

FIRST EDITION

What Color Are Your

Jellybeans?



Intersections of Generation,
Race, Sex, Culture, and Gender



SNEAK PREVIEW

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Felecia Carter Harris, Ed.D.

FIRST EDITION

WHAT COLOR ARE YOUR JELLYBEANS?

INTERSECTIONS OF GENERATION, RACE, SEX, CULTURE, AND GENDER

By **Felecia Carter Harris, Ed.D.**

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA - CHARLOTTE



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“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plan.”

PROVERBS 16:3.

Writing a book is not an easy task coupled with being a wife, mother, professor and other obligations, it would be impossible without GOD directing my path, and the support and encouragement of family members, friends, colleagues and editors. I owe thanks to many.

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I wrote this book because I wanted to help people understand and learn the value we all have; we just present it in different ways. It is those differences that make us all valuable and unique. So I acknowledge you, the reader, for joining me in this journey.

“Diversity: verb - To expand your outlook and network”

—*CHARREAH K. JACKSON*

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.”
—*PSALM 133:1*

PREFACE

I began writing this book several years ago under the assumption that we live in a post-racial, post-generational America. Our neighborhoods and churches are integrated; baby boomers work cooperatively with Millennials; Hispanic, Arabic, and Asian children sit beside African Americans and Whites in the classroom; interracial couples no longer draw stares; and, according to recent studies, young children are more concerned about whether a person is nice than the color of his skin.

Although my grandmother recalls stories of the bias and hate she endured throughout much of her life, my students at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte often wonder why I teach a class that, among other topics, focuses on racism, colorblindness, and stereotypes. Most African Americans born in the late 1990s have no serious personal references for racial discrimination, although many have experienced unpleasant encounters, such as being questioned by authorities if they seemed out of place in particular areas of town or in certain situations, or being followed around in stores as if they were shoplifters.

Yes, we thought our nation was moving forward from its racially divided past, but we began to notice that things were changing—or perhaps nothing had changed at all—when a string of violent incidents caught our attention. The first one occurred in 2012 in Sanford, Florida, where Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager, was shot and killed by the White neighborhood watch captain, George Zimmerman. In August 2014 the town of Ferguson, Mississippi, erupted in violence after 18-year-old Michael Brown, an unarmed Black man, was shot and killed by a White police officer; and in North Charleston, South Carolina, in April 2015 50-year-old Walter Scott was stopped by a White police officer for having a broken taillight. The scene turned violent when the unarmed Scott fled, and the officer, Michael Slager, shot him in the back.

These are but a few of the events that have occurred over the past few years between Black men and armed White men, but the racial divide doesn't end there. Despite the fact that many of my students have a naïve attitude toward racism, college campuses often mirror mainstream society. The University of Oklahoma Kappa chapter of Sigma Alpha Epsilon was shut down in March 2015 after members

were filmed singing racial slurs on a bus. Eight months later, hundreds of students at the University of California, Los Angeles protested after some students wore blackface to a Kanye West-themed fraternity party. And the country was shocked in November 2015 when President Tim Wolfe and Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin stepped down from their positions at the University of Missouri after they came under fire for the mishandling of racism on campus. As disturbing as these incidents are, they are nothing new. In 2015 the U.S. Department of Education recorded 146 cases of racial harassment on college and university campuses, down from 177 in 2014 but up from 96 in 2009.

The violence and hatred in our society crosses lines other than color. In August 2012 a massacre took place at the Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, where six temple members were gunned down by White supremacist Wade Michael Page; and in February 2015 three Muslim students, Deah Shaddy Barakat, his wife, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, and her sister, Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha, were shot and killed by Craig Stephen Hicks, a White man, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Then there was an event so tragic it became a rallying cry for people of all races, colors and religions: Emanuel. Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old White man, joined a prayer circle at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and proceeded to shoot 10 African American members, killing nine, in an effort to foment racial tension across the country.

No matter how hard we want to believe that we see each other as equals, racial and ethnic biases in our society are pervasive. In our own defense, stereotyping and discriminating often occur without the offender realizing it is happening—mainly because of a lack of cultural awareness or understanding.

Let's take a look at a few more examples:

- Asian American Jeremy Lin electrified NBA fans in 2012 as he led a winning streak as point guard for the New York Knicks, creating a global phenomenon known as “Linsanity.” As the first American of Chinese descent to play in the NBA, Lin's presence on the court highlighted racial profiling in sports. The Harvard University graduate overcame the stereotype that Asians are smart but cannot play basketball (Gregory, 2012).
- Culinary mogul and TV chef Paula Deen was fired from the Food Network for admitting that she privately condoned racist jokes and used the N-word. In a public apology defending her attitude toward race Deen stated, “We're all prejudiced against one thing or another. I think Black people feel the same prejudice as White people feel” (Moskin, June 21, 2013, New York Times p. B1; Dennis, July 8, 2013, p.1).
- The N-word, although trivialized and more mainstreamed than ever, is still a racially offensive term. Its usage has been blurred by the entertainment industry in platforms such as poetry, literature, music, comedy, movies, and sports, so we ask ourselves: Who can say the N-word? When can it be used and in what context? Unfortunately, the N-word is not going away anytime soon, and its generational and historical baggage will not change (Taylor, 2013).

- One of the most publicized debacles of a sports figure during the writing of this project was that of former Los Angeles Clippers' owner Donald Sterling, who made offensive racist remarks that were recorded. The story broke when the recording was shared by TMZ. It then spread like wildfire for the world to hear. Even though every American is entitled to express one's views through First Amendment rights, sometimes it pays to keep one's thoughts to oneself. Sterling was not only the first NBA team owner to lose his team over bigoted remarks; his words also cost him \$2.5 million in fines.

The previous examples demonstrate that racism, prejudice, and a lack of respectfully acknowledging differences still operate in a society that explicitly and publicly condemns them. Why? Various manifestations are cleaned up, streamlined, and mainstreamed—which allows them to survive (Winant, 2007).

During the completion of this book, I had the opportunity to sit down and talk with one of my colleagues at UNC-Charlotte, Dr. Shannon Sullivan, the author of *Good White People*. Although Dr. Sullivan's book is not strictly focused on differences, she does examine the intersection of race, class, privilege, and how cultural and educational capital position individuals—especially White people—at the top. She takes a look at how simply being White impacts how differences are acknowledged, not acknowledged, or included in conversations about race.

What Color Are Your Jellybeans? explores how issues dealing with differences like race, culture, and generation are either examined in isolation, overlooked, or not discussed in public at all. Similarly, *Good White People* puts a name on something that is usually not said out loud. For example, White people are not really racists. She says that White people don't think of themselves as White, and they surely are not surrounded by racists. However, if someone is racist, it is those "other people," not themselves. According to Dr. Sullivan, by identifying themselves as White but also slipping in the word "good," the label acknowledges there is a difference between the "good" ones and the "bad" ones.

To show that you're not a racist has become synonymous with showing your class status: You don't say certain things, and you don't talk about race openly. Also, saying some of these things out loud may make White people—as well as other groups—uncomfortable. There's a set of conversations about race and class in the United States that White people have only begun to have, and maybe don't even understand how to have.

These conversations must start with being accurately educated about differences. We are not born with stereotypes, prejudices, or racism. However, learning these attitudes begins early. Even in our preschool years we are exposed to misinformation or no information at all. If we live in communities without diversity, we may have limited opportunities to learn about it the right way.

Dr. Sullivan further explains that kids' conversations can teach us a lot, although kids very quickly learn and pick up subtle cues from adults. They notice what adults are and aren't talking about, and what they're uncomfortable talking about. What we learn is from them is who we are. In the same ways we

learn those perceptions and actions, we must learn how to do it right. *What Color Are Your Jellybeans?* is the first step (S. Sullivan, interview, January 20, 2016).

Despite the diversity surrounding us, the decisions about who we allow in our personal spaces are also impacted by hot topics surrounding race, which have the potential to set people off. For example, using the term “colorblind” has become synonymous with acknowledging “I do not see color” (race), therefore I value everyone the same. According to Tim Wise (2010), in his book *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat From Racial Equity*, our ability to tackle or even openly discuss matters relevant to race remains a challenge. Having open discussions that are not just “colorblind” but also acknowledge the various ways in which we experience society around us is important in understanding each other and building relationships.

Developing exceptional relationships is about the accuracy of the information you receive and how you react to it. As you read the contents of this book, keep in mind that our differences should be used to build relationships rather than divide us. Making connections with others is what makes all of us human and allows us to remain hopeful in our daily interactions as we encounter people who are as different as the colors of jellybeans.

“You are only an attitude away from success!”

— *JOHN C. MAXWELL*

“Examining differences or racism is not about how you look, it is about how people
assign meaning to how you look.”
— *ROBIN D.G. KELLY, HISTORIAN.*

INTRODUCTION

“IT’S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL”

“You can tell a lot about a fellow’s character by the way he eats jellybeans.”

— *PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN*

You might ask, what do jellybeans have to do with building extraordinary relationships? Unless you’re a Jelly Belly looking for a soul mate, the concept might seem farfetched. On the other hand, I’ve spent the last two decades researching interpersonal relationships and have concluded that there is no simpler way to represent the variety of people on our great planet. Jellybeans come in a variety of shapes, colors, textures, and sizes—just as we do. If used effectively, they can reveal how well we interact with the people around us—and indicate changes necessary to improve those interactions.

I began using jellybeans in presentations on professional development, diversity, and inclusion for business owners, government agencies, corporate executives, and nonprofit and educational organizations. Before the participants arrived, I took a handful of a single color of jellybeans and placed them in individual clear cups labeled with various racial and ethnic groups. For example:

- White American or Caucasian
- African American or Black
- Native American
- Asian
- Pacific Islander
- Latino
- Hispanic
- European
- African
- Australian
- Other

These labels were not inclusive of every individual global group because of the sheer number of cups, but those represented provided participants with numerous selections and the opportunity

to add additional identifiers if necessary. Each participant received an empty clear cup and was asked to select a jellybean from one of the labeled cups that best represented their answers to a series of questions. These related to a variety of personal, professional, and leisure activities. For example: What was the race or ethnic background of the last person(s) you had lunch with? Participants placed a jellybean representative of the various races or ethnicities of the people with whom they had eaten lunch in their cups.

Another question concerned neighbors: Do you know the cultural backgrounds of the people who live in close proximity to your home? The participants continued to put relevant jellybeans in their cups. I also asked about the cultural background of the author(s) of the most recent book(s) the participants had read. Another question was: How many different cultural groups were represented at the last personal or professional gathering you attended?

I used the same process to examine generational differences. Cups were labeled “Traditionalist,” “Baby Boomer,” “Generation Xer,” “Millennial,” and “Generation Zer,” and jellybeans of a particular color were placed in the cups in answer to my questions. For example:

- To what generational group(s) did the individual(s) you had lunch with last week belong?
- How many different generational groups were represented at the last personal or professional gathering you attended? What were they?
- What is the generation(s) of the characters in your favorite television programs?

After all the questions were completed, I asked participants to observe the colors of the jellybeans they had collected. Most were surprised and somewhat ashamed by the lack of variety. Many realized for the first time how little contact they had on a daily basis with people who were different from them racially, culturally, and generationally.

Social psychologist Dr. Jennifer Richeson, a MacArthur Genius Award recipient, also uses jellybeans to bring home her discussions on stereotypes and prejudice. “I really like jellybeans—especially green jellybeans,” she says. “I could eat myself sick—and I do,” she tells the students in her course. If she were to pick only one jellybean from a pack, it would probably be green, but if she were to scoop up a handful, she wouldn’t put the other colors back “because it’s rude and because it just doesn’t seem right. It’s called a variety pack for a reason.”

Taking jellybeans one at a time, you can easily fail to realize that you favor a single color. See all your green selections at once, though, and it’s obvious. The anecdote relates to what she tells her students: “If you want to understand stereotypes and prejudice, and how people often deal with difference—don’t just look at conscious thoughts and spoken words, but at what people feel and do without realizing it.”

The jellybean exercise reveals how much emphasis we place on visual differences. I have learned over the years that we spend a lot of time thinking about how we can develop relationships in the most

comfortable of ways, not understanding how this limits our options. Instead, we need to focus on how we can better educate ourselves to develop diverse relationships.

When you give someone an opportunity to interact with you without either of you wearing blinders, you learn about them—and from them—and despite your differences, you may be surprised at how well you get along. Making room to enjoy new relationships can help you recognize that everyone has innate value and should be shown respect.

THE MESSAGE

So let's say the jellybeans in your cup are just as uniform as those of the participants in the exercise. What does this mean for you? It means that you may have limited those you associate with to a very small group, and in the process are preventing yourself from experiencing the gifts that people from other groups or cultures have to offer. More important, you are not making your gifts and talents available to others. I wrote this book because I believe that everyone must seize the opportunity to value the differences in others. By doing so, we can take advantage of the diversity in cultures, skills, education, talents, innovation, and religion that surround us.

As an educator, trainer, and consultant, I have experienced the struggles, frustration, and anguish that individuals and organizations face when diversity and differences surface as challenges. Issues surrounding this topic are often discussed or debated in personal circles, but they continue to remain a subject most people are uncomfortable examining in public.

THE DESIGN

This interactive guide is designed to help individuals and organizations attain more fulfilling, beneficial, and diverse relationships. Why is this important?

An organization will never reach its full potential if only a certain type of employee is hired. To be innovative, a company needs workers with a variety of perspectives on challenges and solutions. This requires a diverse workforce in regard to age, race, gender, and culture.

If you never step outside of your cultural comfort zone, you miss out on the ability to enjoy other people's creativity, perceptions, innovation, and conversations. Such conversations will assist you in creating perceptions that are based on facts rather than myths, which are difficult to overcome and lead to incorrect assumptions. According to Antonio Damasio, professor of neuroscience at the University of Southern California and an adjunct professor at the Salk Institute, there are biological reasons we recognize differences, but many of our responses are created by our own perceptions of a situation (Johnson, 2011).

Dr. Jill Taylor's groundbreaking book, *My Stroke of Insight*, which explores the process of rebuilding her brain to connect with the world after having a stroke, further explains that we recognize differences through our limbic system. This system mediates how we process information through our senses and controls how we perceive incoming information. The limbic system allows us to scan incoming information in an immediate moment and determine if it is OK to proceed. For any two people to communicate with one another they must share a certain amount of common reality (Taylor, 2006). Developing comfort and a sense of familiarity allows the brain to feel we can safely connect with people who are different and can expose us to new friendships, foods, recreational activities, religions, and social interactions.

This book is based on the following core questions:

1. Why and how do we choose to develop the relationships we do?
2. What gets in the way of exploring those relationships outside our natural/normal circle of people or comfort zone?
3. What experiences can happen when you choose to explore and learn about new people? No matter in which part of the globe you live, understanding how we educate ourselves about those who are different can be life changing. In order to examine this process we will discuss issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, generations, and communication. It truly is a small world after all.

WHAT'S INSIDE?

- Chapter 1, *Skin Deep*, introduces the jellybean exercise as we explore your interactions on a basic level. We'll look at the types of people you choose to interact with on a consistent basis.
- Chapter 2, *I See Colored People*, focuses on the consequences of not actively seeking relationships with people who are different.
- Chapter 3, *We're All a Little Weird*, explores whether anyone is really "normal."
- Chapter 4, *Dare to Be Different*, discusses the impact of stereotypes and myths, and what we can learn once we have factual information.
- Chapter 5, *Judge Not*, acknowledges that our natural instinct is to judge but explains how judging keeps us from learning from each other.
- Chapter 6, *Can't We All Just Get Along?*, reveals we must move past personal barriers if we want to change the way we think and interact with people who are different from us.
- Chapter 7, *Lost in Translation*, analyzes the complexities of communication and cultural dimensions, and discusses how our fears get in the way.
- Chapter 8, *Always Connected; Never in Touch*, explores the impact of digital technology.

- Chapter 9, *When You Know Better, You Do Better*, shows how educating yourself is the best way to understand and value differences.
- Chapter 10, *Just Do It!*, examines the personal fulfillment you can expect to attain by opening your mind and expanding your network of friends and acquaintances, one person at a time.
- Chapter 11, *Commit to Long-Term Change!*, wraps it all up with 50 steps to take action right now.

Are you ready to embark on this journey in your personal development? Of course you are. Pack away your inhibitions, stereotypes, misconceptions, and fears, and get ready for transformation.

FIVE GENERATIONS

CAN YOU RELATE?

In this day and age, it is imperative that you can relate not only to people of other races and cultures but also to those with varied ideas and attitudes. The five major generations within our current population include:

- **Traditionalists (born 1922–1943):** These hard workers are recognized for their conformity and ability to receive delayed rewards. They are conservative dressers, save their money, and pay cash for purchases. Many grew up during the Great Depression. During their lifetime, Social Security was established, World War II was fought, the atomic bomb was dropped, and Mickey Mouse was created. Traditionalists grew up in the era of radio, Tarzan, and the introduction of Wheaties. Traditionalists get their information from *Reader's Digest*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Time*.
- **Baby Boomers (born 1943–1964):** These optimists seek personal growth and gratification. They are workaholics and are involved in their communities. During their lifetime, President John F. Kennedy was elected, the Peace Corps was established, Martin Luther King, Jr. marched on Washington, the National Organization for Women was created, the first nuclear power plant was built, the Vietnam War was fought, Woodstock happened, and cellular phones were introduced. In addition, President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated. Baby Boomers grew up watching the *Ed Sullivan Show* and eating TV dinners, and made the peace sign, hula hoops, and designer glasses popular. *People* magazine and *Business Week* are favorite reads.
- **Generation Xers (born 1960–1980):** This generation is one of diversity and global thinking. Gen Xers are adaptable, self-reliant, independent, and technoliterate. They experienced the Women's Liberation Movement, Watergate, Three Mile Island, the Challenger Disaster, Ronald Reagan's presidency, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the Rodney King beating. Xers grew up with the

The Brady Bunch, platform shoes, Cabbage Patch dolls, nose rings, tattoos, and chat rooms. *Dynasty* and *The Simpsons* were popular television shows.

- **Millennials/Nexters (born 1980–2000):** This child-focused generation is experiencing busy, over-planned lives and stress, although it is optimistic, confident, and diverse. Millennials have been affected by the Oklahoma City Bombing, the Columbine High School massacre, 9/11, and the advance of technology. Popular during this generation's childhood were Barney, Beanie Babies, American Girl dolls, Oprah, the Spice Girls, Michael Jordan, Princess Diana, Bill Gates, Tiger Woods, Mia Hamm, and *Goosebumps*.
- **Generation Zers (born 1994–2004):** This generation, which lives in an almost virtual world, is in a stage of evolution. Known as the “silent generation” because its members are so connected digitally, Zers are poor communicators and lack interpersonal skills. They are accustomed to instant action, satisfaction, and immediate results. Zers' primary means of communication is through Google, Facebook, and MySpace. They do not meet their friends face-to-face and are less likely than other generations to travel or step out of their homes for anything. Zers are individualistic, believe men and women are equal, live very structured lives, and speak their minds and express opinions through the digital community.

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