

The social GRRRAACCEEESSS framework

John Burnham and colleagues developed the acronym 'social graces' to represent aspects of difference in beliefs, power and lifestyle, visible and invisible, voiced and unvoiced, to which we might pay attention in therapy and in supervision.

The 'social graces' have grown since their original development and currently represent: gender, geography, race, religion, age, ability, appearance, class, culture, ethnicity, education, employment, sexuality, sexual orientation and spirituality, though the acronym can be more than a list.

They are a useful tool for relationship building as they provide a framework for understanding value bases and sense checking cultural competence and awareness.

Social graces meaning

The original process of creating understandings of distinctions with people about difference and diversity can be lost when practitioners view the framework as a "this is the named distinctions I know about" idea. The process of creating through language and being together in interaction can be fluid and hard to grasp this struggling together allows greater awareness of the uniqueness of the otherness of people. This therapeutic 'posturing', 'dance', 'positioning', 'relating' etc. are all aspects of therapy and supervisory practice that are so important to the artfulness of therapeutic interaction.

Having said this, the list-like qualities also are useful in reminding us of some of the possible differences to be considered about 'otherness'. The list thereby becomes a framework for considering further aspects of difference.

- Gender
- Gender identity
- Geography
- Race
- Religion
- Age
- Ability
- Appearance
- Class
- Culture
- Caste
- Education
- Ethnicity
- Economics
- Spirituality
- Sexuality
- Sexual orientation

Separating into parts allows people to explore more fully the influence of particular aspects of lives that may have a dominant presence or, alternatively, may be invisible or unnoticed. More information on each aspect is included below.

Exercise: Asking questions such as "*Which of the social grrrraacceeeesss grabs you the most?*" and reflecting on this, or "*What aspects do you least comprehend?*" are both helpful explorative questions within supervision allowing practitioners to consider further their familiarity with distinctions or otherwise.

What are the social GRRRAACCEEESSS?

Gender – biological sex; masculinity v femininity; social roles – male and female; gender identity and transgender- 3rd gender? Gender continuum?

Geography – physical location/ living conditions; community; personal background – rural or urban; connections with physical environment and meanings

Race – social construct- links to colonialism/ misuse of power; genetic myths; Links to ethnicity interchangeable used; US- black refers to Afro-Americans and history of slavery; political struggle. Coloured used to describe mixed race in US and elsewhere but in UK offensive. Hence, language varies and it's meaning in different places/contexts; oppression

Religion- different and dominant religions; links to moral principles; tolerance of others; links to cultural beliefs/rituals; impact on gender roles; atheism; Impact on practice /relationships?

Age- chronological and cognitive; differences/similarities in age; generational changes in beliefs/behaviour. Impact of practice/relationships?

Ability – Links to aptitude; intelligence, capability, knowledge, skills, power; strengths; potential; impact of disability?

Appearance – physical- dress code; speech and language; cultural influences first impressions; looks; relate to gender roles; discrimination

Class – social class; Does it still exist in UK? Marxism and capitalism; hierarchy; socio-economic circumstances/opportunities- links to outcomes for education, employment; health, values etc

Culture – links to ethnicity; dominant /mainstream culture; multiculturalism v community cohesion in UK; Links with immigration; cultural competence

Ethnicity – Race and ethnicity are related concepts – shared views/similarities to ancestry, language, culture, religion, rituals etc – group identity – e.g. USA native Indians- indigenous and others: Black African Americans; White Americans; Hispanics

Education – formal and informal; state v private; vocational v academic; prestige and privilege; commonalities and differences; life-long learning

Employment - past, present, future aspirations and opportunities; knowledge and skills; economic security

Sexuality – sexual development e.g. puberty and humans as sexual beings; impact of religion and culture; private and public spheres

Sexual Orientation – heterosexual, homosexual; bisexual etc. Preference/identity; Social attitudes to these overtime

Spirituality – maybe linked to religion; deepest / inner values and meanings to which we live; philosophical; personal growth