the toll that microaggressions and other examples of daily discrimination can take. In a world that regularly invalidates your experiences and feelings, members of your support network can reassure you that you’re not imagining those experiences of discrimination. Still, it’s sometimes painful to talk about discrimination. It can be helpful to ask friends and family how they handle such events.

Your family and friends can also be helpful if you feel you’ve been the victim of discrimination in areas such as housing, employment, or education. Often, people don’t report such experiences to agencies or supervisors. One reason for that lack of reporting is that people often doubt themselves: *Was I actually discriminated against, or am I being oversensitive? Will I be judged negatively if I push the issue?* Your support network can provide a reality check and a sounding board to help you decide if your claims are valid and worth pursuing.

- **Get involved.** Support doesn’t have to come from people in your family or circle of friends. You can get involved with like-minded groups and organizations, whether locally or online. It can help to know there are other people who have had similar experiences to yours. And connecting with those people might help you figure out how to address situations and respond to experiences of discrimination in ways you haven’t thought of.
- **Help yourself think clearly.** Being the target of discrimination can stir up a lot of strong emotions including anger, sadness, and embarrassment. Such experiences often trigger a physiological response, too; they can increase your blood pressure, heart rate, and body temperature.

Try to check in with your body before reacting. Slow your breathing or use other relaxation exercises to calm your body’s stress response. Then you’ll be able to think more clearly about how you want to respond.

- **Don’t dwell.** When you’ve experienced discrimination, it can be really hard to just shake it off. People often get stuck on episodes of discrimination, in part because they’re not sure how to handle those experiences. You might want to speak out or complain, but you’re not sure how to go about it, or are afraid of the backlash. So instead, you end up ruminating, or thinking over and over about what you should have done.

In a calmer moment, it might be helpful to talk over the ways you can cope with similar experiences in the future. Try to come up with a plan for how you might respond or what you could do differently next time. Once you've determined how to respond, try to leave the incident behind you as you go on with your day.

- **Seek professional help.** Discrimination is difficult to deal with, and is often associated with symptoms of depression. Psychologists are experts in helping people manage symptoms of stress and depression, and can help you find healthy ways to cope. You can find a psychologist in your area by using APA's [Psychologist Locator](#) Service.

ON YOUR MIND

How to cope with racism-induced stress

As an Asian therapist, I witnessed firsthand the effect xenophobia and racism had on my community

Advice by Jason Wu

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Researchers have found that pandemic experiences of racial discrimination were associated with higher levels of [anxiety and depression](#). This was certainly true for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders during the past few years, who endured bigotry and racist attacks after President Donald Trump labeled the [coronavirus](#) the “Chinese virus.”

As an Asian therapist, I witnessed firsthand the effect [xenophobia](#) and [racism](#) had on my community. One client said they started to question whether moving to America was the right decision, as they hadn’t realized that racism toward Asians was so prevalent. Another talked about the hours they would spend scrolling through videos of hate incidents, feeling angry, anxious and hopeless about the future and the potential for change. One client even said they started to carry a pocketknife when they went out in public.

Before the pandemic, about 20 percent of my clients were Asian-identified individuals. Now it’s closer to 60 percent. Bango Gancinia, a psychologist in Utah, said he has more such individuals coming to therapy and with higher levels of distress than his other clients.

I’m seeing more Asian clients in my practice, but the reality is that Asians tend not to seek mental health help. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health showed that in 2019, 7 percent of Asian Americans sought mental health services, less than for almost any other racial group. By comparison, 20 percent of non-Hispanic White adults and 10 percent of Black and Hispanic adults seek mental health care.

Only 3.3 percent of psychologists are Asians, even though Asians make up [6.2 percent of the U.S. population](#). This has left some providers, including myself, overwhelmed by the large number of patient requests and unable to work with everyone who contacts us.

Despite these issues, it feels like a watershed moment. Many Asian individuals, young and old, are opening up to therapy as well as explicitly addressing the mental health consequences of racism.

Shuyun David Lo, director of psychiatry at the University of California, Santa Cruz Health Services, said that he’s seen it, too. More Asian students are coming in to address the anxiety they feel about their safety and that of their elders, as attacks on [Asian elders](#) have been [well-documented](#) by the media.

In his practice, Gancinia said that not only have young people been “more vocal about their mental health needs, their parents have been more responsive and are taking them more seriously.” And adults have shared that they have been wanting to try therapy for a while, and current events have been so stressful that they finally decided to seek it.

Every person of color in the United States has experienced some form of bigotry. Here are some of the things I tell my patients to help them cope with racism-induced stress.

Embrace your culture

Be proud of who you are and where you come from — it’s good for your mental health. Developing positive feelings toward your ethnic group, learning about your cultural heritage and history, and feeling secure in your ethnic identity can protect your self-esteem even amid high stress from discrimination. For example, one of my Asian patients feared seeming “too Asian” for their predominantly White community. They would accept being the butt of racist jokes to fit in, not bring certain foods to school, and would go to their White friends’ houses rather than invite them over, as they were embarrassed of what the friends might think of their family’s behavior.

Once they began to embrace who they are more fully and develop a stronger sense of ethnic identity, they felt less ashamed and fearful, and more confident and assertive.

Cultivating a secure sense of ethnic identity can involve reading about Asian history, volunteering with advocacy groups, de-stigmatizing therapy in your community by talking about mental health, or even binge-watching Asian movies.

As a psychology nerd, I take pride in recognizing that the popular concepts of mindfulness and acceptance have roots in Asian and Buddhist traditions that have existed for thousands of years. That’s right, we were meditating before it was cool.

You don’t have to respond

Some of my clients, after experiencing an act of racism, criticize themselves for not responding. One of my patients was called a racial slur and was shocked into silence. Later, they were frustrated with themselves at allowing racism to go unchecked. They discussed feeling pressured to represent the entire Asian community in that moment, especially in an effort to combat the stereotype that Asians are submissive and unassertive. Not saying something felt deeply disappointing and shameful to them.

I understand why some, like my patient, think racism should be confronted, but that places an unfair burden on the victim. There are costs to both confronting and not confronting a perpetrator of racism. If we don’t confront the perpetrator, we may feel shame and guilt and ruminate excessively. If we confront them, we may face social and employment repercussions, or worse, threats and violence. Jeopardizing your safety is not healing.

Yue (Brian) Shi, a psychologist in Davis, Calif., was at a supermarket in the early days of the pandemic. A person stared at him in a way that made him feel targeted and unsafe. Shi then decided to shop online. Rather than berating himself for not confronting the threat, he recognized that there was resiliency in finding alternative ways to cope with racism that did not compromise his sense of safety.

In responding to racism, choose what feels right for you.

Don't gaslight yourself

I remember walking with my dog, and, through my headphones, I thought I heard someone yell the lyrics to “Gangnam Style,” a South Korean song. I didn't see anyone. At first, I was confused, then angry. I even came back to the street on my way home to see if it would happen again.

I told my friends about it; some were similarly outraged, but others questioned whether I had misheard. I initially felt angry at those who questioned my experience. Later that night, I found myself lying awake, wondering if I was acting foolish.

Learning about racism-related stress, however, has helped me contextualize the situation. In such moments, we are not responding to just one act of racism — we are carrying a lifetime of being hurt by racism.

So don't litigate what happened, but validate the feelings that were triggered. I might have misheard, but my feelings of anger and hurt are still valid.

Give yourself a break

Self-compassion can buffer the effects of racial discrimination on depressive symptoms. Individuals can also use culturally specific variations of compassion exercises that are consistent with their cultural backgrounds, as that can increase the effectiveness of the exercises.

One example is the Buddhist practice of metta meditation, often translated as “loving kindness,” which focuses on cultivating feelings of compassion and love for ourselves and others. Practicing regularly can reduce anxiety, depression and stress, and it doesn't require much time; you can try a seven-minute metta meditation here.

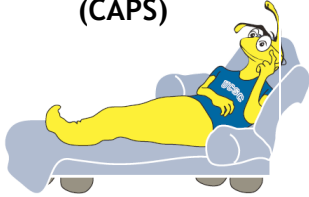
Seek out a BIPOC therapist

Research shows that mental health services tailored to culturally specific needs can greatly improve the treatment's success. Interventions targeted to specific cultural groups are four times more effective than non-culturally specific interventions, while interventions conducted in clients' native language are twice as effective as interventions conducted in English.

There are even Asian-specific therapist directories to help clients find therapists who understand their culture, and fundraisers to support Asian individuals becoming mental health professionals.

Finally, remind yourself that change happens slowly and across generations. Most importantly, Asian therapists and clients are ready to talk now, so let's keep the conversation going.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2022/10/06/tips-to-cope-racism-stress/>



Coping with Racism & Discrimination

Considerations for Students of Color

Racism and discrimination continue to be a fact of life for many students of color on college campuses. At times, racism is overt, such as the use of racial slurs, graffiti, or even violence. However, it can also frequently arise in more subtle forms, such as stereotyping, assumptions, or exclusion. In any form, racism and discrimination add stress and challenges to the lives of students of color.

Common consequences of racism for students of color at UCSC:

- A sense of being isolated and an outsider in the UCSC community
- Pressure to “prove oneself” and defy stereotypes
- Stress related to being seen as a “representative” of one’s community
- Feeling fearful, anxious, frustrated, helpless, depressed, or angry
- Considering dropping out or transferring to another school
- Difficulties with concentration and motivation for classes
- Being unsure or confused about whether one is being treated differently because of race or ethnicity

What Can You Do?

Taking active steps to combat the effects of racism and discrimination can have an extremely positive impact on students’ well-being at UCSC. Consider these tips:

Get Support

Talking to or spending time with supportive friends, family, professors, or mentors can be an effective way of releasing stress and reducing isolation. You are not alone! If you’re unsure where to start, consider getting connected with the Ethnic Resource Centers or one of the many student groups on campus. If you’re in need of a confidential space to talk, CAPS counselors are a great resource for getting support privately.

Get Empowered

If you are experiencing racism or discrimination, finding a way to push back is empowering and healthy. It can reduce feelings of depression or helplessness, and give frustration and anger a positive outlet. This will look different for different people in different situations. You might use humor to challenge an offensive statement with a group of friends; get involved in a political or activist cause; blog or get involved with online discussions; or simply offer a differing opinion in a group discussion. Whatever your style, it’s important to have a way to make your voice heard.

Practice Good Self-Care

In dealing with the pressures of being exposed to racism and discrimination, it can be easy to lose track of the things we need to do to take care of ourselves. Students may become exhausted, frequently using extra energy to process and combat these experiences. It may sometimes be hard to resist using unhealthy ways to cope, such as using drugs and alcohol excessively, or isolating oneself from the broader community. Taking good care of your physical, mental, and spiritual health will leave you better equipped to cope with the stress of bias, and make empowered choices for yourself.



Addressing Racism & Discrimination

Considerations for Allies

An **ally** is a person who does not belong to particular community, but is actively engaged in advocating for and supporting that community. White students can be allies to students of color, and students of color can be allies to each other. (For example, an African American student can be an ally to the Asian American community). Allies are important partners in countering racism and discrimination on campus.

Tips for Being an Effective Ally:

- Get educated. You don't have to have a Ph.D. in ethnic studies or be a history scholar. But making an effort to learn the history and current issues relevant to the communities you support is an important part of being an ally. Getting educated includes learning about the way that power, privilege, and oppression have impacted others' lives, as well as your own.
- Speak up (but speak for yourself). When you see racism rearing its head in your day-to-day life, say something. Too often, people of color are left holding all the responsibility for educating others and speaking up about racism, but racism is everyone's issue. At the same time, avoid speaking *for* other groups of people (which can be inaccurate, reductionist, or even unintentionally condescending), and stick to sharing your own opinions and viewpoints.
- Know the difference between intent and impact. It's easy to recognize overt racism, but it can be harder to recognize – and therefore, to challenge – racism when it comes with good intentions. *Allies recognize that well-intended actions can sometimes have an unintentional negative or hurtful impact.* They are willing to listen non-defensively, and try to understand the perspectives of people of color when they express discomfort, hurt, or anger.
- Challenge the behavior, not the person. Accusing another person of being a racist automatically puts them on the defensive, shutting them down and ending the conversation. Encourage thoughtfulness and dialogue by addressing racist behaviors and language, without escalating into hostility and name-calling.
- Be willing to make mistakes. When racism is part of the culture, we all absorb beliefs and attitudes that are shaped by that reality. Our actions will sometimes reflect this despite our best efforts, meaning that we all make mistakes from time to time, and can unwittingly cause anger or hurt. Don't panic or despair. A willingness to genuinely listen, engage, and apologize when necessary, goes a long way.

<https://caps.ucsc.edu/pdf/coping-with-racism.pdf>

Additional Resources:

FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR

https://www.state.gov/courses/answeringdifficultquestions/html/app.htm?p=module1_p1.htm

<https://umabroad.umn.edu/resources/identity/students-of-color/experiences>

<https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles/managing-black-hair-abroad>

https://www.geneseo.edu/study_abroad/asian-americanpacific-islander-students-abroad

<https://hnmagazine.com/2017/04/10-reasons-hispanic-american-students-study-abroad/>

<https://www.goabroad.com/articles/study-abroad/students-of-color-study-abroad>

<https://www.goabroad.com/articles/study-abroad/black-students-travel-guide>

<https://global.umich.edu/travel-resources/identities-abroad/>

FOR LGBTQIA STUDENTS

<https://umabroad.umn.edu/resources/identity/lgbtqia>

<http://www.rainbowsig.org/>

https://ilga.org/sites/default/files/downloads/ENG_ILGA_World_map_sexual_orientation_laws_dec2020.png

FOR DACA STUDENTS

<https://www.nafsa.org/professional-resources/browse-by-interest/daca-resource-page-international-student-advisers-and-education-abroad-advisers>

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY ABROAD

<https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles/religious-diversity-abroad>

<http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/>

<https://pluralism.org/home>

<https://www.state.gov/international-religious-freedom-reports/>

ACCESSIBILITY & DISABILITIES ABROAD

<https://www.miusa.org/ncde/>

<https://umabroad.umn.edu/resources/identity/disabilities>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/19/travel/how-to-make-sure-you-travel-with-medication-legally.html>

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/your-health-abroad.html>

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS ABROAD

<https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles/first-generation-students-traveling-abroad>

<https://www.iie.org/en/Learn/Blog/2015/05/2015-May-A-Different-Experience-Supporting-First-Generation-College-Students-In-Education-Abroad>

<https://firstgen.naspa.org/blog/adventure-is-where-belonging-began-my-first-generation-study-abroad-experience>

<https://global.umich.edu/travel-resources/identities-abroad/first-generation-abroad/>