

## **Race and Equality**

*Cultural values and expectations*

### **Tessy Mbofung and Joan Simons:**

JOAN SIMONS: Hello, I'm Joan Simons. I'm associate Dean for Teaching Excellence in the faculty of Well Being, Education, and Language Studies. And I'm also the academic lead for equality, diversity, and inclusion at EOU. And today I'm talking to my colleague Tessy Mbofung who is working in people services.

TESSY MBOFUNG: Thank you very much Joan. I'm Tessy Mbofung and I am the people business partner for wealth and PVC students.

JOAN SIMONS: Tessy thanks for agreeing to talk to me today about issues around race and ethnicity and cultural issues. One of the things we talked about when we were preparing was the notion of cultural background and the challenges that can bring. Could you talk to me a little bit about that?

TESSY MBOFUNG: So, I come from Cameroon in West Africa, which is a small country in Africa, which is French and English predominantly French-- 80% French and 20% English.

And it's got a very strong African culture in the sense that we have a lot of-- we have certain values that we hold very strongly on. Values like a woman has a place. Even though it's changing slightly nowadays, it's changing gradually but the woman has a place in our culture.

It's just our expectation that the children should grow up and look after their parents, look after their family. So, you've got that responsibility. People are looking up to you to become successful and obviously look after the rest of your family. And those are some of the values-- how I grew up and the values that we have in Cameroon.

JOAN SIMONS: And Tessy, those values did they create challenges for you when you came to live in the UK?

TESSY MBOFUNG: Yeah, it created challenges because I had that invisible burden that unless I speak to you, unless I totally explain to you wouldn't necessarily understand. So, I think people in the Western world I would imagine-- I would like to think don't necessarily have that burden on them. Not everybody. I think if some people have the burden is just a few. But for us it's an expectation from your family, for example, to look after them. You are under some sort of pressure. And don't get me wrong, you have a few families back in Cameroon who perhaps a well-to-do and don't put so much pressure or don't put that undue pressure on their children. However, because it's a cultural thing the children still wants to do something, they still want to make sure that they play their role.

In terms of me being a woman I have to always understand that my role as a woman in the society is, I need to show values of respect, I need to be a role model and display values that other women, other children like myself would follow through. To be respectful to, for example, my husband. I'm married. I need to respect. But because we both live in the Western world; we give each other due respect. But it's just something that if I'm going by my cultural values I need to be-- I'll have to be submissive. So those are some of the challenges that when you get to the Western world where everybody is equal, where people are equal, you need to try to fit in, try to live up to fit in the society.

But one thing that you struggle with and one to let go if they are true values, if it's your culture I believe are your values. When I came to the UK, I've always made sure that I fit in but still holding onto my values because I feel that they are the right values for me personally. So, it's trying to integrate into the society and behave normally with people when you have complete different set of values everybody else around you.