

S.C.A.A.A.A.R.R.S (Cultural Identity Framework) & STANDPOINT SOCIAL CONTRACT

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During my senior year in college (Fall 1998), I created a concept, **S.C.A.A.A.A.R.R.S.**, to organize my thoughts on what I wanted to study in graduate school. Since then, I have developed this acronym into a tool to assess the aspects of cultural identity that addresses, at once, individual and social, biological and environmental characteristics. This framework presents an orderly way of confronting the historic and increasingly contentious topic of cultural identity that, by academic necessity, must surpass the convenient classifications of “race, class, and gender.” By creating this system (basically a heuristic), I seek to demonstrate the complexity of identity.

S.C.A.A.A.A.R.R.S. represents the intricate marking or naming process of one’s identity within any given culture; it is a way of considering and re-considering the way we label ourselves and the way in which we are labeled (or libeled) by others. S.C.A.A.A.A.R.R.S. is a way of digging deeper in our quest for diversity and for casting a wider dragnet when attempting to identify and extinguish various means and ways of oppression.

By considering ourselves in terms of the following characteristics, we can discuss the many ways in which various aspects of our identities interact. We can also pinpoint the many ways in which you are similar to and different from others. There will always be additional categories to consider; this will remain a framework in progress.

Sex - gender / sexuality

Class - economic/ educational /occupational /citizenship status

Age - era / generation

Ability - physical / mental / learning style /

Affiliation - political / institutional / familial / community / relationship to land

Artifacts - symbols / values / social norms / artistic expression / appearance [including hair, skin color, clothing style]

Race - ethnicity / nationality / region / language / ancestry

Religion - spirituality / philosophy / scientific ideologies

Size - body image / health status

This framework is also useful with my idea of a **STANDPOINT SOCIAL CONTRACT** (developed in 2006). This contract is recognition of a shared set of experiences that any group can identify with. For example, African American women are a diverse group with differences in ethnicity, nationality, appearance, religion, sexuality, and such. However, the intersection of race and gender, in the social context of America, has given Black women a particular relationship with social, political, and economic institutions. Jean-Jacque Rousseau (*Social Contract*, 1762), Carole Pateman (*Sexual Contract*, 1988), and Charles Mills (*Racial Contract*, 1991) have all used the idea of a social contract to identify an individual's relationship to society and to institutions. I posit that a *standpoint social contract* exists for Black women as for any group, through which we negotiate our respective identities, experiences, and quest for realization of our potential.

Together, **S.C.A.A.A.A.R.R.S. and STANDPOINT SOCIAL CONTRACT** offer students ways to discuss identity and experience by recognizing our real human differences while, at the same time, honoring our (often ignored) human commonalities.