

## What is ethnicity?

Ethnicity is a form of culture. You will recall that culture involves groups sharing language, ideas, technology, habits, oral traditions, and spiritual beliefs. The shared practices (and the ideas and artifacts that result from sharing) become the culture. When a cultural group is mostly made up of people with *common ancestry that occupy (or once occupied) a common territory*, then we say that this group also has ethnicity. Ethnic practices lean toward history and community homelands. Group members benefit from ethnicity because it gives them a sense of belonging, collective goals, and an appreciation of the past.

However, sometimes members of an ethnic group face adversity because of their ethnicity. Outsiders might resent people with practices or backgrounds different from their own. They might believe that all people should be the same—like them. Outsiders might also negatively stereotype an ethnic group based on the questionable actions of a few. When members of ethnic groups experience these hardships they might form stronger bonds with their group or, in some cases, try to deny their ethnic backgrounds.

In the story, “Barbara Smith is German?” by cultural anthropologist Dr. Jill Florence Lackey, you’ll find an example of a family that denied its ethnic background in the past because of stereotypes associated