

often viewed by people as inevitable. This social construction results in an unequal distribution of resources and power, with people who have more money and power considered to be superior to those who have less (Reay, 2007).

Social differences that today seem "normal" may change over time because they are socially constructed. For example, 100 years ago it was not socially acceptable for women to wear pants or to make investments in their own name. Because those were male-only privileges, yet today both are the norm. Until recent years, the perception was that a gay man was effeminate, but "manly" men have been publicly identified as gay (the actor Rock Hudson is an early example; football player Michael Sam is a more recent example). The supposed inferiority of African Americans was socially constructed by whites, and this social construction was used as a justification for slavery and later for legally maintaining racial segregation. As a result of the enormous power of whites' social construction of African Americans as inferior, it took decades for activists to succeed in winning passage of civil rights legislation. Commonly held beliefs about social groups are socially constructed and tend to reflect the dominant way of thinking, but they may be inaccurate and are subject to change.

Diversity in the United States

The constellation of communities and membership groups in the United States is tremendous. Almost 325 million people reside in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). That number is expected to grow to roughly 441 million by 2065 (Cohn, 2016). Table 5.1 illustrates some of the racial and gender diversity and its projected growth.

The United States is a nation of various racial and ethnic groups. **Race** is considered an umbrella term that generally includes multiple **ethnic groups** that share common cultural patterns or national origins. People who are descendants of Spanish-speaking ancestors are often racially grouped as Latino. There are Latino groups that strongly identify as Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, or one of dozens of other ethnic groups, each with distinct and unique cultural characteristics. Thus, what is perceived as one group is often a collection of multiple ethnic groups with different cultural patterns and backgrounds.

Table 5.1 Percentage Actual and Projected US Population by Race

Race*	1965	2015	Projected 2065
White	84%	63%	46%
Black	11%	12%	13%
Hispanic	3.5%	15%	24%
Asian American	0.6%	6%	24%

*Some people identify as more than one race.

Source: Cohn & Cavanaugh (2016).

The composition of the United States is changing and will continue to change, resulting in a much more ethnically and racially diverse nation. As of 50 years ago, the US population was roughly 90 percent white. However, unlike other ethnic or racial groups, because of aging, intermarriage, a shrinking proportion of the childbearing age population, immigration, and low fertility rates, the white population is declining. In fact, 2013 was the first year that the majority of babies born in the United States were babies of color (Dinner, 2017). The white population in the United States is expected to decrease by roughly 6 percent from 2010 to 2050. In that same time period, the Latino population should increase by 102 percent. People who identify as two or more races should grow by 200 percent (Ingraham, 2015). The African American population is projected to increase by about 20 million by 2060, and the Asian American population is expected to more than double during that time period (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). Projections are that the white population will no longer be in the majority by about 2042 (Ingraham, 2015).

Age is another characteristic that will shift over the next 50 years. As Table 5.2 shows, the age of the population is increasing. It is estimated that between 2016 and 2060, the number of people in the United States ages 65 and older will more than double. Today's 46 million Americans over age 65 will become more than 98 million, their percentage of the population growing from 15 to almost 24 percent. People above the age of 85 are projected to almost triple, growing from 6 million to almost 20 million. If life expectancy continues to rise, the number of Americans above the age of 100 is expected to grow from about 53,000 in 2010 to more than 600,000 by 2060 (Mathew, Jacobson, & Pollard, 2015). The aging of the population will place new demands on the social welfare system.

LO2 Until relatively recently, sexual orientation was not regarded as a significant part of the diversity of the nation. However, the gay rights movement and subsequent public discussion about sexual orientation have brought to light the existence of a significant portion of the population who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). An accurate count of the

Table 5.2 Number and Percentage of the Population by Age in the United States Projected for 2015 and 2060

	2015	2060
Below 18 years	74,516 (23.19)	89,286 (21.79)
18-24 years	30,983 (9.64)	30,239 (8.30)
25-44 years	84,327 (26.24)	106,305 (25.49)
45-64 years	83,839 (26.09)	97,408 (22.89)
65 years and older	47,695 (14.84)	92,003 (21.66)
85 years and older	6,306 (1.90)	14,187 (4.58)
100 years and older	79 (0.02)	693 (0.19)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2012b).