

## Cultural Narrative Essay

We all have a story to tell about ourselves. Since we live in solitary confinement daily (within our minds) and perceive the world through our own identities, cultures, and ways, we realize, even when talking amongst similar people, that we are indeed not all the same. Our experiences shape us. Our histories shape us. Our identities shape us.

Cultural narratives are important to us in society. They help us better understand ourselves and our own identities through writing and exploration, but they also allow us to connect to and see the differences in our identities. Though many times we do not realize these in an academic sense, we often create identity stories through the likes of telling our histories and in locating how we relate to other groups.

Thus, for our first major assignment this semester, we will be writing our own individual cultural narratives. The goal of this assignment is for you to articulate how in certain categories and identities you live within and outside of cultural norms. **Cultural norms** are defined as a certain topic, category, or identity that is recognized as a regular identity for a majority of Americans. For instance, being heterosexual would be considered a cultural norm and being bisexual or homosexual would be considered as a cultural alternative. Cultural norms are not a set list of identities; they are ever changing. It will be up to you to fully describe what you believe the norms are in our culture. We will discuss these terms more in class.

What you have to accomplish in this paper:

1. Define at least two cultural norms and two cultural alternatives you have and discuss why they are indeed “norms” or “alternatives.” You must use both sets of identity markers. So if you want to argue why “x” is an alternative in this country, you must explain what is the majority and why you believe this is so.
2. Discuss why you chose these certain cultural identities. Why do you choose to go against the grain? Were you raised to be one way or another? Why do you define yourself as something over something else? Do you agree that your identity marker is the majority? Does your alternative identity feel oppressed by the majority? These sorts of questions will be the main emphasis of your analysis. Though there is a not set of answers you must provide, you must be able to offer this sort of analysis, from a personal angle, when describing each identity.
3. Be able to provide examples, research, etc. to define, describe, and/or back up your point. Have outside works reference to your personal experiences or your argument for defining a certain cultural norm or alternative
4. Though you are creating an argument (in a degree) you will also want to show your creative side in this piece. Just simply stating your norms and alternatives without elaborating on them, without describing situations or creating allegories (for instance), will not allow you to best develop your paper.

You will write a paper that is 8-10 pages in length. In class we will be discussing more about different identities to talk about, ways to describe cultural norms and your own identities, and we will be reading various cultural narratives as well (though many will not fit neatly into this genre).

What is required:

1. 8-10 pages in length, double spaced with correct MLA stylistics

2. 2-3 outside sources that help define your identities or backup claims of norms or alternatives
3. At least two identities that explain how you exist within the norm and at least two identities that explain how you exist within the alternative

**Workshop Dates: 9/17 (plus other in class activities)**

**Due Date: 9/24**

Possible Terms Discussed plus more: Cultural Norms, Identity Markers, Intersectionality, Borderlands, Differential Racialization, Double Consciousness, Essentialism, Exceptionalism, False Consciousness, Hypodescent, Model Minority Myth, Passing, Stock Stories, Transparency Phenomenon