# The Catholic University of America Counseling Center

## Cultural Identity

In forming a cultural identity, people come to identify with and attach themselves to (fuse themselves with) a particular set of ideas that are characteristic of their larger family and tribal or national identity. This may include an identification with a particular religious group, a particular ethnic or racial group, a particular country, a particular language and dialect, a particular set of foods that are thought to be good to eat, a particular set of holidays, of usual and unusual names that people might have, etc. By accepting these ideas handed down by the larger tribe or nation or family a person comes to be an accepted part of the group. For the most part, this is a good thing.

There are occasions where cultural identity doesn't work for people. Individuals within a given culture may disagree with views that cultural leaders promote, leading to their persecution or marginalization. A given culture may be highly intolerant of some of its members, forcing those members to suppress their views, go underground or go into exile. Dissent may lead to the formation of counter-cultures that promote values that are more accepting of dissenters (e.g., LGBTQ+ communities). Stressful clashes between culture and countercultures may then occur. All this is to say that sometimes people's problems are not really so much due to something they are doing wrong as they are due to the ill fit between that person's identity and commitments and the culture in which they find themselves.

## Questions to Ponder

* What is your cultural background?
* What are some things that you value because your culture values those things?
* How well do your beliefs and values fit in with your culture's values.
* Have clashes between your values and those promoted by your culture harmed you?