

EXPLORING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMM 325 DUBRAY VERSION, GROTHE



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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Front Matter

Exploring Intercultural Communication
COMM 325 DuBray version, Grothe

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This text was compiled on 06/15/2026

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: What is Intercultural Communication

1.1: Broadening our Horizons

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1.4: Intercultural Communication as an Academic Discipline

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1.1: Broadening our Horizons

In efforts to explain the world's population to young children, David J. Smith asks children to imagine the world as a small village so they can understand the vast population figures in a more comprehensible way. In 2012, the world's population was 7,050,000,000 (Smith 7). Instead of talking about numbers of this magnitude, he represents the world as 100 people, where one imaginary person represents 70,500,000 people from the real world. Using Smith's model, we can more easily examine what nationalities make up the world's population, what languages they speak, how old they are, and how these statistics involve wealth and education.

Here are some interesting facts from Smith's global village (8). Of the 100 people living in the village:

- 60 are from Asia
- 15 are from Africa
- 11 are from Europe
- 8 are from South and Central America (including Mexico) and the Caribbean
- 5 are from the United States and Canada
- 1 is from Oceania

So, how do these 100 people talk with one another? While there are nearly 6,000 languages spoken in this village, more than 50% of the villagers speak one of these eight (10):

- 27 speak a Chinese dialect (16 speak Mandarin)
- 9 speak Hindi
- 9 speak English
- 7 speak Spanish
- 4 speak Bengali
- 4 speak Arabic
- 3 speak Portuguese
- 3 speak Russian

Although there are 36 school-aged villagers (5-24 years), only 30 of them go to school, and there is only one teacher. Of the people old enough to read, 14 cannot read at all. Male villagers are taught to read more than females (Smith 21). While 68 villagers breathe clean air, the remaining 32 villagers breathe unhealthy air due to pollution (Smith 18). If each villager earned a similar annual income, each one would have \$10,300 per year. Instead, the richest 10 people in the village earn more than \$87,500 a year, the poorest 10 villagers earn less than \$2 a day, while the remaining 80 earn somewhere in between. As the average annual cost of food and shelter in the village is more than \$5,000, many people go without these basic necessities (Smith 22).

Moreover, it probably does not surprise you that the people with less money are also likely not to have electricity and education. Besides simple cultural differences such as what language one speaks or the foods they prefer; cultural identity impacts individuals' accessibility to certain resources such as shelter, electricity, running water, health care, education, and political and legal systems.

If we return to the United States from our look at the global village we see that according to Moore (62-63, 149-50):

- About 20 percent of young black men ages 16-24 are neither in school nor working. Compare this to 9 percent of young white men.
- Black women are four times more likely than white women to die in childbirth.
- Black levels of unemployment have been roughly twice those of white since 1954.
- Women hold only 13 seats in Congress.
- 496 of the top 500 companies are run by men.
- Women's earnings average 76 cents for every \$1 earned by men—resulting in a lifetime loss of over \$650,133.
- To make the same annual salary as her male counterpart, a woman would have to work the entire year PLUS an additional four months.
- The United States is one of the few countries in the world that puts to death both children and those with intellectual disabilities. The other five countries in the world that execute their children are Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.

Think about culture and communication as a reciprocal process: culture affects communication and communication affects culture. Both work together to shape how we identify as belonging to one culture or another, how we feel about belonging to a particular cultural group, how we communicate with other cultural groups, and how that group is regarded in the larger social system. In other

words, what is the value and level of power afforded to various cultural groups? As you will see, this is often a reflection of the language used to refer to a particular group of people, or the relative value placed on their communication practices.

What is Intercultural Communication?

Intercultural communication refers to the process of interacting with people who are different from oneself in fundamental ways related to appearance, language, **worldviews**, or a number of other categories. For many people this phenomenon is part of their everyday lives, for example, in multilingual, multicultural communities or in culturally diverse families. The majority of human societies deal with multiple cultures and multiple languages. The USA has traditionally been one of the few countries in which it is possible to be successful even if one speaks only one language, English (Nieto, 2010). The USA, however, is shifting demographically in ways that are likely to change dramatically attitudes towards language and culture. By the year 2042, demographers tell us, non-Hispanic whites will be in the minority (Roberts, 2008).

The USA is by no means unique in undergoing this process. The means of communication and transportation available today result in more mixing of cultures than ever before. This coincides with trends in commerce and trade in recent decades which have facilitated growing internationalization in all areas of business and economic activity. This process of **globalization** is facilitated by social media activities of people around the world. Communicating with others who are physically remote is possible through social networks such as *Facebook* or through online conversations via *Skype* or chat programs such as *WhatsApp*. At the same time, political and economic forces are causing large numbers of people to become asylum-seekers or economic refugees, creating more diverse cities and countries throughout the world. This process can also create conflict, sometimes due to concerns of foreigners taking jobs away or changing the character of a region, and sometimes due to fear arising from willful ignorance and **xenophobia** – the fear of foreigners.

In fact, globalization is by no means, as often portrayed a benign process, benefiting humanity universally. While many in developed countries enjoy international travel, increasing prosperity, and safe communities, those in other parts of the world continue to experience severe deprivations (food, water, housing), mass unemployment, and violent communities. These conditions, along with unequal access to education and healthcare, are often accompanied by corruption and political powerlessness. This has led to mass migrations and social instability. Within developed countries, there are sharp divisions based on geography, social class, and income. These disparities, along with changes in the global economy, have propelled populist and nationalistic leaders in many parts of the world to power.

The Need for Intercultural Communication Today

Given the demographical and globalizing trends of recent decades, in today's world one is likely to have more encounters (online or in person) with people from different cultures. Technological advances have played a major role in bringing people together. The Internet has reached the remotest corners of the world, as has satellite and online entertainment. People are able to see and appreciate differences in culture, way of life, and ways of interpreting the world at the click of a button. To add to this is the increasing ease of travel to different parts of the world for both work and pleasure (for the privileged). This has possibly resulted in a significant decrease in communication apprehension and a visible increase in the need and desire to be interculturally sensitive and competent. From that perspective, there is certainly a personal incentive for being interculturally sensitive. The openness and flexibility needed for successful cross-cultural exchanges offer benefits in personal and professional interactions of all kinds. Becoming knowledgeable about other cultures is also invaluable in gaining deeper insight into one's own culture. An experience living abroad or in close contact with those from another culture can lead to dramatically changed perspectives on the values and behavior patterns of one's native country.



Figure 1.1.1: UK International Development Secretary, Justine Greening, talking with Syrian children in the Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan

There is in addition a practical, utilitarian benefit, as companies are increasingly looking for employees who are flexible, tolerant, and able to work with others different from themselves. In virtually every business today, what happens in other countries can have a serious impact on its operations and viability. Communities and societies benefit as well, as understanding and tolerance reduce animosity and conflict. This is of increasing importance today, as we see a rise in nationalistic movements in many countries, often accompanied by growing calls for political isolation, economic nationalism, and stricter immigration controls. In part, this is a response to the fact that the forces of globalization have resulted in disadvantages for particular local populations in terms of job opportunities and economic well-being. These tendencies have unfortunate byproducts, namely the rise of prejudicial attitudes towards members of minority groups and a closing-off of minds and feelings towards those who act or look different.

It is of particular importance for future leaders to gain insight and empathy into other cultures. National or regional officeholders, heads of political parties, and others in the public eye (entertainers, writers, activists) function as role models. Their views, opinions, and behaviors can have a substantial public influence. Figures like Pope Francis, Malala Yousafzai, or Greta Thunberg have exerted positive influence, respectively, on views of minority rights, educational opportunities for girls, and the need for immediate action on climate change. Unfortunately, we have seen in recent years public figures advocating for ideas and policies which divide and inflame communities, such as white supremacy or rejection of equal rights for LGBTQ individuals. Messages of this kind — of hatred and bigotry— can fall on receptive ears, particularly if an individual or a community has not often encountered individuals different in ethnic background, religious belief, or language:

Many societies are deeply divided: the anger of rural and deindustrialized communities cut adrift by neoliberal globalization is readily harnessed against the more concrete scapegoat of minorities, particularly if people have little experience with diversity. Against this context, opportunities for everyday mundane connections that allow people to engage beyond the stereotypes can become a crucial means to overcoming division and exclusion (Piller, 2017, p. 203).

Studies have shown that the geographical regions with the lowest number of immigrants or members of a minority tend to have the highest level of negative views of those groups. This is a clear indication that these views are not based on experience or evidence but on uninformed opinions based on slanted media or anecdotal information from friends or family. Piller (2017) provides a hopeful example, namely Sudanese immigrants in a virtually all-white Australian community becoming socially accepted by individuals and community leaders who reach out beyond stereotypes and their in-group bubbles.

Intercultural understanding is essential as well in gaining an informed and balanced appreciation of media, whether that be television reports focusing on other countries or blog posts from abroad. Today there is a vast amount of information freely available, through media channels and the Internet. Understanding the perspective from which others view the world can be very helpful in becoming informed consumers of news stories and social media. Given the importance of this topic, it will form a thread through many of the discussions in this textbook.

One of the reasons identities are complex today is the pervasive influence of modern media, which crosses cultural and linguistic boundaries. Participation in social media can be such a central aspect of one's life as to have a determining effect on worldview, values, and behaviors. Individuals can become members of online communities which acquire over time more importance than national characteristics, religious affiliations, or even families. Such relationships may be virtual, but they are just as real – and can be just as strong – as in-person relationships.

Ethics and intercultural communication

When we reference the widespread use of social media, we need to keep in mind the very real nature of the **digital divide** between those (predominately in developed countries) with easy access to *Facebook* and other online services and those (predominately in developing countries) who have no Internet connectivity, and possibly even no access to electricity. In fact, for many of our co-denizens of the 21st-century, daily routines do not involve reading *tweets*, posting *Facebook* updates, or checking *Instagram*, but rather seeking to fill basic human needs — food, water, shelter. About 50% of the world's population lives below the internationally recognized poverty line, living on less than \$2.50 a day. The forces of globalization, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, have indeed brought the world closer together in terms of communication and commerce, but large numbers of people have been left out. That includes not only individuals from countries in Africa, Latin America or Southeast Asia, but also factory workers and others holding blue-collar jobs who have lost their livelihoods to outsourcing or to companies moving factories to lower wage economies. There has been in recent years a growing recognition of the inequality in the distribution of wealth, leading

to phenomena such as the “Occupy” movement of 2011-2012, protesting against the elite 1% of the population, or the election of Donald Trump in the United States in 2016, who was elected in large part due to votes from those who feel left out of the 21st-century US economy.

✓ Getting Plugged In

The Digital Divide

Many people who are now college age struggle to imagine a time without cell phones and the Internet. As “digital natives” it is probably also surprising to realize the number of people who do not have access to certain technologies. The *digital divide* was a term that initially referred to gaps in access to computers. The term expanded to include access to the Internet since it exploded onto the technology scene and is now connected to virtually all computing (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2010). Approximately two billion people around the world now access the Internet regularly, and those who don’t face several disadvantages (Smith, 2011). Discussions of the digital divide are now turning more specifically to high-speed Internet access, and the discussion is moving beyond the physical access divide to include the skills divide, the economic opportunity divide, and the democratic divide. This divide doesn’t just exist in developing countries; it has become an increasing concern in the United States. This is relevant to cultural identities because there are already inequalities in terms of access to technology based on age, race, and class (Sylvester & McGlynn, 2010). Scholars argue that these continued gaps will only serve to exacerbate existing cultural and social inequalities. From an international perspective, the United States is falling behind other countries in terms of access to high-speed Internet. South Korea, Japan, Sweden, and Germany now all have faster average connection speeds than the United States (Smith, 2011). And Finland in 2010 became the first country in the world to declare that all its citizens have a legal right to broadband Internet access (ben-Aaron, 2010). People in rural areas in the United States are especially disconnected from broadband service, with about 11 million rural Americans unable to get the service at home. As so much of our daily lives go online, it puts those who aren’t connected at a disadvantage. From paying bills online, to interacting with government services, to applying for jobs, to taking online college classes, to researching and participating in political and social causes, the Internet connects to education, money, and politics.

1. What do you think of Finland’s inclusion of broadband access as a legal right? Is this something that should be done in other countries? Why or why not?
2. How does the digital divide affect the notion of the global village?
3. How might limited access to technology negatively affect various nondominant groups?

To be truly interculturally competent means not only being responsible and empathetic in our personal encounters, but extending that process more broadly. We need engaged global citizens, knowledgeable and caring about people and events outside our own backyards. Part of that process is being cognizant of the privileged position many of us enjoy. Important in that process is a willingness to break out of our regular routines of communication and information retrieval, occasionally stepping outside our social media bubble to encounter different voices and points of view. In that way, we are likely to be better informed about the complexities and fragmentations of global communities. This can lead to an enhanced recognition of the need for **social justice**, i.e. the struggle to confront discrimination and challenge inequities. We are both consumers and producers of culture and we all have a role in shaping the nature of the world in which we live. From that perspective, it is important not to think of culture as a fixed entity with a controlling influence on our lives. Cultures, as are all human affairs, are not immutable, but rather subject to change through a variety of forces.



Figure 1.1.2: Occupy general strike in 2011, Oakland, California

There is a natural human tendency to want to be among those similar to ourselves, known as **homophily**. It takes some effort to overcome this normal human instinct. Part of that phenomenon makes us leery of those who look different, belong to different ethnic groups, or profess other worldviews. Those who seem different become the "**other**", rejected for being dissimilar and therefore considered inferior (see Scollon, Scollon & Jones, 2011). This rejection of others who have different ethnic backgrounds or practice other religions has in human history led to multiple instances of civil strife and war, including in recent times conflicts in many parts of the world from Northern Ireland to South Sudan. In extreme cases, the result can be ethnic cleansing and genocide, as we have experienced in the 20th century in Armenia, Germany, and Rwanda. That process of **othering** is intensified if we feel threatened in our livelihood or security by new arrivals. This has been one of the unfortunate byproducts of the large wave of refugees beginning in 2015, principally to Europe, from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and north Africa.



Figure 1.1.3: Refugees from Syria on their way to Europe

As the number of immigrants has increased in countries like Great Britain, France, Germany, some feel that not only are jobs and security at risk, but also the very existence of their cultures. This has led to the rise of a number of new movements and political parties in Europe which promote xenophobia and economic nationalism. The vote in Great Britain in 2016 to leave the European Union was not just an assertion of national independence, but also a rejection of the influx of foreigners. We have witnessed similar shifts towards greater nationalism in a variety of countries including Turkey, Russia, India, and the United States. Unfortunately, the patriotism evident in these developments often translates into a kind of free license to discriminate against minorities, whether that be Muslims in India or Latinx in the US. Political leaders play a crucial role here in setting the tone, thereby influencing followers in terms not only of attitudes but also of behavior. This is one of the strongest reasons we need today worldwide more intercultural understanding, so that future leaders are acculturated to accept diversity and practice tolerance.

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1.2: Culture- Central to our Lives

Culture: Central to our lives

Embedded in the term intercultural communication is the word **culture**. Culture is a slippery concept. In English, it has a number of different uses. Already in the 1950's, one article cited over 150 definitions of culture (Kluckhohn & Kroeber, 1952), while a more recent study analyzed over 300 definitions (Baldwin et al., 2006). One of those concepts is culture with a capital C, or high culture, namely literature and the arts. When we say in English that someone is cultured, this is the kind of culture we mean, someone with a good education, who perhaps goes on a regular basis to the theater or concerts, and reads books. We won't be talking much here about that kind of culture. Rather what's important for intercultural communication is the concept of culture related to the everyday pattern of life. Neuliep defines culture as **"an accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors, shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol systems"** (2012, p. 19). We will use this as our initial working definition, refining it subsequently to embrace other concepts beyond that of national cultures, implied in this view. In this traditional description of culture, several ideas emerge as being of importance:

- *An accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors...*

Individual cultural identities develop over time, with handed-down concepts and actions being reinforced through repetition in a gradual socialization process. Culture references a number of aspects of normal human existence, from weighty issues such as our worldview and ethical-moral standards to more mundane matters such as how we greet each other or the kinds of food we like to eat.

- *...shared by an identifiable group of people...*

These cultural norms represent fundamental, default values for individuals identified with that cultural group. That group may be small or large, fixed in a single location or dispersed among different **diaspora** communities (geographically separated). However, no matter where they may be, they share particular characteristics that make them a distinct group.

- *...with a common history...*

How important historical memory is to members of a culture may vary. In some cases, as with Native Americans, or for other groups having been displaced or suffered acute social injustice, their history is likely to be well known and to play a significant role in determining cultural values as well as in shaping interactions with other groups. According to Rogers and Steinfatt (1999), "collective cultural consciousness," the embedded memories of historical events important to a particular cultural group, can act as a kind of "message filter", affecting significantly communication dynamics (p. 3).

- *...and (common) verbal and nonverbal symbol systems.*

Language plays an oversized role in social cohesion and is the most important vehicle for transmission of cultural values. Nonverbal communication patterns are also a prominent constituent part of a group's identity and an easily identifiable marker for group membership. Both systems are based on symbols. Some see the use of symbols as the essence of a culture. For anthropologist Clifford Geertz, culture is a complex set of symbols used to create order and sense in our lives. According to Geertz, cultures "denote an historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols" (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). While symbols may sometimes seem arbitrary (i.e., no inherent connection to their meaning), they nevertheless can be powerful, embodying deeply-held values and beliefs.



Figure 1.2.1: A protest in Madrid, Spain against the Catalan independence movement. The Catalonia region of Spain, with its own language and culture has long sought to become an independent nation. (CC BY; Tom Grothe)

Culture is not something we are born with, but rather it is learned, starting with our families, then moving on to our school experiences, and friends, and media. We often are not aware of the cultural values we embrace, even though many of those values and behaviors determine important aspects of our lives. They may only come to the surface when we encounter people who come from different cultures. In that sense, culture is often described as hidden (Hall, 1966). Culture is not fixed and immutable; culture does not exist in a vacuum, but is influenced by historical, social, political, and economic conditions. Cultural values are constructed from social dynamics in the countries or groups represented. Those values are not necessarily universally embraced.

In everyday life, cultures are often associated with nation-states, as assumed in Neuliep's definition. This can be traced back to the work of early 19th-century German scholar Wilhelm von Humboldt, who was one of the first to equate nations with cultures (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). We often hear about French culture or Chinese culture. But within political boundaries, cultures are rarely monolithic. There tend to be many regional differences, as well as differences based on ethnicity, age, profession, social class, and other categories. National cultures change, whether it's a consequence of catastrophic events such as wars or natural disasters, or simply through contact with a foreign culture. One could point to the spread of U.S. culture, for example, through the popularity of American movies and music, as well as through military interventions. In recent years we've seen South Korean popular culture develop a large following outside of Korea. K-pop, as it's called, has many fans worldwide, some of whom adapt aspects of the K-pop sub-culture such as dress, hair style, or mannerisms (Kim, 2013). The fact is that as individuals we don't necessarily fit the mold of the national culture in which we were raised. Some scholars speak of culture as something often contested (see Jackson, 2010; Pillar, 2017). Hippies in the 1960's, for example, saw themselves in opposition to the cultural mainstream of many Western countries, in political views, in dress, and in attitudes towards work and leisure. In the end, culture is personal and fluid.



Figure 1.2.2: Korean group Girls' Generation, popular world-wide

With these perspectives on culture, we can return to our initial working definition and add some qualifiers. This traditional view of culture implies a static state, not the flexibility described above. It also includes a common history, but a dynamic vision of culture embraces the idea that cultures can be built on the fly, through individuals coming together due to commonalities of one kind or another, possibly even for a short duration of time. Finally sharing values, behaviors and languages may be true only in a restricted sense. It is useful to have knowledge of the traditional conception of culture, but at the same time understand new and different perspectives on what "culture" is.

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1.3: Communication- A Human Necessity

Most of us admit that communication is important, but it's often in the back of our minds or viewed as something that "just happens." Putting communication at the front of your mind and becoming more aware of how you communicate can be informative and have many positive effects. In this section, as we learn the principles of communication, I encourage you to take note of aspects of communication that you haven't thought about before and begin to apply the principles of communication to various parts of your life.

Communication Meets Needs

As a student with years of education experience, you know that communication is far more than the transmission of information. The exchange of messages and information is important for many reasons, but it is not enough to meet the various needs we have as human beings. While the content of our communication may help us achieve certain physical and instrumental needs, it also feeds into our identities and relationships in ways that far exceed the content of what we say.

- **Physical needs** include needs that keep our bodies and minds functioning like air, food, water, and sleep. Communication, which we most often associate with our brain, mouth, eyes, and ears, actually has many more connections to and effects on our physical body and well-being. At the most basic level, communication can alert others that our physical needs are not being met. Even babies cry when they are hungry or sick to alert their caregiver of the need to satisfy physical needs. Current research indicates that social connection has a huge impact on longevity, our immune systems, and other aspects of physical health (Seppala, et al., 2014).
- **Instrumental needs** Include needs that help us get things done in our day-to-day lives and achieve short- and long-term goals. We all have short- and long-term goals that we work on every day. Fulfilling these goals is an ongoing communicative task, which means we spend much of our time communicating for instrumental needs. Some common instrumental needs include influencing others, getting information we need, or securing support (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). An example could be when Jeon tries to persuade his roommate to turn down his music because he is studying. In this instance, Jeon is using communication to meet an instrumental need.
- **Relational needs** include needs that help us maintain social bonds and interpersonal relationships. Communicating to fill our instrumental needs helps us function on many levels, but communicating for relational needs helps us achieve the social relating that is an essential part of being human. Communication meets our relational needs by giving us a tool through which to develop, maintain, and end relationships.
- **Identity needs** include our need to present ourselves to others and be thought of in particular and desired ways. What adjectives would you use to describe yourself? Are you funny, smart, loyal, or quirky? Your answer isn't just based on who you think you are, since much of how we think of ourselves is based on our communication with other people. Our identity changes as we progress through life, but communication is the primary means of establishing our identity and fulfilling our identity needs.

NO COMMUNICATION = NO COMMUNITY

Throughout history, when societies wanted to severely punish someone for a social transgression, the harshest punishment was excommunication — banishment from the community. In Catholicism this means to cast out someone from the church. In ancient Rome the process was called ostracism, a ritual in which citizens used clay shards (ostraca) to vote for someone to be sent away from the community for 10 years. In modern Amish communities the practice is called shunning. The shunned person is allowed to physically remain in the community but is prohibited from any social interaction with others

Remland et al., 2014. p. 9

Communication Is a Process

Communication can be defined as the process of understanding and sharing meaning (Pearson & Nelson, 2000). When we refer to communication as a process, we imply that it doesn't have a distinct beginning and end or follow a predetermined sequence of events. It can be difficult to trace the origin of a communication encounter, since communication doesn't always follow a neat and discernible format, which makes studying communication interactions or phenomena difficult. Models of communication simplify the process by providing a visual representation of the various aspects of a communication encounter. Models allow us to see specific concepts and steps within the process of communication, define communication, and apply communication concepts. However, any time we pull one part of the process out for study or closer examination, we artificially "freeze" the process in order to examine it, which is not something that is possible when communicating in real life. Doing that changes the very process itself,

and by the time you have examined a particular stage or component of the process, the entire process may have changed. Still, communication models are useful for scholarly interrogation of the communication process, and they can also help us evaluate our own communication practices, troubleshoot a problematic encounter we had, or slow things down to account for various contexts before we engage in communication (Dance & Larson, 1976).

Although models of the communication process differ, they all contain some common elements such as participants, messages, encoding, decoding, and channels. In communication models, the **participants** are the senders and/or receivers of messages in a communication encounter. The **message** is the verbal or nonverbal content being conveyed from sender to receiver. For example, when you say “Hello!” to your friend, you are sending a message of greeting that will be received by your friend.

The internal cognitive processes that allow participants to send, receive, and understand messages are the encoding process and decoding process. **Encoding** is the process of turning thoughts into communication. As we will learn later, the level of conscious thought that goes into encoding messages varies. **Decoding** is the process of turning communication into thoughts. For example, you may realize you’re hungry and encode the following message to send to your roommate: “I’m hungry. Do you want to get pizza tonight?” As your roommate receives the message, he decodes what you are expressing to him and turns it back into thoughts in order to make meaning out of it. Of course, we don’t just communicate verbally—we have various options, or channels for communication. Encoded messages are sent through a **channel**, or a sensory route on which a message travels, to the receiver for decoding. While communication can be sent and received using any sensory route (sight, smell, touch, taste, or sound), most communication occurs through visual (sight) and/or auditory (sound) channels. If your roommate has headphones on and is engrossed in a video game, you may need to get his attention by waving your hands before you can ask him about dinner.

Transactional Model of Communication

As the study of communication has progressed, models have expanded to account for more of the communication process. Many scholars view communication as more than a process that is used to carry on conversations and convey meaning. We don’t send messages like computers, and we don’t neatly alternate between the roles of sender and receiver as an interaction unfolds. We also can’t consciously decide to stop communicating, because communication is more than sending and receiving messages.

The **transactional model of communication** describes communication as a process in which communicators generate social realities within social, relational, and cultural contexts. In this model, we don’t just communicate to exchange messages; we communicate to create relationships, form intercultural alliances, shape our self-concepts, and engage with others in dialog to create communities. In short, we don’t communicate about our realities; communication helps to construct our realities.

Instead of labeling participants as senders and receivers, the transactional model of communication refers to the people in a communication encounter as *communicators*. The model suggests that we are simultaneously senders and receivers. For example, on a first date, as you send verbal messages about your interests and background, your date reacts nonverbally. You don’t wait until you are done sending your verbal message to start receiving and decoding the nonverbal messages of your date. Instead, you are simultaneously sending your verbal message and receiving your date’s nonverbal messages. This is an important component to the model because it allows us to understand how we are able to adapt our communication—for example, a verbal message—in the middle of sending it based on the communication we are simultaneously receiving from our communication partner.

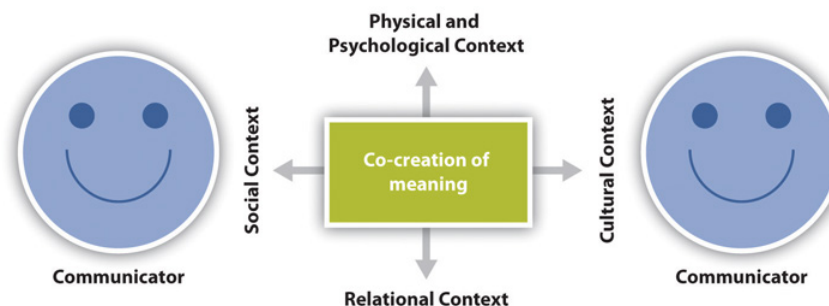


Figure 1.3.1: The Transaction Model of Communication.

The transactional model also includes an important understanding of context. Since the transaction model of communication views communication as a force that shapes our realities before and after specific interactions occur, it must account for contextual influences outside of a single interaction. To do this, the transactional model considers how social, relational, and cultural contexts frame and influence our communication encounters.

- **Social context** refers to the stated rules or unstated norms that guide communication. As we are socialized into our various communities, we learn rules and implicitly pick up on norms for communicating. Some common rules that influence social contexts include don't lie to people, don't interrupt people, don't pass people in line, greet people when they greet you, thank people when they pay you a compliment, and so on. Parents and teachers often explicitly convey these rules to their children or students. Rules may be stated over and over, and there may be punishment for not following them. Norms are social conventions that we pick up on through observation, practice, and trial and error. We may not even know we are breaking a social norm until we notice people looking at us strangely or someone corrects or teases us. For example, as a new employee you may over- or underdress for the company's holiday party because you don't know the norm for formality. Although there probably isn't a stated rule about how to dress at the holiday party, you will notice your error without someone having to point it out, and you will likely not deviate from the norm again in order to save yourself any potential embarrassment. Even though breaking social norms doesn't result in the formal punishment that might be a consequence of breaking a social rule, the social awkwardness we feel when we violate social norms is usually enough to teach us that these norms are powerful even though they aren't made explicit like rules. Norms even have the power to override social rules in some situations. To go back to the examples of common social rules mentioned before, we may break the rule about not lying if the lie is meant to save someone from feeling hurt. We often interrupt close friends when we're having an exciting conversation, but we wouldn't be as likely to interrupt a professor while they are lecturing. Since norms and rules vary among people and cultures, relational and cultural contexts are also included in the transaction model in order to help us understand the multiple contexts that influence our communication.
- **Relational context** includes the previous interpersonal history and type of relationship we have with a person. We communicate differently with someone we just met versus someone we've known for a long time. Initial interactions with people tend to be more highly scripted and governed by established norms and rules, but when we have an established relational context, we may be able to bend or break social norms and rules more easily. For example, you would likely follow social norms of politeness and attentiveness and might spend the whole day cleaning the house for the first time you invite your new neighbors to visit. Once the neighbors are in your house, you may also make them the center of your attention during their visit. If you end up becoming friends with your neighbors and establishing a relational context, you might not think as much about having everything cleaned and prepared or even giving them your whole attention during later visits. Since communication norms and rules also vary based on the type of relationship people have, relationship type is also included in relational context. For example, there are certain communication rules and norms that apply to a supervisor-supervisee relationship that don't apply to a brother-sister relationship and vice versa. Just as social norms and relational history influence how we communicate, so does culture.
- **Cultural context** includes various aspects of identities such as race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and ability. We will learn more about these identities in other chapters, but for now it is important for us to understand that whether we are aware of it or not, we all have multiple cultural identities that influence our communication. Western culture tends to put more value on senders than receivers and on the content rather than the context of a message whereas Eastern cultures tend to communicate with the listener in mind. As we will learn in the next chapter, cultures vary in terms of having a more individualistic or more collectivistic cultural orientation. The United States is considered an **individualistic culture**, where emphasis is put on individual expression and success. Japan is considered a **collectivistic culture**, where emphasis is put on group cohesion and harmony. These are strong cultural values that are embedded in how we learn to communicate. In many collectivistic cultures, there is more emphasis placed on silence and nonverbal context. Some people, especially those with identities that have been historically marginalized, are regularly aware of how their cultural identities influence their communication and influence how others communicate with them. Conversely, people with identities that are dominant or in the majority may rarely, if ever, think about the role their cultural identities play in their communication. Whether in the United States, Japan, or another country, people are socialized from birth to communicate in culturally specific ways that vary by context. When cultural context comes to the forefront of a communication encounter, it can be difficult to manage. Since intercultural communication creates uncertainty, it can deter people from communicating across cultures or lead people to view intercultural communication as negative. But if you avoid communicating across cultural identities, you will likely not get more comfortable or competent as a communicator. "Difference," isn't a bad thing. In fact, intercultural communication has the potential to enrich various aspects of our lives. In order to communicate well within various cultural contexts, it is important to keep an open mind and avoid making assumptions about others' cultural identities. While you may be able to identify some aspects of the cultural context within a communication encounter, there may also be cultural influences that you can't see. A competent communicator shouldn't assume to know all the cultural contexts a person brings to an encounter, since not all

cultural identities are visible. As with the other contexts, it requires skill to adapt to shifting contexts, and the best way to develop these skills is through practice and reflection.

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1.4: Intercultural Communication as an Academic Discipline

Intercultural Communication as an academic discipline

There are a variety of approaches to study and research intercultural communication (see Leeds-Hurwitz, 2010; Rogers & Hart, 2002). As an academic discipline, it is often traced back to anthropologist Edward T. Hall and his book *The Silent Language* (1959). Hall was above all concerned with creating greater cultural awareness among employees of the US Department of State. He was striving to improve the ability of US technicians and diplomats to interact effectively with their foreign counterparts. Given that perspective, his approach was understandably more practical than theory-based. That pragmatism continues to be important in the field, as a central goal is to provide individuals with practical information that can be used in everyday encounters (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999).

Much of the early development of intercultural communication occurred in North America, and North American scholars represented the principal contributors to scholarly activity in intercultural communication through most of the 20th century. However, beginning in the 1990s, the field became increasingly internationalized. European scholars have contributed important new insights and approaches to intercultural communication (Byram, 1997; Holliday, 2010; Hua, 2013; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009), as have Australian and New Zealand scholars (Piller, 2017; Schirato & Yell, 2002). These scholars tend to focus more centrally on language issues than is the case for intercultural communication research in North America.

Through the contributions of researchers from Africa, China, Latin America, and India, there has been a growing recognition that Western approaches to intercultural communication need to be supplemented – and in some cases corrected – through the different life experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives offered by non-Western scholars. One example is the anthropocosmic perspective presented in a recent Chinese textbook on intercultural communication (Jia & Li, 2019), which is based on the concepts of *dao* (道, "the path", the way to enlightenment through cosmic harmony) and *ren* (仁, "benevolence", empathy and responsibility for fellow humans). There have been in recent years more calls for indigenous perspectives on intercultural communication (Miike, 2007). Particularly welcome would be more insights from African scholars (Miller, 2005). In the latter part of the 20th century, there has been considerable interest in **critical intercultural communication**, which views intercultural communication within the context of power structures (see Jackson, 2010; Piller, 2017). That perspective will inform much of the discussion of intercultural communication in this textbook.

Since Hall's time, a great variety of disciplines have contributed to the field, including applied linguistics, business communication, social psychology, and international studies. In fact, intercultural communication is taught within a variety of academic units. Given the practical usefulness of easing communication among those representing different cultures and languages, it is logical that intercultural communication figures prominently in areas where such interactions are common and expected. In many countries, that will include tourism, medical care, and/or education. In the US, intercultural communication is taught most commonly within programs in communication studies, while in other Anglophone countries, it is considered a subdivision of applied linguistics. Professional organizations often bring together scholars from a variety of disciplines. Indeed, that is one of the enriching characteristics of the field, that it draws on knowledge and experience representing a great variety of academic fields. This textbook will incorporate aspects of research in intercultural communication as represented in a variety of disciplines. The disciplines use different research methodologies, have differing goals, and address issues from a variety of perspectives. Some use primarily quantitative data, others are more qualitatively oriented. In the end, these different approaches complement each other and together provide a more complete picture than would reliance on a single discipline (see Kotthoff & Spencer-Oatey, 2007).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Identity and Intercultural Communication

- 2.1: Foundations of Culture and Identity
- 2.2: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities
- 2.3: Identity and Migration

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2.1: Foundations of Culture and Identity

Ask yourself the question “Who am I?” Recall from our earlier discussion of self-concept that we develop a sense of who we are based on what is reflected back on us from other people. Our parents, friends, teachers, and the media help shape our identities. While this happens from birth, most people in Western societies reach a stage in adolescence where maturing cognitive abilities and increased social awareness lead them to begin to reflect on who they are. This begins a lifelong process of thinking about who we are now, who we were before, and who we will become (Tatum, B. D., 2000). Our identities make up an important part of our self-concept and can be broken down into three main categories: personal, social, and cultural identities (see Table 8.1 “Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities”).

Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

We must avoid the temptation to think of our identities as constant. Instead, our identities are formed through processes that started before we were born and will continue after we are gone; therefore our identities aren’t something we achieve or complete. Two related but distinct components of our identities are our personal and social identities (Spreckels, J. & Kotthoff, H., 2009). **Personal identities** include the components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connected to our life experiences. For example, I consider myself a puzzle lover, and you may identify as a fan of hip-hop music. Our **social identities** are the components of self that are derived from involvement in social groups with which we are interpersonally committed.



Figure 2.1.1: Pledging a fraternity or sorority is an example of a social identity (Adaenn – CC BY-NC 2.0.).

For example, we may derive aspects of our social identity from our family or from a community of fans for a sports team. Social identities differ from personal identities because they are externally organized through membership. Our membership may be voluntary (Greek organization on campus) or involuntary (family) and explicit (we pay dues to our labor union) or implicit (we purchase and listen to hip-hop music). There are innumerable options for personal and social identities. While our personal identity choices express who we are, our social identities align us with particular groups. Through our social identities, we make statements about who we are and who we are not.

Table 2.1.1: Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

Personal	Social	Cultural
Antique Collector	Member of Historical Society	Irish American
Dog Lover	Member of Humane Society	Male/Female
Cyclist	Fraternity/Sorority Member	Greek American
Singer	High School Music Teacher	Multiracial
Shy	Book Club Member	Heterosexual
Athletic		Gay/Lesbian

Personal identities may change often as people have new experiences and develop new interests and hobbies. A current interest in online video games may give way to an interest in graphic design. Social identities do not change as often because they take more time to develop, as you must become interpersonally invested. For example, if an interest in online video games leads someone to become a member of a MMORPG, or a massively multiplayer online role-playing game community, that personal identity has led to a social identity that is now interpersonal and more entrenched. **Cultural identities** are based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behavior or ways of acting (Yep, G. A., 2002). Since we are often a part of them since birth, cultural identities are the least changeable of the three. The ways of being and the social expectations for behavior within cultural identities do change over time, but what separates them from most social identities is their historical roots (Collier, M. J., 1996). For example, think of how ways of being and acting have changed for African Americans since the civil rights movement. Additionally, common ways of being and acting within a cultural identity group are expressed through communication. In order to be accepted as a member of a cultural group, members must be acculturated, essentially learning and using a code that other group members will be able to recognize. We are acculturated into our various cultural identities in obvious and less obvious ways. We may literally have a parent or friend tell us what it means to be a man or a woman. We may also unconsciously consume messages from popular culture that offer representations of gender.

Any of these identity types can be ascribed or avowed. **Ascribed identities** are personal, social, or cultural identities that are placed on us by others, while **avowed identities** are those that we claim for ourselves (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Sometimes people ascribe an identity to someone else based on stereotypes. You may see a person who likes to read science-fiction books, watches documentaries, has glasses, and collects Star Trek memorabilia and label him or her a nerd. If the person doesn't avow that identity, it can create friction, and that label may even hurt the other person's feelings. But ascribed and avowed identities can match up. To extend the previous example, there has been a movement in recent years to reclaim the label *nerd* and turn it into a positive, and a nerd subculture has been growing in popularity. For example, MC Frontalot, a leader in the nerdcore hip-hop movement, says that being branded a nerd in school was terrible, but now he raps about "nerdy" things like blogs to sold-out crowds (Shipman, 2007). We can see from this example that our ascribed and avowed identities change over the course of our lives, and sometimes they match up and sometimes not.

Although some identities are essentially permanent, the degree to which we are aware of them, also known as salience, changes. The intensity with which we avow an identity also changes based on context. For example, an African American may not have difficulty deciding which box to check on the demographic section of a survey. But if an African American becomes president of her college's Black Student Union, she may more intensely avow her African American identity, which has now become more salient. If she studies abroad in Africa her junior year, she may be ascribed an identity of American by her new African friends rather than African American. For the Africans, their visitor's identity as American is likely more salient than her identity as someone of African descent. If someone is biracial or multiracial, they may change their racial identification as they engage in an identity search. One intercultural communication scholar writes of his experiences as an "Asianlatinoamerican" (Yep, 2002). He notes repressing his Chinese identity as an adolescent living in Peru and then later embracing his Chinese identity and learning about his family history while in college in the United States. This example shows how even national identity fluctuates. Obviously one can change nationality by becoming a citizen of another country, although most people do not.

Throughout modern history, cultural and social influences have established dominant and nondominant groups (Allen, 2011). **Dominant identities** historically had and currently have more resources and influence, while **nondominant identities** historically had and currently have less resources and influence. It's important to remember that these distinctions are being made at the societal level, not the individual level. There are obviously exceptions, with people in groups considered nondominant obtaining more resources and power than a person in a dominant group. However, the overall trend is that difference based on cultural groups has been institutionalized, and exceptions do not change this fact. Because of this uneven distribution of resources and power, members of dominant groups are granted privileges while nondominant groups are at a disadvantage. The main nondominant groups must face various forms of institutionalized discrimination, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. As we will discuss later, privilege and disadvantage, like similarity and difference, are not "all or nothing." No two people are completely different or completely similar, and no one person is completely privileged or completely disadvantaged.

Identity Development

At this point, you are probably aware of the cultural groups to which you belong (i.e., "I am a Latino, middle-class, (almost) college-educated male"). Do you remember the process of coming to awareness of your cultural identity—when did you know you were white and what that meant? Was it during childhood, as a teenager, or reading this chapter? Has your understanding, or acceptance, of your racial heritage changed during the course of your lifetime? For most people it does. Just as Piaget organized the

growth of children according to various stages of development, cultural scholars have similarly organized racial awareness along models and stages. Before explaining the various models, let us make a couple general comments about models. One, a model is not the thing it represents. Is the model car you played with as a child the same as the actual automobile? What were the differences? Size, time, maneuverability, details? These same kinds of differences exist between the model of racial identity development and the actual personal process. But just like the car model gives a fairly accurate picture of the actual automobile so do the racial identity models. Two, these models are general and not meant to fit perfectly to every individual's experience. With that said, let us examine the process of coming to an understanding of our racial identity.

To better understand this complex process, and in recognition of the above discussion regarding the distinctions in experiences for various cultural groups, we will present three racial identity models—*Nondominant*, *Dominant*, and *Bi-or Multiracial* identity development. While the stages in this model help us understand how many people experience their identities, identity development is complex, and there may be variations. We must also remember that people have multiple identities that intersect with each other. So, as you read, think about how circumstances may be different for an individual with multiple nondominant and/or dominant identities.

Nondominant Identity Development

There are four stages of nondominant identity development (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The first stage is **unexamined identity**, which is characterized by a lack of awareness of or lack of interest in one's identity. For example, a young woman who will later identify as a lesbian may not yet realize that a nondominant sexual orientation is part of her identity. Also, a young African American man may question his teachers or parents about the value of what he's learning during Black History Month. When a person's lack of interest in their own identity is replaced by an investment in a dominant group's identity, they may move to the next stage, which is conformity.

In the **conformity** stage, an individual internalizes or adopts the values and norms of the dominant group, often in an effort not to be perceived as different. Individuals may attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture by changing their appearance, their mannerisms, the way they talk, or even their name. Moises, a Chicano man interviewed in a research project about identities, narrated how he changed his "Mexican sounding" name to Moses, which was easier for his middle-school classmates and teachers to say (Jones Jr., 2009). He also identified as white instead of Mexican American or Chicano because he saw how his teachers treated the other kids with "brown skin." Additionally, some gay or lesbian people in this stage of identity development may try to "act straight." In either case, some people move to the next stage, resistance and separation, when they realize that despite their efforts they are still perceived as different by and not included in the dominant group.

In the **resistance and separation** stage, an individual with a nondominant identity may shift away from the conformity of the previous stage to engage in actions that challenge the dominant identity group. Individuals in this stage may also actively try to separate themselves from the dominant group, interacting only with those who share their nondominant identity. For example, there has been a Deaf culture movement in the United States for decades. This movement includes people who are hearing impaired and believe that their use of a specific language, American Sign Language (ASL), and other cultural practices constitutes a unique culture, which they symbolize by capitalizing the *D* in *Deaf* (Allen, 2011).



Figure 2.1.2: Many hearing-impaired people in the United States use American Sign Language (ASL), which is recognized as an official language (Quinn Dombrowski – [ASL interpreter](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.).

While this is not a separatist movement, a person who is hearing impaired may find refuge in such a group after experiencing discrimination from hearing people. Staying in this stage may indicate a lack of critical thinking if a person endorses the values of the nondominant group without question.

The **integration** stage marks a period where individuals with a nondominant identity have achieved a balance between embracing their own identities and valuing other dominant and nondominant identities. Although there may still be residual anger from the discrimination and prejudice they have faced, they may direct this energy into positive outlets such as working to end discrimination for their own or other groups. Moises, the Chicano man I mentioned earlier, now works to support the Chicano community in his city and also has actively supported gay rights and women's rights

Dominant Identity Development

Dominant identity development consists of five stages (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The **unexamined** stage of dominant identity formation is similar to nondominant in that individuals in this stage do not think about their or others' identities. Although they may be aware of differences—for example, between races and genders—they either don't realize there is a hierarchy that treats some people differently than others or they don't think the hierarchy applies to them. For example, a white person may take notice that a person of color was elected to a prominent office. However, he or she may not see the underlying reason that it is noticeable—namely, that the overwhelming majority of our country's leaders are white. Unlike people with a nondominant identity who usually have to acknowledge the positioning of their identity due to discrimination and prejudice they encounter, people with dominant identities may stay in the unexamined stage for a long time.

In the **acceptance** stage, a person with a dominant identity passively or actively accepts that some people are treated differently than others but doesn't do anything internally or externally to address it. In the passive acceptance stage, we must be cautious not to blame individuals with dominant identities for internalizing racist, sexist, or heterosexist "norms." The socializing institutions we discussed earlier (family, peers, media, religion, and education) often make oppression seem normal and natural. For example, I have had students who struggle to see that they are in this stage say things like "I know that racism exists, but my parents taught me to be a good person and see everyone as equal." While this is admirable, seeing everyone as equal doesn't make it so. And people who insist that we are all equal may claim that minorities are exaggerating their circumstances or "whining" and just need to "work harder" or "get over it." The person making these statements acknowledges difference but doesn't see their privilege or the institutional perpetuation of various "-isms." Although I've encountered many more people in the passive state of acceptance than the active state, some may progress to an active state where they acknowledge inequality and are proud to be in the "superior" group. In either case, many people never progress from this stage. If they do, it's usually because of repeated encounters with individuals or situations that challenge their acceptance of the status quo, such as befriending someone from a nondominant group or taking a course related to culture.

The **resistance** stage of dominant identity formation is a major change from the previous in that an individual acknowledges the unearned advantages they are given and feels guilt or shame about it. Having taught about various types of privilege for years, I've encountered many students who want to return their privilege or disown it. These individuals may begin to disassociate with their own dominant group because they feel like a curtain has been opened and their awareness of the inequality makes it difficult for them to interact with others in their dominant group. But it's important to acknowledge that becoming aware of your white privilege, for instance, doesn't mean that every person of color is going to want to accept you as an ally, so retreating to them may not be the most productive move. While moving to this step is a marked improvement in regards to becoming a more aware and socially just person, getting stuck in the resistance stage isn't productive, because people are often retreating rather than trying to address injustice. For some, deciding to share what they've learned with others who share their dominant identity moves them to the next stage.

People in the **redefinition** stage revise negative views of their identity held in the previous stage and begin to acknowledge their privilege and try to use the power they are granted to work for social justice. They realize that they can claim their dominant identity as heterosexual, able-bodied, male, white, and so on, and perform their identity in ways that counter norms. A male participant in a research project on identity said the following about redefining his male identity:

I don't want to assert my maleness the same way that maleness is asserted all around us all the time. I don't want to contribute to sexism. So I have to be conscious of that. There's that guilt. But then, I try to utilize my maleness in positive ways, like when I'm talking to other men about male privilege (Jones, Jr., 2009).

The final stage of dominant identity formation is **integration**. This stage is reached when redefinition is complete and people can integrate their dominant identity into all aspects of their life, finding opportunities to educate others about privilege while also being a responsive ally to people in nondominant identities. As an example, some heterosexual people who find out a friend or family member is gay or lesbian may have to confront their dominant heterosexual identity for the first time, which may lead them through these various stages. As a sign of integration, some may join an organization like PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), where they can be around others who share their dominant identity as heterosexuals but also empathize with their loved ones.



Figure 2.1.3: Heterosexual people with gay family members or friends may join the group PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) as a part of the redefinition and/or integration stage of their dominant identity development.. (Jason Riedy – Atlanta Pride Festival parade – CC BY 2.0.).

Bi- or Multiracial Identity Development

Originally, people thought that bi-racial individuals followed the development model of minority individuals, but given that we now know that race and the meanings about race are socially constructed, it makes sense to realize that a person of mixed racial ancestry is likely to be viewed differently (from both the dominant culture and the individual's own culture) than a minority individual. Thus, they are likely to experience a social reality unique to their experience. The following five-stage model is derived from the work of W.S. Carlos Poston.

Knowing more about various types of identities and some common experiences of how dominant and nondominant identities are formed prepares us to delve into more specifics about why difference matters.

- **Stage 1: Personal Identity.** Poston's first stage is much like the unexamined identity stage in the previous two models. Again, children are not aware of race as a value-based social category and derive their personal identity from individual personality features instead of cultural ones.
- **Stage 2: Group Categorization.** In the move from stage one to two, the person goes from no racial or cultural awareness to having to choose between one or the other. In a family where the father is Black and the mother is Japanese, the child may be asked by members of both families to decide if he or she is Black or Japanese. Choosing both is not an option in this stage.
- **Stage 3: Enmeshment/Denial.** Following the choice made in stage two, individuals attempt to immerse themselves in one culture while denying ties to the other. This process may result in guilt or feelings of distance from the parent and family whose culture was rejected in stage two. If these feelings are resolved then the child moves to the next stage. If not, they remain here.
- **Stage 4: Appreciation.** When feelings of guilt and anger are resolved the person can work to appreciate all of the cultures that shape their identity. While there is an attempt to learn about the diversity of their heritage, they will still identify primarily with the culture chosen in stage two.
- **Stage 5: Integration.** In the fifth and final stage the once fragmented parts of the person's identity are brought together to create a unique whole. There is integration of cultures throughout all facets of the person's life—dress, food, holidays, spirituality, language, and communication.

Difference Matters

Whenever we encounter someone, we notice similarities and differences. While both are important, it is often the differences that are highlighted and that contribute to communication troubles. We don't only see similarities and differences on an individual level. In fact, we also place people into in-groups and out-groups based on the similarities and differences we perceive. This is important because we then tend to react to someone we perceive as a member of an out-group based on the characteristics we attach to the group rather than the individual (Allen, 2011). In these situations, it is more likely that stereotypes and prejudice will influence our communication. Learning about difference and why it matters will help us be more competent communicators. The flip side of emphasizing difference is to claim that no differences exist and that you see everyone as a human being. Rather than trying to ignore difference and see each person as a unique individual, we should know the history of how differences came to be so socially and culturally significant and how they continue to affect us today.

Culture and identity are complex. You may be wondering how some groups came to be dominant and others nondominant. These differences are not natural, which can be seen as we unpack how various identities have changed over time in the next section. There is, however, an ideology of domination that makes it seem natural and normal to many that some people or groups will always have power over others (Allen, 2011). In fact, hierarchy and domination, although prevalent throughout modern human history, were likely not the norm among early humans. So one of the first reasons difference matters is that people and groups are treated unequally, and better understanding how those differences came to be can help us create a more just society. Difference also matters because demographics and patterns of interaction are changing.

In the United States, the population of people of color is increasing and diversifying, and visibility for people who are gay or lesbian and people with disabilities has also increased. The 2010 Census shows that the Latinx population in the United States are now the second largest group in the country, having grown 43 percent since the last census in 2000 (Saenz, 2011). By 2030, racial and ethnic minorities will account for one-third of the population (Allen, 2011). Additionally, legal and social changes have created a more open environment for sexual minorities and people with disabilities. These changes directly affect our interpersonal relationships. The workplace is one context where changing demographics has become increasingly important. Many organizations are striving to comply with changing laws by implementing policies aimed at creating equal access and opportunity. Some organizations are going further than legal compliance to try to create inclusive climates where diversity is valued because of the interpersonal and economic benefits it has the potential to produce.

"Getting Real": Diversity Training

Businesses in the United States spend \$200 to \$300 million a year on diversity training, but is it effective? (Vedantam, 2008) If diversity training is conducted to advance a company's business goals and out of an understanding of the advantages that a diversity of background and thought offer a company, then the training is more likely to be successful. Many companies conduct mandatory diversity training based on a belief that they will be in a better position in court if a lawsuit is brought against them. However, research shows that training that is mandatory and undertaken only to educate people about the legal implications of diversity is ineffective and may even hurt diversity efforts. A commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace environment must include a multipronged approach. Experts recommend that a company put a staff person in charge of

diversity efforts, and some businesses have gone as far as appointing a “chief diversity officer” (Cullen, 2007). The US Office of Personnel Management offers many good guidelines for conducting diversity training: create learning objectives related to the mission of the organization, use tested and appropriate training methods and materials, provide information about course content and expectations to employees ahead of training, provide the training in a supportive and noncoercive environment, use only experienced and qualified instructors, and monitor/evaluate training and revise as needed (US Office of Personnel Management, 2011). With these suggestions in mind, the increasingly common “real-world” event of diversity training is more likely to succeed.

1. Have you ever participated in any diversity training? If so, what did you learn or take away from the training? Which of the guidelines listed did your training do well or poorly on?
2. Do you think diversity training should be mandatory or voluntary? Why?
3. From what you’ve learned so far in this book, what communication skills are important for a diversity trainer to have?

We can now see that difference matters due to the inequalities that exist among cultural groups and due to changing demographics that affect our personal and social relationships. Unfortunately, there are many obstacles that may impede our valuing of difference (Allen, 2011). Individuals with dominant identities may not validate the experiences of those in nondominant groups because they do not experience the oppression directed at those with nondominant identities. Further, they may find it difficult to acknowledge that not being aware of this oppression is due to privilege associated with their dominant identities. Because of this lack of recognition of oppression, members of dominant groups may minimize, dismiss, or question the experiences of nondominant groups and view them as “complainers” or “whiners.” Recall from our earlier discussion of identity formation that people with dominant identities may stay in the unexamined or acceptance stages for a long time. Being stuck in these stages makes it much more difficult to value difference.

Members of nondominant groups may have difficulty valuing difference due to negative experiences with the dominant group, such as not having their experiences validated. Both groups may be restrained from communicating about difference due to norms of political correctness, which may make people feel afraid to speak up because they may be perceived as insensitive or racist. All these obstacles are common and they are valid. However, as we will learn later, developing intercultural communication competence can help us gain new perspectives, become more mindful of our communication, and intervene in some of these negative cycles.

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2.2: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

We can get a better understanding of current cultural identities by unpacking how they came to be. By looking at history, we can see how cultural identities that seem to have existed forever actually came to be constructed for various political and social reasons and how they have changed over time. Communication plays a central role in this construction. As we have already discussed, our identities are relational and communicative; they are also constructed. Social constructionism is a view that argues the self is formed through our interactions with others and in relationship to social, cultural, and political contexts (Allen, 2011). In this section, we'll explore how the cultural identities of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability have been constructed in the United States and how communication relates to those identities. There are other important identities that could be discussed, like religion, age, nationality, and class. Although they are not given their own section, consider how those identities may intersect with the identities discussed next.

Race

Would it surprise you to know that human beings, regardless of how they are racially classified, share 99.9 percent of their DNA? This finding by the Human Genome Project asserts that race is a social construct, not a biological one. The American Anthropological Association agrees, stating that race is the product of “historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances” (Allen, 2011). Therefore, we'll define **race as a socially constructed category based on differences in appearance that has been used to create hierarchies that privilege some and disadvantage others.**



Figure 2.2.1: There is actually no biological basis for racial classification among humans, as we share 99.9 percent of our DNA. Evelyn – friends – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Race didn't become a socially and culturally recognized marker until European colonial expansion in the 1500s. As Western Europeans traveled to parts of the world previously unknown to them and encountered people who were different from them, a hierarchy of races began to develop that placed lighter skinned Europeans above darker skinned people. At the time, newly developing fields in natural and biological sciences took interest in examining the new locales, including the plant and animal life, natural resources, and native populations. Over the next three hundred years, science that we would now undoubtedly recognize as flawed, biased, and racist legitimated notions that native populations were less evolved than white Europeans, often calling them savages. In fact, there were scientific debates as to whether some of the native populations should be considered human or animal. Racial distinctions have been based largely on phenotypes, or physiological features such as skin color, hair texture, and body/facial features. Western “scientists” used these differences as “proof” that native populations were less evolved than the Europeans, which helped justify colonial expansion, enslavement, genocide, and exploitation on massive scales (Allen, 2011). Even though there is a consensus among experts that race is social rather than biological, we can't deny that race still has meaning in our society and affects people as if it were “real.”

Given that race is one of the first things we notice about someone, it's important to know how race and communication relate (Allen, 2011). Discussing race in the United States is difficult for many reasons. One is due to uncertainty about language use. People may be frustrated by their perception that labels change too often or be afraid of using an “improper” term and being viewed as racially insensitive. It is important, however, that we not let political correctness get in the way of meaningful dialog and

learning opportunities related to difference. Learning some of the communicative history of race can make us more competent communicators and open us up to more learning experiences.

Racial classifications used by the government and our regular communication about race in the United States have changed frequently, which further points to the social construction of race. Currently, the primary racial groups in the United States are African American, Asian American, European American, Latinx, and Native American, but a brief look at changes in how the US Census Bureau has defined race clearly shows that this hasn't always been the case (see Table 8.2 "Racial Classifications in the US Census"). In the 1900s alone, there were twenty-six different ways that race was categorized on census forms (Allen, 2011). The way we communicate about race in our regular interactions has also changed, and many people are still hesitant to discuss race for fear of using "the wrong" vocabulary.

Table 2.2.1: Racial Classifications in the US Census

Year(s)	Development
1790	No category for race
1800s	Race was defined by the percentage of African "blood." <i>Mulatto</i> was one black and one white parent, <i>quadroon</i> was one-quarter African blood, and <i>octroon</i> was one-eighth.
1830–1940	The term <i>color</i> was used instead of <i>race</i> .
1900	Racial categories included white, black, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. Census takers were required to check one of these boxes based on visual cues. Individuals did not get to select a racial classification on their own until 1970.
1950	The term <i>color</i> was dropped and replaced by <i>race</i> .
1960, 1970	Both <i>race</i> and <i>color</i> were used on census forms.
1980–2010	<i>Race</i> again became the only term.
2000	Individuals were allowed to choose more than one racial category for the first time in census history.
2010	The census included fifteen racial categories and an option to write in races not listed on the form.

Source: Adapted from Brenda J. Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2011), 71–72.

The five primary racial groups noted previously can still be broken down further to specify a particular region, country, or nation. For example, Asian Americans are diverse in terms of country and language of origin and cultural practices. While the category of Asian Americans can be useful when discussing broad trends, it can also generalize among groups, which can lead to stereotypes. You may find that someone identifies as Chinese American or Korean American instead of Asian American. In this case, the label further highlights a person's cultural lineage. We should not assume, however, that someone identifies with his or her cultural lineage, as many people have more in common with their US American peers than a culture that may be one or more generations removed.

History and personal preference also influence how we communicate about race. Culture and communication scholar Brenda Allen notes that when she was born in 1950, her birth certificate included an *N* for Negro. Later she referred to herself as *colored* because that's what people in her community referred to themselves as. During and before this time, the term *black* had negative connotations and would likely have offended someone. There was a movement in the 1960s to reclaim the word *black*, and the slogan "black is beautiful" was commonly used. Brenda Allen acknowledges the newer label of *African American* but notes that she still prefers *black*. The terms *colored* and *Negro* are no longer considered appropriate because they were commonly used during a time when black people were blatantly discriminated against. Even though that history may seem far removed to some, it is not to others. Currently, the terms *African American* and *black* are frequently used, and both are considered acceptable. The phrase *people of color* is acceptable for most and is used to be inclusive of other racial minorities. If you are unsure what to use, you could always

observe how a person refers to himself or herself, or you could ask for his or her preference. In any case, a competent communicator defers to and respects the preference of the individual.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a term that describes shared culture — the practices, values, and beliefs of a group. This might include shared language, religion, and traditions, among other commonalities. Like race, the term ethnicity is difficult to describe and its meaning has changed over time. And like race, individuals may be identified or self-identify with ethnicities in complex, even contradictory, ways. For example, ethnic groups such as Irish, Italian, Russian, Jewish, and Serbian might all be groups whose members are predominantly included in the racial category “white.” Conversely, the ethnic group British includes citizens from a multiplicity of racial backgrounds: black, white, Asian, and more, plus a variety of race combinations. These examples illustrate the complexity and overlap of these identifying terms. Ethnicity, like race, continues to be an identification method that individuals and institutions use today — whether through the census, affirmative action initiatives, non-discrimination laws, or simply in personal day-to-day relations. So conceived, the terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic group* avoid the biological connotations of the terms *race* and *racial group*.

Latin Americans, Latinos, Latinas, Latinx, and Hispanics

The label *Latin American* generally refers to people who live in Central American countries. Although Spain colonized much of what is now South and Central America and parts of the Caribbean, the inhabitants of these areas are now much more diverse. Depending on the region or country, some people primarily trace their lineage to the indigenous people who lived in these areas before colonization, or to a Spanish and indigenous lineage, or to other combinations that may include European, African, and/or indigenous heritage. *Latina* and *Latino* are labels that are preferable to *Hispanic* for many who live in the United States and trace their lineage to South and/or Central America and/or parts of the Caribbean. In verbal communication you might say “Latina” when referring to a particular female or “Latino” when referring to a particular male of Latin American heritage. When referring to the group as a whole, you could say “Latinx” instead of just “Latinos,” which would be more gender inclusive. While *Hispanic* is used by the US Census, it refers primarily to people of Spanish origin, which doesn’t account for the diversity of background of many Latinx. The term *Hispanic* also highlights the colonizer’s influence over the indigenous, which erases a history that is important to many. Additionally, there are people who claim Spanish origins and identify culturally as Hispanic but racially as white. Labels such as *Puerto Rican* or *Mexican American*, which further specify region or country of origin, may also be used. Just as with other cultural groups, if you are unsure of how to refer to someone, you can always ask for and honor someone’s preference.

Gender

When we first meet a newborn baby, we ask whether it’s a boy or a girl. This question illustrates the importance of gender in organizing our social lives and our interpersonal relationships. A Canadian family became aware of the deep emotions people feel about gender and the great discomfort people feel when they can’t determine gender when they announced to the world that they were not going to tell anyone the gender of their baby, aside from the baby’s siblings. Their desire for their child, named Storm, to be able to experience early life without the boundaries and categories of gender brought criticism from many (Davis & James, 2011). Conversely, many parents consciously or unconsciously “code” their newborns in gendered ways based on our society’s associations of pink clothing and accessories with girls and blue with boys. While it’s obvious to most people that colors aren’t gendered, they take on new meaning when we assign gendered characteristics of masculinity and femininity to them. Just like race, gender is a socially constructed category. While it is true that there are biological differences between who we label male and female, the meaning our society places on those differences is what actually matters in our day-to-day lives. And the biological differences are interpreted differently around the world, which further shows that although we think gender is a natural, normal, stable way of classifying things, it is actually not. There is a long history of appreciation for people who cross gender lines in Native American and South Central Asian cultures, to name just two.

You may have noticed I use the word *gender* instead of *sex*. That’s because **gender is an identity based on internalized cultural notions of masculinity and femininity that is constructed through communication and interaction.** There are two important parts of this definition to unpack. First, we internalize notions of gender based on socializing institutions, which helps us form our gender identity. Then we attempt to construct that gendered identity through our interactions with others, which is our gender expression. Sex is based on biological characteristics, including external genitalia, internal sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones (Wood, 2005). While the biological characteristics between men and women are obviously different, it’s the meaning that we create and attach to those characteristics that makes them significant. The cultural differences in how that significance is ascribed are proof that “our way of doing things” is arbitrary. For example, cross-cultural research has found that boys and girls in most cultures show both aggressive and nurturing tendencies, but cultures vary in terms of how they encourage these characteristics

between genders. In a group in Africa, young boys are responsible for taking care of babies and are encouraged to be nurturing (Wood, 2005).

Gender has been constructed over the past few centuries in political and deliberate ways that have tended to favor men in terms of power. And various academic fields joined in the quest to “prove” there are “natural” differences between men and women. While the “proof” they presented was credible to many at the time, it seems blatantly sexist and inaccurate today. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, scientists who measure skulls, also known as craniometrists, claimed that men were more intelligent than women because they had larger brains. Leaders in the fast-growing fields of sociology and psychology argued that women were less evolved than men and had more in common with “children and savages” than an adult (white) males (Allen, 2011). Doctors and other decision makers like politicians also used women’s menstrual cycles as evidence that they were irrational, or hysterical, and therefore couldn’t be trusted to vote, pursue higher education, or be in a leadership position. These are just a few of the many instances of how knowledge was created by seemingly legitimate scientific disciplines that we can now clearly see served to empower men and disempower women. This system is based on the ideology of **patriarchy, which is a system of social structures and practices that maintains the values, priorities, and interests of men as a group** (Wood, 2005). One of the ways patriarchy is maintained is by its relative invisibility. While women have been the focus of much research on gender differences, males have been largely unexamined. Men have been treated as the “generic” human being to which others are compared. But that ignores that fact that men have a gender, too. Masculinities studies have challenged that notion by examining how masculinities are performed.

There have been challenges to the construction of gender in recent decades. Since the 1960s, scholars and activists have challenged established notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. The women’s rights movement in the United States dates back to the 1800s, when the first women’s rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 (Wood, 2005). Although most women’s rights movements have been led by white, middle-class women, there was overlap between those involved in the abolitionist movement to end slavery and the beginnings of the women’s rights movement. Although some of the leaders of the early women’s rights movement had class and education privilege, they were still taking a risk by organizing and protesting. Black women were even more at risk, and Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave, faced those risks often and gave a much noted extemporaneous speech at a women’s rights gathering in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, which came to be called “Ain’t I a Woman?” (Wood, 2005) Her speech highlighted the multiple layers of oppression faced by black women.

Feminism as an intellectual and social movement advanced women’s rights and our overall understanding of gender. Feminism has gotten a bad reputation based on how it has been portrayed in the media and by some politicians. When I teach courses about gender, I often ask my students to raise their hand if they consider themselves feminists. I usually only have a few, if any, who do. I’ve found that students I teach are hesitant to identify as a feminist because of connotations of the word. However, when I ask students to raise their hand if they believe women have been treated unfairly and that there should be more equity, most students raise their hand. Gender and communication scholar Julia Wood has found the same trend and explains that a desire to make a more equitable society for everyone is at the root of feminism. She shares comments from a student that capture this disconnect:

"I would never call myself a feminist, because that word has so many negative connotations. I don't hate men or anything, and I'm not interested in protesting. I don't want to go around with hacked-off hair and no makeup and sit around bashing men. I do think women should have the same kinds of rights, including equal pay for equal work. But I wouldn't call myself a feminist." (Wood, 2005)

It’s important to remember that there are many ways to be a feminist and to realize that some of the stereotypes about feminism are rooted in sexism and homophobia, in that feminists are reduced to “men haters” and often presumed to be lesbians. The feminist movement also gave some momentum to the transgender rights movement. **Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression do not match the gender they were assigned by birth.** Transgender people may or may not seek medical intervention like surgery or hormone treatments to help match their physiology with their gender identity. The term *transgender* includes other labels such as *transsexual*, *transvestite*, *cross-dresser*, and *intersex*, among others. Terms like *hermaphrodite* and *she-male* are not considered appropriate. As with other groups, it is best to allow someone to self-identify first and then honor their preferred label. If you are unsure of which pronouns to use when addressing someone, you can use gender-neutral language or you can use the pronoun that matches with how they are presenting. If someone has long hair, make-up, and a dress on, but you think their biological sex is male due to other cues, it would be polite to address them with female pronouns, since that is the gender identity they are expressing.

Gender as a cultural identity has implications for many aspects of our lives, including real-world contexts like education and work. Schools are primary grounds for socialization, and the educational experience for males and females is different in many ways from preschool through college. Although not always intentional, schools tend to recreate the hierarchies and inequalities that exist in society. Given that we live in a patriarchal society, there are communicative elements present in school that support this (Allen, 2011). For example, teachers are more likely to call on and pay attention to boys in a classroom, giving them more feedback in the form of criticism, praise, and help. This sends an implicit message that boys are more worthy of attention and valuable than girls. Teachers are also more likely to lead girls to focus on feelings and appearance and boys to focus on competition and achievement. The focus on appearance for girls can lead to anxieties about body image. Gender inequalities are also evident in the administrative structure of schools, which puts males in positions of authority more than females. While females make up 75 percent of the educational workforce, only 22 percent of superintendents and 8 percent of high school principals are women. Similar trends exist in colleges and universities, with women only accounting for 26 percent of full professors. These inequalities in schools correspond to larger inequalities in the general workforce. While there are more women in the workforce now than ever before, they still face a **glass ceiling**, which is a barrier for promotion to upper management. Many of my students have been surprised at the continuing pay gap that exists between men and women. In 2010, women earned about seventy-seven cents to every dollar earned by men (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2011). To put this into perspective, the National Committee on Pay Equity started an event called Equal Pay Day. In 2011, Equal Pay Day was on April 11. This signifies that for a woman to earn the same amount of money a man earned in a year, she would have to work more than three months extra, until April 11, to make up for the difference (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2011).

Sexuality

While race and gender are two of the first things we notice about others, sexuality is often something we view as personal and private. Although many people hold a view that a person's sexuality should be kept private, this isn't a reality for our society. One only needs to observe popular culture and media for a short time to see that sexuality permeates much of our public discourse.

Sexuality relates to culture and identity in important ways that extend beyond sexual orientation, just as race is more than the color of one's skin and gender is more than one's biological and physiological manifestations of masculinity and femininity. Sexuality isn't just physical; it is social in that we communicate with others about sexuality (Allen, 2011). Sexuality is also biological in that it connects to physiological functions that carry significant social and political meaning like puberty, menstruation, and pregnancy. Sexuality connects to public health issues like sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and teen pregnancy. Sexuality is at the center of political issues like abortion, sex education, and gay and lesbian rights. While all these contribute to sexuality as a cultural identity, the focus in this section is on sexual orientation.

The most obvious way sexuality relates to identity is through sexual orientation. **Sexual orientation refers to a person's primary physical and emotional sexual attraction and activity.** The terms we most often use to categorize sexual orientation are *heterosexual*, *gay*, *lesbian*, and *bisexual*. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are sometimes referred to as sexual minorities. While the term *sexual preference* has been used previously, *sexual orientation* is more appropriate, since *preference* implies a simple choice. Although someone's preference for a restaurant or actor may change frequently, sexuality is not as simple. The term *homosexual* can be appropriate in some instances, but it carries with it a clinical and medicalized tone. As you will see in the timeline that follows, the medical community has a recent history of "treating homosexuality" with means that most would view as inhumane today. So many people prefer a term like *gay*, which was chosen and embraced by gay people, rather than *homosexual*, which was imposed by a then discriminatory medical system.

The gay and lesbian rights movement became widely recognizable in the United States in the 1950s and continues on today, as evidenced by prominent issues regarding sexual orientation in national news and politics. National and international groups like the Human Rights Campaign advocate for rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities. While these communities are often grouped together within one acronym (LGBTQ), they are different. Gays and lesbians constitute the most visible of the groups and receive the most attention and funding. Bisexuals are rarely visible or included in popular cultural discourses or in social and political movements. Transgender issues have received much more attention in recent years, but transgender identity connects to gender more than it does to sexuality. Last, *queer* is a term used to describe a group that is diverse in terms of identities but usually takes a more activist and at times radical stance that critiques sexual categories. While *queer* was long considered a derogatory label, and still is by some, the queer activist movement that emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s reclaimed the word and embraced it as a positive. As you can see, there is a diversity of identities among sexual minorities, just as there is variation within races and genders.

As with other cultural identities, notions of sexuality have been socially constructed in different ways throughout human history. Sexual orientation didn't come into being as an identity category until the late 1800s. Before that, sexuality was viewed in more physical or spiritual senses that were largely separate from a person's identity. Table 8.3 "Developments Related to Sexuality, Identity, and Communication" traces some of the developments relevant to sexuality, identity, and communication that show how this cultural identity has been constructed over the past 3,000 years.

Table 2.2.2: Developments Related to Sexuality, Identity, and Communication

Year(s)	Development
1400 BCE–565 BCE	During the Greek and Roman era, there was no conception of sexual orientation as an identity. However, sexual relationships between men were accepted for some members of society. Also at this time, Greek poet Sappho wrote about love between women.
533	Byzantine Emperor Justinian makes adultery and same-sex sexual acts punishable by death.
1533	Civil law in England indicates the death penalty can be given for same-sex sexual acts between men.
1810	Napoleonic Code in France removes all penalties for any sexual activity between consenting adults.
1861	England removes death penalty for same-sex sexual acts.
1892	The term <i>heterosexuality</i> is coined to refer a form of "sexual perversion" in which people engage in sexual acts for reasons other than reproduction.
1897	Dr. Magnus Hirschfield founds the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Berlin. It is the first gay rights organization.
1900–1930	Doctors "treat" homosexuality with castration, electro-shock therapy, and incarceration in mental hospitals.
1924	The first gay rights organization in the United States, the Chicago Society for Human Rights, is founded.
1933–44	Tens of thousands of gay men are sent to concentration camps under Nazi rule. The prisoners are forced to wear pink triangles on their uniforms. The pink triangle was later reclaimed as a symbol of gay rights.
1934	The terms <i>heterosexuality</i> and <i>homosexuality</i> appear in Webster's dictionary with generally the same meaning the terms hold today.
1948	American sexologist Alfred Kinsey's research reveals that more people than thought have engaged in same-sex sexual activity. His research highlights the existence of bisexuality.
1969	On June 27, patrons at the Stonewall Inn in New York City fight back as police raid the bar (a common practice used by police at the time to harass gay people). "The Stonewall Riot," as it came to be called, was led by gay, lesbian, and transgender patrons of the bar, many of whom were working class and/or people of color.
1974	The American Psychiatric Association removes its reference to homosexuality as a mental illness.
1999	The Vermont Supreme Court rules that the state must provide legal rights to same-sex couples. In 2000, Vermont becomes the first state to offer same-sex couples civil unions.

Year(s)	Development
2003	The US Supreme Court rules that Texas's sodomy law is unconstitutional, which effectively decriminalizes consensual same-sex relations.
2011	The US military policy "Don't Ask Don't Tell" is repealed, allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly.

Source: Adapted from Brenda J. Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2011), 117–25; and University of Denver Queer and Ally Commission, "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer History," *Queer Ally Training Manual*, 2008.

Ability

There is resistance to classifying ability as a cultural identity, because we follow a medical model of disability that places disability as an individual and medical rather than social and cultural issue. While much of what distinguishes able-bodied and cognitively able from disabled is rooted in science, biology, and physiology, there are important sociocultural dimensions. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines an individual with a **disability** as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" (Allen, 2011). An impairment is defined as "any temporary or permanent loss or abnormality of a body structure or function, whether physiological or psychological" (Allen, 2011). This definition is important because it notes the social aspect of disability in that people's life activities are limited and the relational aspect of disability in that the perception of a disability by others can lead someone to be classified as such. Ascribing an identity of disabled to a person can be problematic. If there is a mental or physical impairment, it should be diagnosed by a credentialed expert. If there isn't an impairment, then the label of *disabled* can have negative impacts, as this label carries social and cultural significance. People are tracked into various educational programs based on their physical and cognitive abilities, and there are many cases of people being mistakenly labeled disabled who were treated differently despite their protest of the ascribed label. Students who did not speak English as a first language, for example, were—and perhaps still are—sometimes put into special education classes.

Ability, just as the other cultural identities discussed, has institutionalized privileges and disadvantages associated with it. **Ableism** is the system of beliefs and practices that produces a physical and mental standard that is projected as normal for a human being and labels deviations from it abnormal, resulting in unequal treatment and access to resources. Ability privilege refers to the unearned advantages that are provided for people who fit the cognitive and physical norms (Allen, 2011). Perhaps you broke your leg and had to use crutches or a wheelchair for a while. Getting sick for a prolonged period of time also lessens our abilities, but we may fully recover from any of these examples and regain our ability privilege. Whether you've experienced a short-term disability or not, the majority of us will become less physically and cognitively able as we get older.

Statistically, people with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the United States, with an estimated 20 percent of people five years or older living with some form of disability (Allen, 2011). Medical advances have allowed some people with disabilities to live longer and more active lives than before, which has led to an increase in the number of people with disabilities. This number could continue to increase, as we have thousands of veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with physical disabilities or psychological impairments such as posttraumatic stress disorder.



Figure 2.2.2: As recently disabled veterans integrate back into civilian life, they will be offered assistance and accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Wounded Warrior Regiment – CC BY-NC 2.0.

As disability has been constructed in US history, it has intersected with other cultural identities. For example, people opposed to “political and social equality for women cited their supposed physical, intellectual, and psychological flaws, deficits, and deviations from the male norm.” They framed women as emotional, irrational, and unstable, which was used to put them into the “scientific” category of “feeble-mindedness,” which led them to be institutionalized (Carlson, 2001). Arguments supporting racial inequality and tighter immigration restrictions also drew on notions of disability, framing certain racial groups as prone to mental retardation, mental illness, or uncontrollable emotions and actions. See Table 8.4 “Developments Related to Ability, Identity, and Communication” for a timeline of developments related to ability, identity, and communication. These thoughts led to a dark time in US history, as the **eugenics** movement sought to limit reproduction of people deemed as deficient.

Table 2.2.3: Developments Related to Ability, Identity, and Communication

Year(s)	Development
400 BCE	The Greeks make connections between biology, physiology, and actions. For example, they make a connection between epilepsy and a disorder of the mind but still consider the source to be supernatural or divine.
30–480	People with disabilities are viewed with pity by early Christians and thought to be so conditioned because of an impurity that could possibly be addressed through prayer.
500–1500	As beliefs in the supernatural increase during the Middle Ages, people with disabilities are seen as manifestations of evil and are ridiculed and persecuted.
1650–1789	During the Enlightenment, the first large-scale movements toward the medical model are made, as science and medicine advance and society turns to a view of human rationality.
1900s	The eugenics movement in the United States begins. Laws are passed to sterilize the “socially inadequate,” and during this time, more than sixty thousand people were forcibly sterilized in thirty-three states.
1930s	People with disabilities become the first targets of experimentation and mass execution by the Nazis.
1970s	The independent living movement becomes a prominent part of the disability rights movement.
1990	The Americans with Disabilities Act is passed through Congress and signed into law.

Source: Maggie Shreve, “The Movement for Independent Living: A Brief History,” *Independent Living Research Utilization*, accessed October 14, 2011, ilru.org/html/publications/in...L_paradigm.doc.

During the early part of the 1900s, the eugenics movement was the epitome of the move to rehabilitate or reject people with disabilities (Allen, 2005). This was a brand of social engineering that was indicative of a strong public support in the rationality of science to cure society’s problems (Allen, 2011). A sterilization law written in 1914 “proposed to authorize sterilization of the socially inadequate,” which included the “feeble-minded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf, deformed, and dependent” (Lombardo, 2011). During the eugenics movement in the United States, more than sixty thousand people in thirty-three states were involuntarily sterilized (Allen, 2011). Although the eugenics movement as it was envisioned and enacted then is unthinkable today, some who have studied the eugenics movement of the early 1900s have issued warnings that a newly packaged version of eugenics could be upon us. As human genome mapping and DNA manipulation become more accessible, advanced genetic testing could enable parents to eliminate undesirable aspects or enhance desirable characteristics of their children before they are born, creating “designer children” (Spice, 2005).

Much has changed for people with disabilities in the United States in the past fifty years. The independent living movement (ILM) was a part of the disability rights movement that took shape along with other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The ILM

calls for more individual and collective action toward social change by people with disabilities. Some of the goals of the ILM include reframing disability as a social and political rather than just a medical issue, a shift toward changing society rather than just rehabilitating people with disabilities, a view of accommodations as civil rights rather than charity, and more involvement by people with disabilities in the formulation and execution of policies relating to them (Longmore, 2003). As society better adapts to people with disabilities, there will be more instances of interability communication taking place.

Interability communication is communication between people with differing ability levels; for example, a hearing person communicating with someone who is hearing impaired or a person who doesn't use a wheelchair communicating with someone who uses a wheelchair. Since many people are unsure of how to communicate with a person with disabilities, following are the "Ten Commandments of Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities" to help you in communicating with persons with disabilities:

1. When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion or sign-language interpreter.
2. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.)
3. When meeting a person who is visually impaired, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
5. Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.)
6. Leaning on or hanging on to a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on to a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.
7. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.
8. When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.
9. To get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to determine if the person can read your lips. Not all people who are deaf can read lips. For those who do lip read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when speaking.
10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to a person's disability. Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

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2.3: Identity and Migration

Cross-cultural adaptation

Those who have the day-to-day experience of living in the culture are likely to have a quite different experience from tourists. This might involve learning and using a second language, coping with bureaucracies, finding out how things get done in that culture, making new friends, and a host of other issues and potential difficulties that everyone living in that culture – native or foreigner – experiences. This process of adjustment is often referred to as **acculturation**, the learning and adapting of at least some of the values, norms, and behaviors of the new culture. This may be an easy process, or long and difficult. That depends on many factors, including one's age, educational level, familiarity with the language and culture, reasons for relocating, support structures available (friends, family, coworkers), and the degree of difference between one's home culture and that of the new residence. Acculturation can be fragmented; that is, one might adapt to some parts of a culture and not others. Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999) distinguish between psychological adjustment (emotional well-being) and sociocultural adaptation (the ability to function day-to-day in the target culture). While psychological adjustment is largely dependent on personality and social support, "sociocultural adaptation, measured in relation to the amount of difficulty experienced in the performance of daily tasks, is more dependent on variables such as length of residence in the new culture, language ability, cultural distance, and the quantity of contact with host nationals" (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999, p. 424). While both forms of adjustment are present during initial contact with the new culture, normally sociocultural problems steadily decrease over time. Psychological adjustments are more variable.

The process of acculturation can vary as well depending on the purpose of the contact, such as colonization, trade, evangelism, or education. It can also depend on the length of time the contact lasts. A scholar who has studied acculturation extensively, John Berry, has identified four principal modes of acculturation (Berry & Sam, 1997). **Assimilation** is the loss of one's original cultural identity by acquiring a new identity in the host culture. The goal is to become indistinguishable from other people in that culture. Adapting to the host culture but maintaining the identity from one's native culture is **integration**. This kind of bicultural identity is likely to provide the most successful and satisfying acculturative experience. In some cases, individuals prefer no close contact with the host culture. In this mode, **separation**, the individual maintains his or her native identity with minimal adaptation to the host culture, although the individual may choose for practical reasons, such as employment, to adopt particular aspects of the host culture (speech, dress). The fourth mode of acculturation is **marginalization**, in which individuals have a weak identification with both host and native cultures. This can lead to alienation and a sense of abandonment. An additional mode of acculturation was identified by Richard Mendoza (1989). He labeled this **cultural transmutation**, in which an individual chooses to identify predominately with a third cultural group, such as youth culture or gay/lesbian groups.

The history of immigration in the United States also ties to the way that race has been constructed. The metaphor of the melting pot has been used to describe the immigration history of the United States but doesn't capture the experiences of many immigrant groups (Allen, 2011). Generally, immigrant groups who were white, or light skinned, and spoke English were better able to assimilate, or melt into the melting pot. But immigrant groups that we might think of as white today were not always considered so. Irish immigrants were discriminated against and even portrayed as black in cartoons that appeared in newspapers. In some Southern states, Italian immigrants were forced to go to black schools, and it wasn't until 1952 that Asian immigrants were allowed to become citizens of the United States. All this history is important, because it continues to influence communication among races today.

Getting Critical

Immigration, Laws, and Religion

France, like the United States, has a constitutional separation between church and state. As many countries in Europe, including France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, have experienced influxes of immigrants, many of them Muslim, there have been growing tensions among immigration, laws, and religion. In 2011, France passed a law banning the wearing of a *niqab* (pronounced *knee-cobb*), which is an Islamic facial covering worn by some women that only exposes the eyes. This law was aimed at "assimilating its Muslim population" of more than five million people and "defending French values and women's rights" (De La Baume & Goodman, 2011). Women found wearing the veil can now be cited and fined \$150 euros. Although the law went into effect in April of 2011, the first fines were issued in late September of 2011. Hind Ahmas, a woman who was fined, says she welcomes the punishment because she wants to challenge the law in the European Court of Human Rights. She also stated that she respects French laws but cannot abide by this one. Her choice to wear the veil has been met with more than a fine. She recounts how she has been denied access to banks and other public buildings and was

verbally harassed by a woman on the street and then punched in the face by the woman's husband. Another Muslim woman named Kenza Drider, announced that she will run for the presidency of France in order to challenge the law. The bill that contained the law was broadly supported by politicians and the public in France, and similar laws are already in place in Belgium and are being proposed in Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, and Switzerland (Fraser, 2011).

1. Some people who support the law argue that part of integrating into Western society is showing your face. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. Part of the argument for the law is to aid in the assimilation of Muslim immigrants into French society. What are some positives and negatives of this type of assimilation?
3. Identify which of the previously discussed dialectics can be seen in this case. How do these dialectics capture the tensions involved?

There are many reasons why people migrate to new countries, including the need to find gainful employment for oneself and one's family. The book *Global Woman* (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003) describes how millions of women migrate in order to support their families, moving from the global south (Philippines, Sri Lanka, India) to the north (North America, Europe and Middle East) to work as domestics:

Mexican and Latin American women are the domestics for U.S. women; Asian migrant women work in British homes; North African women work in French homes; Turkish women in German homes; Filipinas work in Spain, Italy, and Greece; and Filipino, Indian, and Sri Lankan women travel to Saudi Arabia to work (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 311).

Such migrations raise many troubling issues. In addition to the main issue of social injustice and cultural loss, Ehrenreich & Hochschild point to the ironic fact that often women in such situations are forced to leave their own children in the care of others while they tend to the children of their employers.



Figure 2.3.1: Filipina nanny in Canada

Added to the emotional toll these women endure from being separated from their families and cultures, they may not find social acceptance in the host communities. Typically, domestic or manual migrant laborers are treated differently from intellectual workers or business professionals. Migrants from the same country might be treated differently in the host culture:

Class issues often enter into the picture. Sometimes immigrant workers are seen as necessary but are not really welcomed into the larger society because of their class (which is often fused with racial differences). And sometimes the discrimination and class issues result in conflict between recent migrants and emigrants from the same country who have been in the host country for a long time. (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 339).

In the US, for example, Mexican workers who have achieved middle class status, and therefore some degree of acceptance in mainstream white US society, may take a dim view of the arrival of undocumented Mexicans, since their arrival may jeopardize their own standing (see sidebar). A crucial factor that affects social acceptance is not just the identity and status of the migrants, but as well their numbers.

Old & new immigrants: not always a good mix

Mexicans have come in increasing numbers to work in the carpet plants in the Southeast [USA] and in the meatpacking plants in the Midwest. This has led to tension between those Latinos/as, who have worked hard to achieve harmony with whites and to attain middle-class status, and the newcomers, who are usually poor and have lower English proficiency. The older Latinos/as feel caught between the two—ridiculed by whites for not speaking English correctly and now by recently arrived Mexicans for mangling Spanish. This resentment between old and new immigrants has always been present in America—from the arrival of the first Europeans.

Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 339

Refugees

In addition to those leaving their home country in order to better themselves and their families economically, many migrants leave in order to escape regional or national danger or deprivation. Some leave to escape discrimination due to their ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. In some cases, migration may be limited to individuals, families, or small groups, as may be the case with political activists or members of small religious denominations. In other cases, there may be mass immigration due to extreme conditions of hardship or widespread political or religious persecution. In the 19th century, for example, large numbers of Irish families migrated to the US due to the potato famine, as did many Germans to escape political prosecution after the failed 1848 revolution. Discrimination towards minorities, leading in some instances to **ethnic cleansing**, can lead to mass migration. Large numbers of Rohingyas, Muslims from Rakhine State have left Myanmar (Burma) to escape mistreatment.

The Rohingyas have sought refuge in Bangladesh and Thailand, countries located nearby. This is the normal pattern for refugees, that they tend to relocate to areas close by their home countries. This is for practical reasons, namely ease of migration and likely cultural similarities. Many refugees prefer to stay close to home in the hope of repatriation after a short period away. In other cases, families may be separated and want to stay close to enable family reunification. Sadly, hopes that refugees' stay will be temporary are often disappointed. Many temporary refugee settlements become semi-permanent. Displaced Palestinians, for example, have lived in refugee settlements since the Six Days War in 1967. Long-term refugees can be found in many other regions, particularly in Africa. The quality of life in refugee camps varies considerably. Generally, however, available services will be significantly inferior to those available to permanent residents of the country. Schools may not be available, and there will often be substandard health care. Refugees are not usually permitted to work. Given the adverse conditions, it's not surprising that refugee settlements often become sites of strife and hopelessness.



Figure 2.3.2: Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

The relationship between refugees and permanent residents is often problematic. The local populace may resent public resources being used to support groups of refugees. There may be fears that frustrated refugees will resort to crime. Occasionally, there are rumors about refugees bringing in diseases. In recent years, a new worry has emerged, namely that refugees are harboring terrorists in their midst. The large influx of refugees to Europe from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other Middle Eastern and some African countries in 2014 through 2016 contributed to the backlash against immigrants that led to protest movements and the rise of anti-immigrant political parties in Denmark, France, Germany and other countries. In some cases, backlashes against refugees have led to discriminatory actions, such as not allowing refugee children to attend public schools. Sometimes, refugees are exploited as

cheap labor, or women are tricked into working in the sex industry. In recent years there has been violence directed against refugees in some countries. In Germany, for example, built or designated refugee homes have been set on fire by arsonists.

Organized efforts to help refugees exist in many countries. In some cases, these are organized by national governments, often in cooperation with international groups such as the international Red Cross or the UN Refugee Agency. The help may come in the form of food, clothing, and housing. Occasionally, social and medical services may be offered. Educational and cultural resources are provided less often. As it is uncertain how long refugees will be present, there is often no long-term planning for their possible integration into the host country. At a minimum, one should expect to have schools available for all children. Ideally, training should be provided to enable future employment either in the host country, or wherever the refugee may end up living. Training in English, for example, is crucial in virtually any country, for use as a lingua franca in the host country, but also as an important factor in employability.

Some governments and NGOs have come up with innovative ways to provide language and cultural training. Today, phones provide a lifeline for many refugees. They provide a vital way to connect to families and friends in the home country as well as those in the host country or on their way. A report from the European Union Institute for Security Studies stated:

Migrants are linking up online to cross borders and meet their basic needs. They are using smartphones to share tips and geo-positional data as they cross North Africa. They rank and rate Afghan people-smugglers, trying to hold the criminals accountable for the safe transport of family members. On Google they share tips, such as to avoid exploitative Istanbul taxi drivers or evade new EU border controls. (Parkes, 2016, p. 1)

The kind of device that migrants use will vary with the individual and place of origin. One account has shown that of young Syrian refugees, 86% owned a smartphone (Parkes, 2016). A number of mobile apps have been developed by NGOs and government agencies to help migrants in a variety of areas, including language learning, cultural integration, and practical day-to-day living. Some apps aid in the process of migrants making their way through intermediate countries to their final destination. [InfoAid](#) helps refugees in Hungary, while [Gherbtina](#) is aimed at Syrians newly arrived in Turkey. The [Mobile Legal Info Source](#) helps navigate Turkey's legal system. The [Crisis Info Hub](#) offers support for new arrivals in Greece.

Mobile devices can provide tools and services which can ease the transition into the culture, but they can only go so far in helping the adjustment process. Ultimately, the situation of refugees depends on the reception they receive in the host country, the living conditions provided, and on the opportunities available for living a healthy and meaningful existence. For refugees eventually granted asylum and permanent residence, the struggle is not necessarily over. Individuals will need to go through a process of transitioning into the new culture, not always a smooth, easy, or quick process.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Intercultural Communication Competence

3.1: Intercultural Communication Competence

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3.1: Intercultural Communication Competence

People who have developed good communication skills are often described as having communication competence. Communicating effectively, along with writing and critical thinking, is often considered one of the key skills of gaining a college education. To have communication competence means that “we have knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts” (Cooley & Roach, 1984).

The National Communication Association (NCA) has developed guidelines for what it means to be a competent communicator (1999). They include:

1. State ideas clearly.
2. Communicate ethically.
3. Recognize when it is appropriate to communicate.
4. Identify their communication goals.
5. Select the most appropriate and effective medium for communicating.
6. Demonstrate credibility.
7. Identify and manage misunderstandings.
8. Manage conflict.
9. Be open-minded about another’s point of view.
10. Listen attentively.

Intercultural communication competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. Researcher Owen Hargie (2011) proposed that there were four levels of intercultural communication competence based on competent and incompetent communication as well as conscious or unconscious communication. **Unconscious incompetence** is the “be yourself” approach. This person may not have a strong knowledge of cultural differences and does not see any need to accommodate differences in communication styles or culture. They may not even be aware they are communicating in an incompetent manner. Once people learn more about culture and communication, they may become **conscious incompetent**. This is where they have the vocabulary to identify the concepts, and know what they should be doing, but realize they are not communicating as well as they could. Many of us have experienced the feeling that something isn’t quite right, yet we can’t quite figure out what went wrong. As communication skills increase, and the focus is on cultural concepts and communication styles, you become a **conscious competent** communicator. You know that you are communicating well in the moment, and you can add this memory to your growing bank of successful intercultural interactions. Reaching this level is important, but not the pinnacle of competent communication. **Unconscious competence** is the level to achieve. Unconscious competence means that you can communicate successfully without straining to be competent. At this point all the knowledge and previous experiences have been put into practice, and you rarely have to intently focus on your intercultural interactions because it has become second nature. You have developed the skills needed to be competent.

Cultivating Intercultural Communication Competence

While building any form of competence requires effort, building intercultural communication competence often requires us to take more risks. Some of these risks require us to leave our comfort zones and adapt to new and uncertain situations. What it means to be competent will vary depending on your physical location, your role (personal, professional, etc.), and your life stage, among other things. Sometimes we will know or be able to figure out what is expected of us in a given situation, but sometimes we may need to act in unexpected ways to meet the needs of a situation. Competence enables us to better cope with the unexpected, adapt to the nonroutine, and connect to uncommon frameworks. How can intercultural communication competence be built and achieved? This is a key question we will address in this section. I have always told my students that intercultural communication competence is less about a list of rules and more about a box of tools. Three ways to cultivate intercultural communication competence are to foster attitudes that motivate us, discover knowledge that informs us, and develop skills that enable us (Bennett, 2009).

Motivation

To foster attitudes that motivate us, we must develop a sense of wonder about culture. This sense of wonder can lead to feeling overwhelmed, humbled, or awed (Opdal, 2001). This sense of wonder may correlate to a high tolerance for uncertainty, which can help us turn potentially frustrating experiences we have into teachable moments. Initially, a person’s motivation for communicating with people from other cultures must be considered. Motivation refers to the root of a person’s desire to foster intercultural relationships. (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Put simply, if a person isn’t motivated to communicate with people from different

cultures, then the components of intercultural communication competence discussed next don't really matter. If a person has a healthy curiosity that drives him or her toward intercultural encounters in order to learn more about self and others, then there is a foundation from which to build additional competence-relevant attitudes and skills. This **intrinsic motivation** makes intercultural communication a voluntary, rewarding, and lifelong learning process. While intrinsic motivation captures an idealistic view of intercultural communication as rewarding in its own right, many contexts create extrinsic motivation. **Extrinsic motivation** for intercultural communication is driven by the desire of an outside reward like money, power, or recognition. While both types of motivation can contribute to intercultural communication competence, tolerance for uncertainty may further enhance or impede a person's motivation to communicate across cultures.

Tolerance for uncertainty refers to an individual's attitude about and level of comfort in uncertain situations (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Some people perform better in uncertain situations than others, and intercultural encounters often bring up uncertainty. Whether communicating with someone of a different gender, race, or nationality, we are often wondering what we should or shouldn't do or say. Situations of uncertainty most often become clearer as they progress, but the anxiety that an individual with a low tolerance for uncertainty feels may lead them to leave the situation or otherwise communicate in a less competent manner. Individuals with a high tolerance for uncertainty may exhibit more patience, waiting on new information to become available or seeking out information, which may then increase the understanding of the situation and lead to a more successful outcome (Pusch, 2009). Individuals who are intrinsically motivated toward intercultural communication may have a higher tolerance for uncertainty, in that their curiosity leads them to engage with others who are different because they find the self- and other-knowledge gained rewarding.

Members of dominant groups are often less motivated, intrinsically and extrinsically, toward intercultural communication than members of nondominant groups, because they don't see the incentives for doing so. Having more power in communication encounters can create an unbalanced situation where the individual from the nondominant group is expected to exhibit competence, or the ability to adapt to the communication behaviors and attitudes of the other. Even in situations where extrinsic rewards like securing an overseas business investment are at stake, it is likely that the foreign investor is much more accustomed to adapting to United States business customs and communication than vice versa. This expectation that others will adapt to our communication can be unconscious, but later intercultural communication competence skills we will learn will help bring it to awareness.

The unbalanced situation I just described is a daily reality for many individuals with nondominant identities. Their motivation toward intercultural communication may be driven by survival in terms of functioning effectively in dominant contexts. Recall the phenomenon known as code-switching discussed earlier, in which individuals from nondominant groups adapt their communication to fit in with the dominant group. In such instances, African Americans may "talk white" by conforming to what is called "standard English," women in corporate environments may adapt masculine communication patterns, people who are gay or lesbian may self-censor and avoid discussing their same-gender partners with coworkers, and people with nonvisible disabilities may not disclose them in order to avoid judgment. These situations highlight the relational aspect of intercultural communication competence, meaning that the motivation of all parties should be considered.

Knowledge

Motivation alone cannot create intercultural communication competence. Discovering knowledge that informs us is another step that can build on our motivation and is an important part of building intercultural communication competence. Knowledge includes self- and other-awareness, mindfulness, and cognitive flexibility. Building knowledge of our own cultures, identities, and communication patterns takes more than passive experience (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Developing cultural **self-awareness** often requires us to get out of our comfort zones. Listening to people who are different from us is a key component of developing self-knowledge. The most effective way to develop **other-awareness** is by direct and thoughtful encounters with other cultures. However, people may not readily have these opportunities for a variety of reasons. Despite the overall diversity in the United States, many people still only interact with people who are similar to them. Even in a racially diverse educational setting, for example, people often group off with people of their own race. While a heterosexual person may have a gay or lesbian friend or relative, they likely spend most of their time with other heterosexuals. Able-bodied people, unless they interact with people with disabilities as part of their job or have a person with a disability in their family, likely spend most of their time interacting with able-bodied people. Living in a rural area may limit one's ability to interact with a range of cultures, and most people do not travel internationally regularly. Because of this, we may have to make a determined effort to interact with people from other cultures or rely on educational sources like college classes, books, or documentaries. Learning another language is also a good way to learn about a culture, because you can then read the news or watch movies in the native language, which can offer insights that are lost in translation. It is important to note though that we must evaluate the credibility of the source of our knowledge, whether it is a book,

person, or other source. Also, knowledge of another language does not automatically equate to intercultural communication competence.

Developing knowledge through self- and other-awareness is an ongoing process that will continue to adapt and grow as we encounter new experiences. Mindfulness and cognitive complexity will help as we continue to build our intercultural communication competence (Pusch, 2009). **Mindfulness** is a state of self- and other-monitoring that informs later reflection on communication interactions. As mindful communicators we should ask questions that focus on the interactive process like “How is our communication going? What are my reactions? What are their reactions?” Being able to adapt our communication in the moment based on our answers to these questions is a skill that comes with a high level of intercultural communication competence. Reflecting on the communication encounter later to see what can be learned is also a way to build intercultural communication competence. We should then be able to incorporate what we learned into our communication frameworks. One tool to increase mindfulness involves learning more about our cognitive style, or how we learn. Our cognitive style consists of our preferred patterns for “gathering information, constructing meaning, and organizing and applying knowledge” (Bennett, 2009). As we explore cognitive styles, we discover that there are differences in how people attend to and perceive the world, explain events, and use rules of logic (Nisbett, 2003). Some cultures have a cognitive style that focuses more on tasks, analytic and objective thinking, details and precision, inner direction, and independence, while others focus on relationships and people over tasks and things, concrete and metaphorical thinking, and a group consciousness and harmony. This awareness can lead to **cognitive flexibility**, which refers to the ability to continually supplement and revise existing knowledge to create new categories rather than forcing new knowledge into old categories. Cognitive flexibility helps prevent our knowledge from becoming stale and also prevents the formation of stereotypes and can help us avoid prejudging an encounter or jumping to conclusions. In summary, to be better intercultural communicators, we should know much about others and ourselves and be able to reflect on and adapt our knowledge as we gain new experiences.

Skills

Developing skills that enable us is another part of intercultural communication competence. Some of the skills important to intercultural communication competence are the ability to empathize, accumulate cultural information, listen, resolve conflict, and manage anxiety (Bennett, 2009). Again, you are already developing a foundation for these skills by reading this book, but you can expand those skills to intercultural settings with the motivation and knowledge already described. Contact with culturally different others alone does not increase intercultural skills; there must be more deliberate measures taken to fully capitalize on those encounters. While research now shows that intercultural contact does decrease prejudices, this is not enough to become interculturally competent. The ability to empathize and manage anxiety enhances prejudice reduction, and these two skills have been shown to enhance the overall impact of intercultural contact even more than acquiring cultural knowledge. There is intercultural training available for people who are interested. If you can’t access training, you may choose to research intercultural training on your own, as there are many books, articles, and manuals written on the subject.

Reflective practices can also help us process through rewards and challenges associated with developing intercultural communication competence. As we open ourselves to new experiences, we are likely to have both positive and negative reactions. It can be very useful to take note of negative or defensive reactions you have. This can help you identify certain triggers that may create barriers to effective intercultural interaction. Noting positive experiences can also help you identify triggers for learning that you could seek out or recreate to enhance the positive (Bednarz, 2010). A more complex method of reflection is called intersectional reflexivity. Intersectional reflexivity is a reflective practice by which we acknowledge intersecting identities, both privileged and disadvantaged, and implicate ourselves in social hierarchies and inequalities (Jones Jr., 2010). This method brings in the concepts of dominant and nondominant groups and the privileges/disadvantages dialectic we discussed earlier in chapter 2.

While formal intercultural experiences like studying abroad or volunteering for the Special Olympics or a shelter for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth can result in learning, informal experiences are also important. We may be less likely to include informal experiences in our reflection if we don’t see them as legitimate. Reflection should also include “critical incidents” or what I call “a-ha! moments.” Think of reflection as a tool for metacompetence that can be useful in bringing the formal and informal together (Bednarz, 2010).

“Getting Competent”

Thinking under the Influence

Communication and culture scholar Brenda Allen coined the phrase “thinking under the influence” (TUI) to highlight a reflective process that can help us hone our intercultural communication competence (Allen, 2011). As we discussed earlier,

being mindful is an important part of building competence. Once we can become aware of our thought processes and behaviors, we can more effectively monitor and intervene in them. She asks us to monitor our thoughts and feelings about other people, both similar to and different from us. As we monitor, we should try to identify instances when we are guilty of TUI, such as uncritically accepting the dominant belief systems, relying on stereotypes, or prejudging someone based on their identities. She recounts seeing a picture on the front of the newspaper with three men who appeared Latino. She found herself wondering what they had done, and then found out from the caption that they were the relatives of people who died in a car crash. She identified that as a TUI moment and asked herself if she would have had the same thought if they had been black, white, Asian, or female. When we feel “surprised” by someone different, this often points to a preexisting negative assumption that we can unpack and learn from. Allen also found herself surprised when a panelist at a conference who used a wheelchair and was hearing impaired made witty comments. Upon reflection, she realized that she had an assumption that people with disabilities would have a gloomy outlook on life. While these examples focus on out-groups, she also notes that it’s important for people, especially in nondominant groups, to monitor their thoughts about their own group, as they may have internalized negative attitudes about their group from the dominant culture. As a black woman, she notes that she has been critical of black people who “do not speak mainstream English” based on stereotypes she internalized about race, language, and intelligence. It is not automatically a bad thing to TUI. Even Brenda Allen, an accomplished and admirable scholar of culture and communication, catches herself doing it. When we notice that we TUI, it’s important to reflect on that moment and try to adjust our thinking processes. This is an ongoing process, but it is an easy-to-remember way to cultivate your intercultural communication competence. Keep a record of instances where you catch yourself “thinking under the influence” and answer the following questions:

1. What triggers you to TUI?
2. Where did these influences on your thought come from?
3. What concepts from this chapter can you apply to change your thought processes?

Intercultural learning is a lifelong process. The content you have covered in this text is complex, challenging, and at times, confronting. As you are now aware, the idea of becoming culturally competent represents an over-simplified understanding of intercultural learning. This text is a starting point in developing your critical lens through which you can examine, reflect, and extract deeper learning from your intercultural experiences. Maintaining a critical perspective that is informed by an awareness of your cultural self takes practice. We encourage you to keep working on the development of your critical lens, expect to make mistakes and reflect on your experiences. You will be able to apply these skills not only to your upcoming intercultural experience, but also throughout your personal and professional working life. Good luck and safe journey.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Cultural Essentials and the Roots of Culture

[4.1: A Values Analysis Approach to Intercultural Communication](#)

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4.1: A Values Analysis Approach to Intercultural Communication

Anyone who has had an intercultural encounter or participated in intercultural communication can tell you that they encountered differences between themselves and others. Acknowledging the differences isn't difficult. Rather, the difficulties come from describing the differences using terms that accurately convey the subtle meanings within cultures. These subtle meanings are rooted in deep-level, cultural value systems.

Values and Culture

Value systems are fundamental to understanding how culture expresses itself. **Values** are deeply felt and often serve as principles that guide people in their perceptions and behaviors. Using our values, certain ideas are judged to be right or wrong, good or bad, important or not important, desirable or not desirable. Cultural values are learned, mostly subconsciously, and are hidden deep within the language and traditions of the surrounding society. Shared cultural values form the customs, guide the behaviors, and shape the attitudes of its members. Therefore, analyzing cultural values can be a useful way to understand fundamental differences between cultures.

Geert Hofstede, sometimes called the father of modern cross-cultural science and thinking, developed a framework for comparing values across cultures. Through his research, he identified six key value dimensions (individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, long/short term orientation, and indulgence/restraint) that analyze and interpret the values of a national culture (Hofstede, 1980).

Value Dimensions

Individualism vs. Collectivism

The salient category often used to characterize and contrast cultures is individualism versus collectivism. Individualism vs. collectivism anchor opposite ends of a continuum that describes how people define themselves and their relationships with others. **Individualism** is just what it sounds like. It refers to people's tendency to take care of themselves and their immediate circle of family and friends, perhaps at the expense of the overall society. Cultures labeled as individualistic are seen as emphasizing the rights of the individual to self-determination, with children being brought up to be assertive and distinctive. In individualistic cultures, what counts most is the self, or concern for one's own personal goals. Each person is viewed as responsible for their own success or failure in life. Initiating alone, sweating alone, achieving alone—not necessarily collective efforts—are what win applause. In individualistic cultures, competition is the fuel of success. The United States is labeled as the most individualistic country. People from the United States strongly believe in independence. They consider themselves as separate individuals in control of their own lives. The Declaration of Independence states that all people—not groups, but individual people—are created equal. In the United States, individualism is valued and promoted—from its political structure (individual rights and democracy) to entrepreneurial zeal (capitalism). Other examples of high-individualism cultures include Northern European societies and Australia.

In contrast, **collectivism** describes a society in which tightly-integrated relationships tie extended families and others into in-groups. These in-groups are laced with undoubted loyalty and support each other. When a person or culture has a collective orientation they place the needs and interests of the group above individual desires or motivations. Collectivistic cultures (seen as prevalent in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East) emphasize group identity and conformity, with children expected to be obedient and respectful.

When looking at Hofstede's research and that of others on individualism and collectivism, it is important to remember is that no culture is purely one or the other. Again, think of these qualities as points along a continuum rather than fixed positions. Individuals and co-cultures may exhibit differences in individualism/collectivism from the dominant culture and certain contexts may highlight one or the other. Also remember that it can be very difficult to change one's orientation and interaction with those with different value orientations can prove challenging. In some of your classes, for example, does the Professor require a group project as part of the final grade? How do students respond to such an assignment? In our experience we find that some students enjoy and benefit from the collective and collaborative process and seem to learn better in such an environment. These students have more of a collectivistic orientation. Other students, usually the majority, are resistant to such assignments citing reasons such as "it's difficult to coordinate schedules with four other people" or "I don't want my grade resting on someone else's performance." These statements reflect an individualistic orientation.

Power Distance

Power distance refers to how openly a society or culture accepts or does not accept differences between people, as in hierarchies in the workplace, in politics, and so on. For example, **large power distance** cultures openly accept that a boss is “higher” and as such deserves more formal respect and authority. People tend to accept relationships of servitude. Subordinates expect to be told what to do and won’t take initiative or speak their minds unless a manager explicitly asks for their opinion. They would probably be much less likely to challenge a decision, to provide an alternative, or to give input. They may have learned that less powerful people must accept decisions without comment, even if they have a concern or know there is a significant problem. An individual’s status, age, and seniority are an integral part of the social equation. Examples of these cultures include Southern Europe, Latin America, and much of Asia. For example, in Japan or Mexico, the senior person is almost a father figure and is automatically given respect and usually loyalty without question.

At the other end of the spectrum are **small power distance** cultures, in which superiors and subordinates are more likely to see each other as equal in power. This sense of equality leads to the idea that all people are of the same standing or importance, and therefore, informality or lack of rigid social protocol is common. This leads to an informality of speech, dress, and manners that other cultures might find difficult to negotiate because of their own beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors. In Sweden, Norway, and Israel, for example, respect for equality is a warranty of freedom. Subordinates and managers alike often have carte blanche to speak their minds. Other countries found at this end of the spectrum include Austria and Denmark.

To be sure, not all cultures view power in the same ways. Research indicates that the United States tilts toward small power distance but is more in the middle of the scale than Germany and the United Kingdom. The United States has a culture of promoting participation at the office while maintaining control in the hands of the manager. People in this type of culture tend to be relatively laid-back about status and social standing—but there’s a firm understanding of who has the power. What’s surprising for many people is that countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia actually rank lower on the power distance spectrum than the United States.



Figure 4.1.1: A map which shows the relative power distance of nations around the world

Uncertainty Avoidance

The uncertainty avoidance index measures a society’s tolerance for ambiguity, in which people embrace or avert an event of something unexpected, unknown, or away from the status quo. People who have **strong uncertainty avoidance** generally prefer to steer clear of conflict and competition. They tend to appreciate very clear instructions. They dislike ambiguity. At the office, sharply defined rules and rituals are used to get tasks completed. Stability and what is known are preferred to instability and the unknown. Cultures in the Arab world, for example, have strong uncertainty avoidance; they tend to be resistant to change and reluctant to take risks. Whereas a U.S. business negotiator might enthusiastically agree to try a new procedure, the Egyptian counterpart would likely refuse to get involved until all the details are worked out.

Weak uncertainty avoidance cultures, such as the U.S. and Britain, show more acceptance of differing thoughts or ideas and are highly tolerant of uncertainty. Such cultures tend to impose fewer regulations, ambiguity is more accustomed to, and the environment is more free-flowing. In educational settings, people from countries with strong uncertainty avoidance expect their teachers to be experts with all of the answers. People from weak uncertainty avoidance countries don’t mind it when a teacher says, “I don’t know.”

Masculinity vs. Femininity

This index is about how a society views traits that are considered masculine or feminine. Each carries with it a set of cultural expectations and norms for gender behavior and gender roles across life. Traditionally perceived “masculine” values are

assertiveness, materialism, and less concern for others. In **masculine-oriented cultures**, gender roles are usually crisply defined. Men tend to be the bread winners and women take care of domestic duties. Men tend to be more focused on performance, ambition, and material success. They cut tough and independent personas, while women cultivate modesty and quality of life. Cultures in Japan and Latin American are examples of masculine-oriented cultures.

In contrast, feminine cultures are thought to emphasize “feminine” values: concern for all, an emphasis on the quality of life, and an emphasis on relationships. In **feminine-oriented cultures**, gender roles are more fluid. In such societies it is not uncommon to see women as political and business leaders. There are fewer obstacles for women who enter the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, and less stigma for men who are stay-at-home dads or who enter the helping professions; those occupations typically considered more feminine. Feminine cultures typically offer generous paid maternity *and* paternity leave, free healthcare and free access to higher education. The Scandinavian cultures rank as feminine cultures, as do cultures in Switzerland and New Zealand. The United States is actually more moderate, and its score is ranked in the middle between masculine and feminine classifications.

Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation

This fifth dimension refers to whether a culture has a long-term or short-term orientation. This dimension was added by Hofstede after the original four you just read about. It resulted in the effort to understand the difference in thinking between the East and the West. Certain values are associated with each orientation. **The long-term orientation** values persistence, perseverance, and thriftiness. These are evident in traditional Eastern cultures. Long-term orientation is often marked by an order to relationships based on age and status. A sense of shame, both personal and for the family and community, is also observed across generations. What an individual does reflects on the family, and is carried by immediate and extended family members.

The short-term orientation values tradition only to the extent of fulfilling social obligations or providing gifts or favors. While there may be a respect for tradition, there is also an emphasis on personal representation and honor, a reflection of identity and integrity. Personal stability and consistency are also valued in a short-term oriented culture, contributing to an overall sense of predictability and familiarity. These cultures are more likely to be focused on the immediate or short-term impact of an issue. Not surprisingly, the United Kingdom and the United States rank as short-term orientation.

Indulgence vs. Restraint

This dimension refers to the degree of freedom that societal norms give to citizens in fulfilling their human desires. Countries with a **high indulgence** rating allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. These cultures tend to place a higher importance on leisure and tend to act and spend money as they please. Countries with a **low indulgence** rating have strict social norms. Citizens are more likely to feel powerless, as if their experiences are not determined by their own actions, but rather situations happen to them. There is often a more visible police force, and maintaining national order is a high priority. Countries in Eastern Europe, including Russia, and some Asian countries have low indulgence ratings, indicating a restrained culture. Often, in these countries, there is a pervading idea that indulgence is somewhat wrong. While much of Western Europe falls in the median, most Anglo-Western nations such as The United States have a high indulgence rating.

Value Orientation Theory

The Kluckhohn-Strodtbeck Value Orientations theory represents one of the earliest efforts to develop a cross-cultural theory of values. According to Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), every culture faces the same basic survival needs and must answer the same universal questions. It is out of this need that cultural values arise. The basic questions faced by people everywhere fall into five categories and reflect concerns about: 1) human nature, 2) the relationship between human beings and the natural world, 3) time, 4) human activity, and 5) social relations. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck hypothesized three possible responses or orientations to each of the concerns.

Table 4.1.1: Summary of Kluckhohn-Strodtbeck Values Orientation Theory

Basic Concerns		Orientations	
Human nature	Evil	Mixed	Good
Relationship to natural world	Control	Harmony	Submission
Time	Past	Present	Future
Activity	Being	Becoming	Doing

What is the inherent nature of human beings?

According to Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, this is a question that all societies ask, and there are generally three different responses. The people in some societies are inclined to believe that people are inherently evil and that the society must exercise strong measures to keep the evil impulses of people in check. On the other hand, other societies are more likely to see human beings as basically good and possessing an inherent tendency towards goodness. Between these two poles are societies that see human beings as possessing the potential to be either good or evil depending upon the influences that surround them. Societies also differ on whether human nature is immutable (*unchangeable*) or mutable (*changeable*).

What is the relationship between human beings and the natural world?

Some societies believe nature is a powerful force in the face of which human beings are essentially helpless. We could describe this as “nature over humans.” Other societies are more likely to believe that through intelligence and the application of technology, humans can control nature. In other words, they embrace a “humans over nature” position. Between these two extremes are the societies who believe humans are wise to strive to live in “harmony with nature.”

What is the best way to think about time?

Some societies are rooted in the past, believing that people should learn from history and strive to preserve the traditions of the past. Other societies place more value on the here and now, believing people should live fully in the present. Then there are societies that place the greatest value on the future, believing people should always delay immediate satisfactions while they plan and work hard to make a better future.

What is the proper mode of human activity?

In some societies, “being” is the most valued orientation. Striving for great things is not necessary or important. In other societies, “becoming” is what is most valued. Life is regarded as a process of continual unfolding. Our purpose on earth, the people might say, is to become fully human. Finally, there are societies that are primarily oriented to “doing.” In such societies, people are likely to think of the inactive life as a wasted life. People are more likely to express the view that we are here to work hard and that human worth is measured by the sum of accomplishments.

As Hill (2002) has observed, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck did not consider the theory to be complete. In fact, they originally proposed a sixth value orientation—Space: here, there, or far away, which they could not quite figure out how to investigate at the time. Today, the Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck framework is just one among many attempts to study universal human values.

Critique of Cultural Values Analysis

While such distinctions can be useful in describing general cultural traditions and patterns of behavior, they are problematic when applied to individuals. Individual identities in today's world tend to be complex, constructed from a variety of sources. Individuals may belong to an ethnic group, whose worldview, values, and behavior are quite different from those represented by the mainstream culture. Political boundaries do not define who we are. One might consider in that regard groups which cross political boundaries, such as the Kurds, Romani, or Basques. In fact, in today's world the coherence of nation-states is increasingly porous, given changing demographics, wide-spread immigration, and the growth of social media.



Figure 4.1.2: Representatives of the Yi Minority in China

Contemporary scholars of intercultural communication urge caution in using these categories, as they tend to “present people's individual behavior as entirely defined and constrained by the culture in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are” (Holliday, 2010, p. 4). Critics like Holliday describe the use of Hofstede's categories as **essentialism**, that is,

assuming that people and things have 'natural' characteristics that are inherent and unchanging. That may translate into defining the essence of individuals in terms of their national origins. If one is from Mexico (a culture designated as large power distance), for example, an essentialist view would be to assume that person will be subservient to the boss, and never question decisions, no matter the context. Inherent in such an assumption is that individuals are unable to adapt to others' norms of behavior. The term **reductionism** is used in similar fashion, referring to the tendency to explain an object by reducing it to a different, usually simpler, level. When dealing with people this means that identities are being reduced to a predetermined set of characteristics, associated with ethnic or cultural stereotypes. Defining individual characteristics through associations with national cultures denies individual free will. It assumes that we don't develop unique individual personalities as we grow. Many people living in "feminine-oriented" cultures are ambitious and focused on material success. Entrepreneurs (and others) in China (a "strong uncertainty avoidance" culture) often take risks to make their businesses successful. No matter what kind of culture we live in, we can probably all point to individuals in our culture who have the characteristics of "individualism" and others who tend towards "collectivism".

Holliday and others have pointed out that most of the cultural categories used in intercultural communication were created from a Western perspective and tend to skew accordingly the values attached to the different labels (Holliday, 1999; Piller, 2017). Individualism, for example, is seen as inherently positive, with attributes attributed to it which are valued in Western cultures, namely initiative, assertiveness, and ambition. Similarly, cultures with a large power distance are seen as undemocratic, hence inferior, and those with high uncertainty avoidance are regarded as adverse to risk-taking and, therefore, inhospitable to creativity and personal initiative. Holliday emphasizes the importance of allowing other cultures to define themselves, advocating a **decentered** perspective. One should be aware of conventional cultural descriptions, but in encountering someone put them aside to the extent possible and focus on the other as an individual, whose identity may be quite complex, derived from a variety of influences. He emphasizes "bracketing" away the cultural stereotypes, removing *a priori* assumptions, in order to be able to judge others individually. Of course, this necessitates on the one hand, being aware of one's own preconceptions. On the other hand, it contradicts the basic human tendency of putting unknowns into familiar categories.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Barriers to Intercultural Communication

[5.1: Ethnocentrism and Stereotypes](#)

[5.2: Prejudice and Discrimination](#)

[5.3: Racism and Privilege](#)

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5.1: Ethnocentrism and Stereotypes

Where did you start reading on this page? The top left corner. Why not the bottom right corner, or the top right one? In English we read left to right, from the top of the page to the bottom. But not everyone reads the same. If you read and write Arabic or Hebrew, you will proceed from right to left. Neither is right or wrong, simply different. Americans tend to say that people from England drive on the “wrong” side of the road, rather than on the “other” side. You may find it hard to drive on the other side of the road while visiting England, but for people in the United Kingdom, it is normal and natural. Often, people in the United States express disgust at other cultures’ cuisine and think that it’s gross to eat meat from a dog or guinea pig, for example, while they don’t question their own habit of eating cows or pigs. Such attitudes are an example of **ethnocentrism**, placing one’s own culture and the corresponding beliefs, values, and behaviors in the center; in a position where it is seen as normal and right, and evaluating all other cultural systems against it. A good example of ethnocentrism is referring to parts of Asia as the “Far East.” One might question, “Far east of where?” Ethnocentrism shows up in large and small ways: the WWII Nazi’s elevation of the Aryan race and the corresponding killing of Jews, Gypsies, gays and lesbians, and other non Aryan groups is one of the most horrific ethnocentric acts in history. However, ethnocentrism shows up in small and seemingly unconscious ways as well. In American culture, if you decided to serve dog meat as appetizers at your cocktail party you would probably disgust your guests and the police might even arrest you because the consumption of dog meat is not culturally acceptable. However, in China “it is neither rare nor unusual” to consume dog meat (Wingfield-Hayes).



Figure 5.1.1: Cooked dog on a hanger. (By Maria Ly - Flickr: dog on a stick :/, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=32815072>)

In the Czech Republic, the traditional Christmas dinner is carp and potato salad. Imagine how your family might react if you told them you were serving carp and potato salad for Christmas. In the Czech Republic, it is a beautiful tradition, but in America, it might not receive a warm welcome. Our cultural background influences every aspect of our lives from the food we consume to the classroom. Ethnocentrism is likely to show up in Literature classes as well. Cultural bias dictates which “great works” students are going to read and study in the classroom. More often than not, these works represent the given culture (i.e., reading French authors in France and Korean authors in Korea). In this case, ethnocentrism can be difficult to identify, as it just seems “normal.” This is also the case with how the world is introduced to us via maps. The map below is similar to the map of the world introduced to me in school. I never questioned why Asia was cut in half and my country was in the middle of the map.



Figure 5.1.2: World map with USA in the middle (public domain - Wikimedia Commons)

In the field of geography there has been an ongoing debate about the use of a Mercator map versus a Peter's Projection map. The arguments reveal cultural biases toward the Northern, industrialized nations.

The Greenland Problem

The Mercator projection creates increasing distortions of size as you move away from the equator. As you get closer to the poles the distortion becomes severe. Cartographers refer to the inability to compare size on a Mercator projection as “the Greenland Problem.” Greenland appears to be the same size as Africa, yet Africa’s land mass is actually fourteen times larger. Greenland is 0.8 million sq. miles and Africa is 11.6 million sq. miles, yet they often look roughly the same size on maps. Because the Mercator distorts size so much at the poles it is common to crop Antarctica off the map. This practice results in the Northern Hemisphere appearing much larger than it really is. Typically, the cropping technique results in a map showing the equator about 60% of the way down the map, diminishing the size and importance of the developing countries.

This was convenient, psychologically and practically, through the eras of colonial domination when most of the world powers were European. It suited them to maintain an image of the world with Europe at the center and looking much larger than it really was. Was this conscious or deliberate? Probably not, as most European map users probably never realized the Ethnocentric bias inherent in their world view.

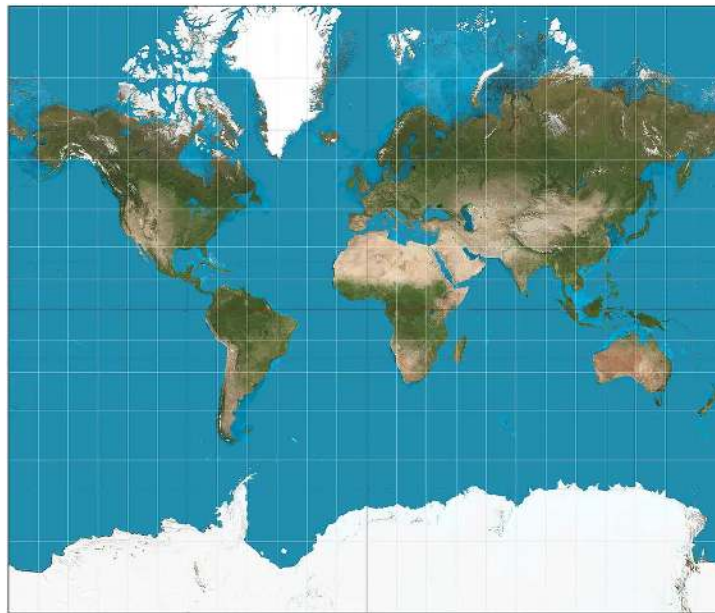


Figure 5.1.3: The Mercator projection. Wikimedia Commons

A few major misconceptions based on this map:

- Alaska is nearly as large as the continental U.S.
- Greenland is roughly the same size as Africa.
- Europe (excluding Russia) is only a bit larger than South America.
- Antarctica dwarfs all the continents.

In reality:

- Alaska can fit inside the continental U.S. about three times.
- Greenland can fit inside Africa about 14 times.
- South America nearly doubles Europe's land mass.
- Antarctica looks like the second-smallest continent.
- The Gall-Peters projection (shown below) makes seeing the relative size of places much easier.

Notably, this version comes closer to showing that what we perceive as land mass in the "South" is nearly twice as big as the "North" — 38.6 million square miles compared to 18.9 million square miles. The Mercator, however, makes the North look much larger. Therefore, Peters argued, the Mercator projection shows a euro-centric bias and harms the world's perception of developing countries.

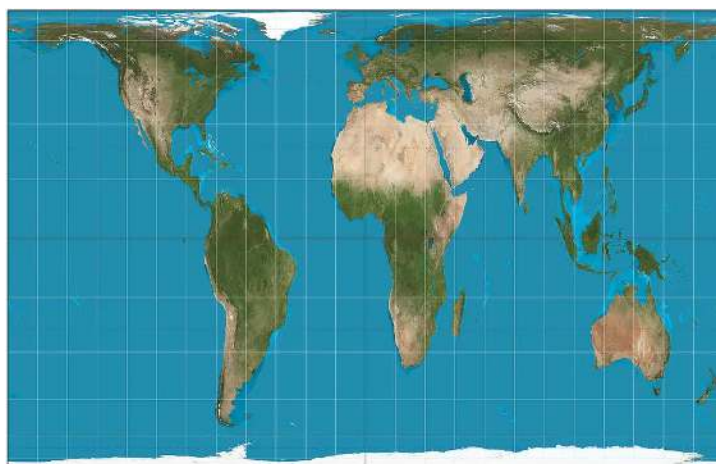


Figure 5.1.4: **The Gall-Peters projection.** Wikimedia Commons

A high level of appreciation for one's own culture can be healthy; a shared sense of community pride, for example, connects people in a society. But ethnocentrism can lead to disdain or dislike for other cultures and could cause misunderstanding and conflict. People with the best intentions sometimes travel to a society to "help" its people, because they see them as uneducated or backward —essentially inferior. In reality, these travelers are guilty of **cultural imperialism**, the ethnocentric imposition of one's own cultural values on another culture. Europe's colonial expansion, begun in the sixteenth century, was often accompanied by a severe cultural imperialism. European colonizers often viewed the people in the lands they colonized as uncultured savages who were in need of European governance, dress, religion, and other cultural practices. A more modern example of cultural imperialism may include the work of international aid agencies who introduce agricultural methods and plant species from developed countries while overlooking indigenous varieties and agricultural approaches that are better suited to the particular region. To dismantle ethnocentrism, we must recognize that our views of the world, what we consider right and wrong, normal or weird, are largely influenced by our cultural standpoint, and that our cultural standpoint is not everyone's cultural standpoint. This ethnocentric bias has received some challenge recently in United States' schools as teachers make efforts to create a multicultural classroom by incorporating books, short stories, and traditions from non-dominant groups.

Stereotypes

Just as ethnocentrism is rooted in our perception of the world around us, so too are stereotypes. In fact, stereotypes are activated out of the perception process. **Perception** is the process of selecting stimuli from our environment, categorizing that stimuli, and then interpreting it. Stereotypes are rigid categorizations of people based on their group affiliation. We stereotype people because it streamlines the perception process. Once we've categorized a person as a member of a particular group, we can form a quick impression of them (Macrae et al., 1999). When we stereotype others, we replace human complexities of personality with broad assumptions about character and worth based on social group affiliation. We stereotype people in the perception process to help us make sense out of our world, which might be efficient for communication, but frequently leads us to form flawed impressions.

As stated above, **stereotypes are oversimplified** ideas about groups of people. Stereotypes can be based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation — almost any characteristic. They may be positive, but when combined with an ethnocentric perspective, are often negative (usually toward other groups, such as when members of a dominant racial group suggest that a subordinate racial group is stupid or lazy). In either case, the stereotype is a generalization that doesn't take individual differences into account.

Although in some cases the stereotypes that are used to make judgments might actually be true of the individual being judged, in many other cases they are not. **Stereotypes are overgeneralized** and applied to all members of a group. Stereotyping is problematic when the stereotypes we hold about a social group are inaccurate overall, and particularly when they do not apply to the individual who is being judged (Stangor, 1995). For example, someone holding prejudiced attitudes toward older adults, may believe that older adults are slow and incompetent (Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005; Nelson, 2004). We cannot possibly know each individual person of advanced age to know that all older adults are slow and incompetent. Therefore, this negative belief is overgeneralized to all members of the group, even though many of the individual group members may in fact be spry and intelligent. Another example of a well-known stereotype involves beliefs about racial differences among athletes. As Hodge, Burden, Robinson, and Bennett (2008) point out, Black male athletes are often believed to be more athletic, yet less intelligent, than their White male counterparts. These beliefs persist despite a number of high profile examples to the contrary. Sadly, such beliefs often influence how these athletes are treated by others and how they view themselves and their own capabilities.

Where do stereotypes come from? New stereotypes are rarely created; rather, they are recycled from subordinate groups that have assimilated into society and are reused to describe newly subordinate groups. For example, many stereotypes that are currently used to characterize black people were used earlier in American history to characterize Irish and eastern European immigrants. Once they become established, stereotypes (like any other cognitive representation) tend to persevere. We begin to respond to members of stereotyped categories as if we already knew what they were like.

Confirmation Bias

Stereotypes are maintained because information that confirms our stereotypes is better remembered than information that disconfirms them. In this process, known as **confirmation bias**, we seek out information that supports our stereotypes and ignore information that is inconsistent with our stereotypes (Fyock & Stangor, 1994). If we believe that women are bad drivers and we see a woman driving poorly, then we tend to remember it, but when we see a woman who drives particularly well, we tend to forget it. When we confirm our biases, we tend to perceive the world in ways that make it fit our existing beliefs, rather than changing our beliefs to fit the reality around us. Because they are so highly cognitively accessible, and because they seem so “right,” our stereotypes easily influence our judgments of and responses to those we have categorized.

Stereotypes and Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

When we hold a stereotype about a person, we have expectations that he or she will fulfill that stereotype. A **self-fulfilling prophecy** is an expectation held by a person that alters his or her behavior in a way that tends to make it true. When we hold stereotypes about a person, we tend to treat the person according to our expectations. This treatment can influence the person to act according to our stereotypic expectations, thus confirming our stereotypic beliefs. Once we believe that men make better leaders than women, we tend to behave toward men in ways that makes it easier for them to lead. And we behave toward women in ways that makes it more difficult for them to lead. The result? Men find it easier to excel in leadership positions, whereas women have to work hard to overcome the false beliefs about their lack of leadership abilities (Phelan & Rudman, 2010). Self-fulfilling prophecies are ubiquitous—even teachers' expectations about their students' academic abilities can influence the students' school performance (Jussim, Robustelli, & Cain, 2009). Research by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found that disadvantaged students whose teachers expected them to perform well had higher grades than disadvantaged students whose teachers expected them to do poorly.

Consider this example of cause and effect in a self-fulfilling prophecy: If an employer expects an openly gay male job applicant to be incompetent, the potential employer might treat the applicant negatively during the interview by engaging in less conversation, making little eye contact, and generally behaving coldly toward the applicant (Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002). In turn, the job applicant will perceive that the potential employer dislikes him, and he will respond by giving shorter responses to interview questions, making less eye contact, and generally disengaging from the interview. After the interview, the employer will reflect on the applicant's behavior, which seemed cold and distant, and the employer will conclude, based on the applicant's poor performance during the interview, that the applicant was in fact incompetent. Thus, the employer's stereotype—gay men are incompetent and do not make good employees—is reinforced. Do you think this job applicant is likely to be hired?

The Stereotype Effect

Our stereotypes influence not only our judgments of others but also our beliefs about ourselves, and even our own performance on important tasks. In some cases, these beliefs may be positive, and they have the effect of making us feel more confident and thus better able to perform tasks. This effect is called **stereotype lift**. Because Asian students are aware of the stereotype that “Asians are good at math,” reminding them of this fact before they take a difficult math test can improve their performance on the test (Walton & Cohen, 2003). On the other hand, sometimes these beliefs are negative, and they create negative self-fulfilling prophecies such that we perform more poorly just because of our knowledge about the stereotypes. This latter effect is called **stereotype threat**.

Research has found that the experience of stereotype threat can help explain a wide variety of performance decrements among those who are targeted by negative stereotypes. For instance, Black students perform more poorly on standardized tests, receive lower grades, and are less likely to remain in school in comparison with White students, even when other factors such as family income, parents’ education, and other relevant variables are controlled. Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995) tested the hypothesis that these differences might be due to the activation of negative stereotypes, prompting stereotype threat. Because Black students are aware of the (inaccurate) stereotype that “Blacks are intellectually inferior to Whites,” this stereotype might create a negative expectation, which might interfere with their performance on intellectual tests through fear of confirming that stereotype.

In support of this hypothesis, Steele and Aronson’s research revealed that Black college students performed worse (in comparison with their prior test scores) on math questions taken from the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) when the test was described to them as being “diagnostic of their mathematical ability” (and thus when the stereotype was relevant) but that their performance was not influenced when the same questions were framed as “an exercise in problem solving.” And in another study, Steele and Aronson found that when Black students were asked to indicate their race before they took a math test (again activating the stereotype), they performed more poorly than they had on prior exams, whereas the scores of White students were not affected by first indicating their race.

Steele and Aronson argued that thinking about negative stereotypes that are relevant to a task that one is performing creates stereotype threat. That is, they argued that the negative impact of race on standardized tests may be caused, at least in part, by knowledge of relevant cultural stereotypes. Because the threat is “in the air,” Black students may be negatively influenced by it. Even groups who typically enjoy advantaged social status can be made to experience stereotype threat. White men performed more poorly on a math test when they were told that their performance would be compared with that of Asian men (Aronson, Lustina, Good, Keough, & Steele, 1999), and Whites performed more poorly than Blacks on a sport-related task when it was described to them as measuring their natural athletic ability (Stone, 2002).

Stereotype threat is created in situations that pose a significant threat to self-concern, such that our perceptions of ourselves as important, valuable, and capable individuals are threatened. In these situations, there is a discrepancy between our positive concept of our skills and abilities and the negative stereotypes suggesting poor performance. When our stereotypes lead us to believe that we are likely to perform poorly on a task, we experience a feeling of unease and status threat. Research has found that stereotype threat is caused by both cognitive and affective factors. On the cognitive side, individuals who are experiencing stereotype threat show an impairment in cognitive processing that is caused by increased vigilance toward the environment and attempts to suppress their stereotypical thoughts. On the affective side, stereotype threat creates stress as well as a variety of affective responses including anxiety (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008).

Stereotype threat is not, however, absolute—we can get past it if we try. What is important is to reduce the self-concern that is engaged when we consider the relevant negative stereotypes. Manipulations that affirm positive characteristics about oneself or one’s group are successful at reducing stereotype threat (Alter, Aronson, Darley, Rodriguez, & Ruble, 2010; Greenberg et al., 2003; McIntyre, Paulson, & Lord, 2003). In fact, just knowing that stereotype threat exists and may influence performance can help alleviate its negative impact (Johns, Schmader, & Martens, 2005).

In the end, stereotypes are difficult to change and stereotyping is almost impossible to avoid. They are frequently expressed on TV, in movies, in chat rooms and blogs, and in conversations with friends and family. Further, research has found that stereotypes are often used out of our awareness, which makes it very difficult for us to correct for them. Even when we think we are being completely fair, we may nevertheless be using our stereotypes to condone discrimination (Chen & Bargh, 1999). And when we are distracted or under time pressure, these tendencies become even more powerful (Stangor & Duan, 1991). Still, it’s crucial to keep in mind that just because someone belongs to a certain group, it doesn’t necessarily mean that all of the defining characteristics of that group apply to that person. Treating individuals according to rigid stereotypic beliefs is detrimental to all aspects of the communication process and can lead to prejudice and discrimination.

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5.2: Prejudice and Discrimination

Prejudice and Discrimination

Prejudice is a negative attitude and feeling toward an individual based solely on one's membership in a particular social group, such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, religion, sexual orientation, profession, and many more (Allport, 1954; Brown, 2010). An example of prejudice is having a negative attitude toward people who are not born in the United States. Although people holding this prejudiced attitude do not know all people who were not born in the United States, they dislike them due to their status as foreigners.

Identifying Prejudice

Because stereotypes and prejudice often operate out of our awareness, and also because people are frequently unwilling to admit that they hold them, social psychologists have developed methods for assessing them indirectly. These **implicit biases** are unexamined and sometimes unconscious but real in their consequences. They are automatic, ambiguous, and ambivalent, but nonetheless biased, unfair, and disrespectful to the belief in equality.

Other indirect measures of prejudice are also frequently used in intercultural communication research, for instance—assessing nonverbal behaviors such as speech errors or physical closeness. One common measure involves asking participants to take a seat on a chair near a person from a different racial or ethnic group and measuring how far away the person sits (Sechrist & Stangor, 2001; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). People who sit farther away are assumed to be more prejudiced toward the members of the group.

Because our stereotypes are activated spontaneously when we think about members of different social groups, it is possible to use reaction-time measures to assess this activation and thus to learn about people's stereotypes and prejudices. In these procedures, participants are asked to make a series of judgments about pictures or descriptions of social groups and then to answer questions as quickly as they can, but without making mistakes. The speed of these responses is used to determine an individual's stereotypes or prejudice.

The most popular reaction-time implicit measure of prejudice—the *Implicit Association Test (IAT)*—is frequently used to assess stereotypes and prejudice (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2007). The test itself is rather simple and you can experience it yourself if you Google “implicit” or go to understandingprejudice.org. In the IAT, participants are asked to classify stimuli that they view on a computer screen into one of two categories by pressing one of two computer keys, one with their left hand and one with their right hand. Furthermore, the categories are arranged such that the responses to be answered with the left and right buttons either “fit with” (match) the stereotype or do not “fit with” (mismatch) the stereotype. For instance, in one version of the IAT, participants are shown pictures of men and women and also shown words related to gender stereotypes (e.g., *strong*, *leader*, or *powerful* for men and *nurturing*, *emotional*, or *weak* for women). Then the participants categorize the photos (“Is this picture a picture of a man or a woman?”) and answer questions about the stereotypes (“Is this the word *strong*?”) by pressing either the Yes button or the No button using either their left hand or their right hand.

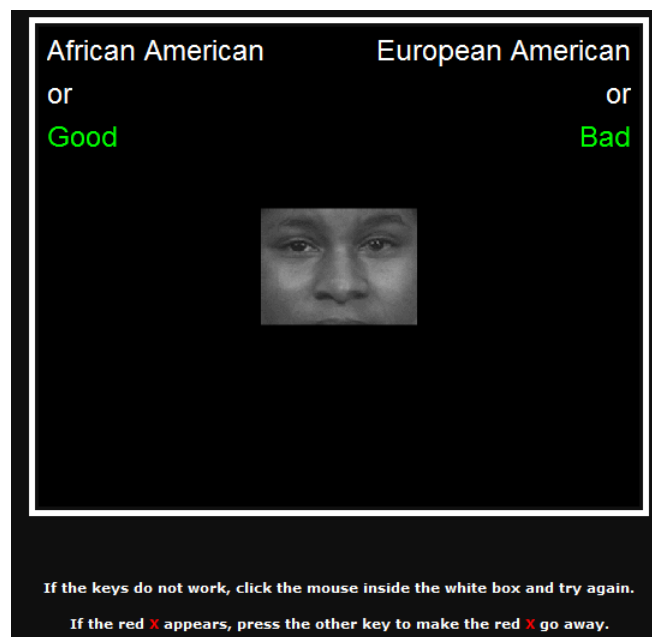


Figure 5.2.1: An actual screenshot from an IAT (Implicit Association Test) that is designed to test a person's reaction time (measured in milliseconds) to an array of stimuli that are presented on the screen. This particular item is testing an individual's unconscious reaction towards members of various ethnic groups. [Image: Courtesy of Anthony Greenwald from Project Implicit]

When the responses are arranged on the screen in a “matching” way, such that the male category and the “strong” category are on the same side of the screen (e.g., on the right side), participants can do the task very quickly and they make few mistakes. It's just easier, because the stereotypes are matched or associated with the pictures in a way that makes sense. But when the images are arranged such that the women and the strong categories are on the same side, whereas the men and the weak categories are on the other side, most participants make more errors and respond more slowly. The basic assumption is that if two concepts are associated or linked, they will be responded to more quickly if they are classified using the same, rather than different, keys.

Implicit association procedures such as the IAT show that even participants who claim that they are not prejudiced do seem to hold cultural stereotypes about social groups. Even Black people themselves respond more quickly to positive words that are associated with White rather than Black faces on the IAT, suggesting that they have subtle racial prejudice toward Blacks.

Because they hold these beliefs, it is possible—although not guaranteed—that they may use them when responding to other people, creating a subtle and unconscious type of discrimination. Although the meaning of the IAT has been debated (Tetlock & Mitchell, 2008), research using implicit measures does suggest that—whether we know it or not, and even though we may try to control them when we can—our stereotypes and prejudices are easily activated when we see members of different social categories (Barden, Maddux, Petty, & Brewer, 2004).

In one particularly disturbing line of research about the influence of prejudice on behaviors, Joshua Correll and his colleagues had White participants participate in an experiment in which they viewed photographs of White and Black people on a computer screen. Across the experiment, the photographs showed the people holding either a gun or something harmless such as a cell phone. The participants were asked to decide as quickly as possible to press a button to “shoot” if the target held a weapon but to “not shoot” if the person did not hold a weapon. Overall, the White participants tended to shoot more often when the person holding the object was Black than when the person holding the object was White, and this occurred even when there was no weapon present (Correll, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2007; Correll et al., 2007).

Explaining Prejudice

As discussed previously in this section, we all belong to a gender, race, age, and social economic group. These groups provide a powerful source of our identity and self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These groups serve as our ingroups. An **ingroup** is a group that we identify with or see ourselves as belonging to. A group that we don't belong to, or an **outgroup**, is a group that we view as fundamentally different from us. For example, if you are female, your gender ingroup includes all females, and your gender outgroup includes all males. People often view gender groups as being fundamentally different from each other in personality traits, characteristics, social roles, and interests. Perceiving others as members of ingroups or outgroups is one of the most important perceptual distinctions that we make. We often feel strongly connected to our ingroups, especially when they are centrally tied to

our identities and culture. Because we often feel a strong sense of belonging and emotional connection to our ingroups, we develop **ingroup favoritism**—the tendency to respond more positively to people from our ingroups than we do to people from outgroups.

People also make trait attributions in ways that benefit their ingroups, just as they make trait attributions that benefit themselves. This general tendency, known as the **ultimate attribution error**, results in the tendency for each of the competing groups to perceive the other group extremely and unrealistically negatively (Hewstone, 1990). When an ingroup member engages in a positive behavior, we tend to see it as a stable internal characteristic of the group as a whole. Similarly, negative behaviors on the part of the outgroup are seen as caused by stable negative group characteristics. On the other hand, negative behaviors from the ingroup and positive behaviors from the outgroup are more likely to be seen as caused by temporary situational variables or by behaviors of specific individuals and are less likely to be attributed to the group. For example, if your friend (someone you perceive as part of your ingroup) does well on an exam, you might account for that by stating that your friend is smart and studied well for the exam. But if someone who you consider as part of your outgroup, such as an international student, does well on an exam, then the reason attributed is that the subject matter is easy, or the professor gives easy exams. Similarly, if your friend does poorly on an exam, you may blame the difficulty of the subject matter or the professor for making unfair exams. If an international student does poorly on an exam, the tendency is to see it as a group trait (international students tend to do poorly on exams). This ingroup bias can result in prejudice and discrimination because the outgroup is perceived as different and is less preferred than our ingroup.

A personality dimension that relates to the desires to protect and enhance the self and the ingroup and thus also relates to greater ingroup favoritism, and in some cases prejudice toward outgroups, is the personality dimension of authoritarianism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1988). **Authoritarianism** is a personality dimension that characterizes people who prefer things to be simple rather than complex and who tend to hold traditional and conventional values. Authoritarians are ingroup-favoring in part because they have a need to self-enhance and in part because they prefer simplicity and thus find it easy to think simply: “We are all good and they are all less good.” Political conservatives tend to show more ingroup favoritism than do political liberals, perhaps because the former are more concerned with protecting the ingroup from threats posed by others (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Stangor & Leary, 2006). Authoritarian personalities develop in childhood in response to parents who practice harsh discipline. Individuals with authoritarian personalities emphasize such things as obedience to authority, a rigid adherence to rules, and low acceptance of people (outgroups) not like oneself. Many studies find strong racial and ethnic prejudice among such individuals (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). But whether their prejudice stems from their authoritarian personalities or instead from the fact that their parents were probably prejudiced themselves remains an important question.

Developed initially from John Dollard’s (1900-1980) frustration-aggression theory, **Scapegoating** is the act of blaming a subordinate group when the dominant group experiences frustration or is blocked from obtaining a goal (Allport, 1954). History provides many examples: The lynchings of African Americans in the South increased when the Southern economy worsened and decreased when the economy improved (Tolnay & Beck, 1995). Similarly, white mob violence against Chinese immigrants in the 1870s began after the railroad construction that employed so many Chinese immigrants slowed and the Chinese began looking for work in other industries. Whites feared that the Chinese would take jobs away from white workers and that their large supply of labor would drive down wages. Their assaults on the Chinese killed several people and prompted the passage by Congress of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 that prohibited Chinese immigration (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 2009). An example from the last century is the way that Adolf Hitler was able to use the Jewish people as scapegoats for Germany’s social and economic problems. In the United States, many states have enacted laws to disenfranchise immigrants; these laws are popular because they let the dominant group scapegoat a subordinate group. Many minority groups have been scapegoated for a nation’s — or an individual’s — woes.



Figure 5.2.2: During the 1870s, whites feared that Chinese immigrants would take away their jobs. This fear led to white mob violence against the Chinese and to an act of Congress that prohibited Chinese immigration. [Wikimedia Commons](#) – public domain.

One popular explanation of prejudice emphasizes conformity and socialization and is called **social learning theory**. In this view, people who are prejudiced are merely conforming to the culture in which they grow up, and prejudice is the result of socialization from parents, peers, the news media, Facebook, and other various aspects of their culture. Supporting this view, studies have found that people tend to become more prejudiced when they move to areas where people are very prejudiced and less prejudiced when they move to locations where people are less prejudiced (Aronson, 2008).

The mass media play a key role in how many people learn to be prejudiced. This type of learning happens because the media often present people of color in a negative light. By doing so, the media reinforce the prejudice that individuals already have or even increase their prejudice (Larson, 2005). Examples of distorted media coverage abound. Even though poor people are more likely to be white than any other race or ethnicity, the news media use pictures of African Americans far more often than those of whites in stories about poverty. In one study, national news magazines, such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, and television news shows portrayed African Americans in almost two-thirds of their stories on poverty, even though only about one-fourth of poor people are African Americans. In the magazine stories, only 12 percent of the African Americans had a job, even though in the real world more than 40 percent of poor African Americans were working at the time the stories were written (Gilens, 1996). In a Chicago study, television news shows there depicted whites fourteen times more often in stories of good Samaritans, even though whites and African Americans live in Chicago in roughly equal numbers (Entman & Rojecki, 2001). Many other studies find that newspaper and television stories about crime and drugs feature higher proportions of African Americans as offenders than is true in arrest statistics (Surette, 2011). Studies like these show that the news media “convey the message that black people are violent, lazy, and less civic minded” (Jackson, 1997, p. A27).

Discrimination

Prejudice and discrimination are often confused, but the basic difference between them is this: Prejudice is the attitude, while discrimination is the behavior. Sometimes people will act on their prejudiced attitudes toward a group of people, and this behavior is known as discrimination. More specifically, **Discrimination** in this context refers to the arbitrary denial of rights, privileges, and opportunities to members of these groups. The use of the word *arbitrary* emphasizes that these groups are being treated unequally not because of their lack of merit but because of one's membership in a particular group (Allport, 1954; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). As a result of holding negative beliefs (stereotypes) and negative attitudes (prejudice) about a particular group, people often treat the target of prejudice poorly.

Examples of Discrimination

When we meet strangers we automatically process three pieces of information about them: their race, gender, and age (Ito & Urland, 2003). Why are these aspects of an unfamiliar person so important? Why don't we instead notice whether their eyes are friendly, whether they are smiling, their height, the type of clothes they are wearing? Although these secondary characteristics are important in forming a first impression of a stranger, the social categories of race, gender, and age provide a wealth of information about an individual. This information, however, is based on stereotypes, and prejudice and discrimination often begin in the form of stereotypes.

Racism

Racism is a type of prejudice that is used to justify the belief that one racial category is somehow superior or inferior to others. Racial discrimination is discrimination against an individual based solely on one's membership in a specific racial group (such as toward African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Arab Americans, etc.). For example, Blacks are significantly more likely to have their vehicles searched during traffic stops than Whites, particularly when Blacks are driving in predominately White neighborhoods, (a phenomenon often termed "DWB," or "driving while Black.") (Rojek, Rosenfeld, & Decker, 2012). Mexican Americans and other Latinx groups also are targets of racism from the police and other members of the community. For example, when purchasing items with a personal check, Latinx shoppers are more likely than White shoppers to be asked to show formal identification (Dovidio et al., 2010).

In one case of alleged harassment by the police, several East Haven, Connecticut, police officers were arrested on federal charges due to reportedly continued harassment and brutalization of Latinx people. When the accusations came out, the mayor of East Haven was asked, "What are you doing for the Latino community today?" The Mayor responded, "I might have tacos when I go home, I'm not quite sure yet" ("East Haven Mayor," 2012) This statement undermines the important issue of racial profiling and police harassment of Latinx people, while belittling Latinx culture by emphasizing an interest in a food product stereotypically associated with Latinx people. We will discuss racism with more depth in the next section.

Sexism

Sexism is prejudice and discrimination toward individuals based on their sex. Typically, sexism takes the form of men holding biases against women, but either sex can show sexism toward their own or the other sex. Common forms of sexism in modern society include gender role expectations, such as expecting women to be the caretakers of the household. Sexism also includes people's expectations for how members of a gender group should behave. For example, women are expected to be friendly, passive, and nurturing, and when women behave in an unfriendly, assertive, or neglectful manner they often are disliked for violating their gender role (Rudman, 1998). Research by Laurie Rudman (1998) finds that when female job applicants self-promote, they are likely to be viewed as competent, but they may be disliked and are less likely to be hired because they violated gender expectations for modesty. Sexism can exist on a societal level such as in hiring, employment opportunities, and education. Women are less likely to be hired or promoted in male-dominated professions such as engineering, aviation, and construction (Blau, Ferber, & Winkler, 2010; Ceci & Williams, 2011).



Figure 5.2.3: Women now have many jobs previously closed to them, though they still face challenges in male-dominated occupations. (credit: "Alex"/Flickr)

Heterosexism

Homophobia is a widespread prejudice in U.S. society that is tolerated by many people (Herek & McLemore, 2013; Nosek, 2005) and often results in heterosexist discrimination, such as the exclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) people from social groups and the avoidance of LGBTQ neighbors and co-workers. This discrimination also extends to employers deliberately declining to hire qualified LGBTQ job applicants. Some people are quite passionate in their hatred for nonheterosexuals in our society. In some cases, people have been tortured and/or murdered simply because they were not heterosexual. This passionate response has led some researchers to question what motives might exist for homophobic people. Adams, Wright, & Lohr (1996) conducted a study investigating this issue and their results were quite an eye-opener.

In this experiment, male college students were given a scale that assessed how homophobic they were; those with extreme scores were recruited to participate in the experiment. In the end, 64 men agreed to participate and were split into 2 groups: homophobic men and nonhomophobic men. Both groups of men were fitted with a penile plethysmograph, an instrument that measures changes in blood flow to the penis and serves as an objective measurement of sexual arousal.

All men were shown segments of sexually explicit videos. One of these videos involved a sexual interaction between a man and a woman (heterosexual clip). One video displayed two females engaged in a sexual interaction (homosexual female clip), and the final video displayed two men engaged in a sexual interaction (homosexual male clip). Changes in penile tumescence were recorded during all three clips, and a subjective measurement of sexual arousal was also obtained. While both groups of men became sexually aroused to the heterosexual and female homosexual video clips, only those men who were identified as homophobic showed sexual arousal to the homosexual male video clip. While all men reported that their erections indicated arousal for the heterosexual and female homosexual clips, the homophobic men indicated that they were not sexually aroused (despite their erections) to the male homosexual clips. Adams et al. (1996) suggest that these findings may indicate that homophobia is related to homosexual arousal that the homophobic individuals either deny or are unaware of.

Ageism

People often form judgments and hold expectations about people based on their age. These judgments and expectations can lead to ageism. Typically, ageism occurs against older adults, but ageism also can occur toward younger adults. Ageism is widespread in U.S. culture (Nosek, 2005), and a common ageist attitude toward older adults is that they are incompetent, physically weak, and slow (Greenberg, Schimel, & Martens, 2002) and some people consider older adults less attractive. Some cultures, however, including some Asian, Latinx, and African American cultures, both outside and within the United States afford older adults respect and honor.

Types of Discrimination

Individual Discrimination

Individual discrimination is discrimination that individuals practice in their daily lives, usually because they are prejudiced. To many observers, the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin in February 2012 was a deadly example of individual discrimination. Martin, a 17-year-old African American, was walking in a gated community in Sanford, Florida, as he returned from a 7-Eleven with a bag of Skittles and some iced tea. An armed neighborhood watch volunteer, George Zimmerman, called 911 and said Martin looked suspicious. Although the 911 operator told Zimmerman not to approach Martin, Zimmerman did so anyway; within minutes Zimmerman shot and killed the unarmed Martin and later claimed self-defense. According to many critics of this incident, Martin's only "crime" was "walking while black." As an African American newspaper columnist observed, "For every black man in America, from the millionaire in the corner office to the mechanic in the local garage, the Trayvon Martin tragedy is personal. It could have been me or one of my sons. It could have been any of us" (Robinson, 2012).



Figure 5.2.4: Michael Fleshman – Trayvon_Martin_Occupy March 21 – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Much individual discrimination occurs in the workplace, as sociologist Denise Segura (Segura, 1992) documented when she interviewed 152 Mexican American women working in white-collar jobs at a public university in California. More than 40 percent of the women said they had encountered workplace discrimination based on their ethnicity and/or gender, and they attributed their treatment to stereotypes held by their employers and coworkers. Along with discrimination, they were the targets of condescending comments like “I didn’t know that there were any educated people in Mexico that have a graduate degree.”

Institutional Discrimination

Individual discrimination is important to address, but just as consequential in today’s world is **institutional discrimination**, or discrimination that pervades the practices of whole institutions, such as housing, medical care, law enforcement, employment, and education. This type of discrimination does not just affect a few isolated individuals, instead, it affects large numbers of individuals simply because of their race, gender, ability, or other group affiliation.

Institutional discrimination often stems from prejudice, as was certainly true in the South during segregation. However, institutions can also discriminate without realizing it. They may make decisions that seem to be racially neutral, but upon close inspection, have a discriminatory effect against people of color. Unfortunately, too often institutional discrimination is a carefully orchestrated plan to target certain groups for discrimination, without appearing to. A particularly egregious example is the so-called War on Drugs, whereby discriminatory enforcement of drug laws resulted in higher arrest and incarceration rates for lower income, urban, communities of color. These communities are not reflective of increased prevalence of drug use, but rather of law enforcement’s targeting of these populations. Institutional discrimination affects the life chances of people of color in many aspects of life today. To illustrate this, we turn to some examples of institutional discrimination that have been the subject of government investigation and scholarly research.

Criminal Justice

Since the declaration of the so called "War on Drugs," the number of incarcerated individuals in the United States (U.S.) has increased tremendously with ~2.3 million individuals reported as incarcerated in 2016, a level higher than any other high-income country. Incarceration disproportionately impacts African American individuals with African American men six times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Hispanic White men and African American women twice as likely to be incarcerated as non-Hispanic

white women. In 2016, Black and Latinx individuals represented only 28% of the adult population of the U.S. but accounted for 56% of incarcerated individuals, whereas Whites represented 64% of the adult population but only 30% of incarcerated individuals. These disparities extend into the non-incarcerated community. Forty-four percent of Black women report having a family member imprisoned compared to only 12% of White women. In a 2009 study, African American children born in 1990 had a 25% increased likelihood of having their father go to prison compared to non-Hispanic White children, and that figure rose to a 50% increase if their fathers had not finished high school. Although the disparities are not as striking as with African Americans, other persons of color are also overrepresented in U.S. jail and prison populations with the consequent impact on their families and communities.

This national picture is similarly reflected in my state of California. In 2017, California prisons held over 115,000 individuals with African Americans representing 29% of the male prisoners, despite comprising only 6% of California's male population. The proportion of imprisoned African-American men in California is almost ten-times that of white men, and the population of imprisoned Latino men is almost twice that of white men. Despite similar rates of illicit drug use, African Americans are imprisoned at almost six times the rate of whites for similar infractions; and while African Americans represent only 12.5% of illicit drug users, they account for 29% of drug-related arrests. These data indicate the presence of institutional discrimination in the criminal justice system.

Health Care

People of color have higher rates of disease and illness than whites, due in large part to institutional discrimination based on race and ethnicity. Several studies use hospital records to investigate whether people of color receive optimal medical care, including coronary bypass surgery, angioplasty, and catheterization. After taking the patients' medical symptoms and needs into account, these studies find that African Americans are much less likely than whites to receive the procedures just listed. This is true when poor blacks are compared to poor whites and also when middle-class blacks are compared to middle-class whites (Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003). In a novel way of studying race and cardiac care, one study performed an experiment in which several hundred doctors viewed videos of African American and White patients, all of whom, unknown to the doctors, were actors. In the videos, each "patient" complained of identical chest pain and other symptoms. The doctors were then asked to indicate whether they thought the patient needed cardiac catheterization. The African American patients were less likely than the white patients to be recommended for this procedure (Schulman et al., 1999). Why does discrimination like this occur? It is possible, of course, that some doctors are racists and decide that the lives of African Americans just are not worth saving, but it is far more likely that they have unconscious racial biases that somehow affect their medical judgments. Regardless of the reason, the result is the same: African Americans are less likely to receive potentially life-saving cardiac procedures simply because they are black. Institutional discrimination in health care, then, is literally a matter of life and death.

These adverse health outcomes are compounded for people of color when considering the intersectionality between poor health care and incarceration. Incarcerated individuals disproportionately suffer from a range of physical and mental health disorders: HIV is up to seven times more prevalent in prison populations compared to the general population; Hepatitis C is up to 21 times more prevalent. Mental health disorders are up to five times more prevalent in incarcerated populations than the general population, and ~68% of incarcerated individuals suffer from substance abuse disorders with only about 15% receiving adequate treatment. African Americans are disproportionately affected by incarceration, impacting racial disparities in health outcomes. For all of the above reasons, mass incarceration is a significant problem for public health.

Housing

When loan officers review mortgage applications, they consider many factors, including the person's income, employment, and credit history. The law forbids them to consider race and ethnicity. Yet African Americans and Latinx Americans are more likely than Whites to have their mortgage applications declined (Blank, Venkatachalam, McNeil, & Green, 2005). When confronted with this disparity, many loan officers claim that because members of these groups tend to be poorer than Whites and to have less desirable employment and credit histories, the higher rate of mortgage rejections may be appropriate, albeit unfortunate. To control for this possibility, researchers take these factors into account and in effect compare Whites, African Americans, and Latinx Americans with similar incomes, employment, and credit histories. Some studies are purely statistical, and some involve White, African American, and Latinx individuals who independently visit the same mortgage-lending institutions. Both types of studies find that African Americans and Latinx Americans are still more likely than Whites with similar qualifications to have their mortgage applications rejected (Turner et al., 2002). We will probably never know whether loan officers are consciously basing their decisions on racial prejudice, but their practices still amount to racial and ethnic discrimination whether the loan officers are consciously prejudiced or not.

There is also evidence of banks rejecting mortgage applications for people who wish to live in certain urban, supposedly high-risk neighborhoods, and of insurance companies denying homeowner's insurance or else charging higher rates for homes in these same neighborhoods. Practices like these that discriminate against houses in certain neighborhoods are called **redlining**, and they also violate the law (Ezeala-Harrison, Glover, & Shaw-Jackson, 2008). Because the people affected by redlining tend to be people of color, redlining, too, is an example of institutional discrimination.

Mortgage rejections and redlining contribute to another major problem facing people of color: **residential segregation**. Housing segregation is illegal but is nonetheless widespread because of mortgage rejections and other processes that make it very difficult for people of color to move out of segregated neighborhoods and into unsegregated areas. For example, realtors may tell African American clients that no homes are available in a particular White neighborhood, but then inform White clients of available homes. The now routine posting of housing listings on the Internet might be reducing this form of housing discrimination, but not all homes and apartments are posted, and some are simply sold by word of mouth to avoid certain people learning about them. African Americans in particular remain highly segregated by residence in many cities, much more so than is true for other people of color. The residential segregation of African Americans is so extensive that it has been termed *hypersegregation* and more generally called American apartheid (Massey & Denton, 1993). The hypersegregation experienced by African Americans cuts them off from the larger society, as many rarely leave their immediate neighborhoods, and results in *concentrated poverty*, where joblessness, crime, and other problems reign. For several reasons, then, residential segregation is thought to play a major role in the seriousness and persistence of African American poverty (Rothstein, 2012; Stoll, 2008).

Employment

Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned racial discrimination in employment, including hiring, wages, and firing. However, African Americans, Latinx Americans, and Native Americans still have much lower earnings than Whites. It is again difficult to determine whether such discrimination stems from conscious prejudice or from unconscious prejudice on the part of potential employers, but it is racial discrimination nonetheless. A now-classic field experiment documented such discrimination. Sociologist Devah Pager (2003) had young White and African American men apply independently in person for entry-level jobs. They dressed the same and reported similar levels of education and other qualifications. Some applicants also admitted having a criminal record, while other applicants reported no such record. As might be expected, applicants with a criminal record were hired at lower rates than those without a record. However, in striking evidence of racial discrimination in hiring, African American applicants *without* a criminal record were hired at the same low rate as the white applicants *with* a criminal record. When we consider intersectionality with incarceration, we see the problem is compounded: incarceration severely diminishes the economic mobility of individuals, reducing their earnings by 40%, and thwarting potential for economic progress. With 1 in 28 (or 2.7 million) U.S. children having an incarcerated parent, the lack of presence and economic support substantially impacts child development.

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5.3: Racism and Privilege

As I write this portion of the text, protests provoked by the brutal murder of George Floyd, an African-American man, by a white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, have reached historic levels in the United States. These protests are occurring in communities large and small, and even in several other countries. Major cities from Sacramento to Philadelphia are under nightly curfews. Of course, these protests aren't just about the murder of George Floyd. Rather, his murder is preceded by a long history of highly publicized instances in which African-Americans were killed by law enforcement. Consider this partial list:

- March 3, 1991: A video camera captures four Los Angeles Police Department officers beating Rodney King in one of the first viral police brutality videos.
- April 21, 1992: A jury acquits the four officers who beat Rodney King. Riots ensue.
- Feb. 23, 1999: Four NYPD officers shoot and kill 23-year-old Amadou Diallo. The officers were acquitted on all charges.
- Nov. 26, 2006: Seven undercover NYPD officers fire more than 50 rounds of ammunition at unarmed Sean Bell at a bachelor party. The officers were acquitted on all charges.
- February 26, 2012: 17-year-old Trayvon Martin is stalked, chased and shot by George Zimmerman after 911 operators tell Zimmerman to leave the teenager alone. Six weeks after the shooting, Zimmerman was arrested and subsequently acquitted of murder.
- March 21, 2012: Chicago police officer Dante Servin shoots unarmed Rekia Boyd. He is acquitted on all charges.
- July 17, 2014: NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo kills Eric Garner. Pantaleo has never been convicted of a crime.
- Aug. 9, 2014: Ferguson, Mo. officer Darren Wilson shoots and kills 18-year-old Mike Brown Jr. Wilson was not charged with a crime.
- Nov. 22, 2014: Cleveland Police Officer Timothy Loehman kills 12-year-old Tamir Rice. Loehmann is not charged with a crime.
- April 4, 2015: A bystander captures North Charleston, SC police officer Michael Slager shooting unarmed Walter Scott as Scott runs away during a traffic stop. Scott plead guilty to federal deprivation of rights under the color of law and was sentenced to 20 years in prison.
- April 12, 2015: Baltimore resident Freddie Gray was arrested for carrying a knife and died from injuries while being transported to jail. No one involved was convicted of a crime.
- July 19, 2015: University of Cincinnati officer Ray Tensing shot and killed Sam DuBose during a traffic stop. Tensing was not convicted of a crime.
- July 13, 2015: Sandra Bland is found hanged in a jail cell after a dashcam captures her brutal arrest by State Trooper Brian Encina, who is never convicted of a crime.
- July 2, 2016: St. Anthony, Minn. police officer Jeronimo Yanez shoots Philando Castile during a traffic stop in which Castile was not driving or committing a crime. Yanez was acquitted on all charges.
- July 5, 2016: Baton Rouge, La. officers shoot 37-year-old Alton Sterling as he lays on the ground, restrained by officers. No one is charged with a crime.
- Aug. 1, 2016: Moments after authorities coerce Facebook and Instagram to shut off the live feed for 23-year-old Korryn Gaines' standoff with police, Baltimore County police officers burst into her home and shoot her dead as she holds her son in her arms. No one is convicted of a crime.
- Sept. 16, 2016: Tulsa, Oklahoma police officer Betty Shelby shoots unarmed Terrance Crutcher as a news helicopter records the footage. She is acquitted of first-degree manslaughter.
- March 18, 2018: Sacramento police officers open fire on 23-year-old Stephon Clark, striking him eight times, six of which were in his back. No one was ever charged with Clark's death.
- Sept. 6, 2018: Officer Amber Guyger enters the home of Botham Jean and shoots him dead. She is convicted of murder and sentenced to 10 years in prison.
- Oct. 12, 2019: Fort Worth, Texas police officer Aaron Dean shoots through the window of 28-year-old Atiatana Jefferson, killing her. Dean is fired and charged with murder.
- February 23, 2020: A vigilante mob in Brunswick, Georgia chases down and shoots 23-year-old Ahmaud Arbery, killing him. Travis and Gregory McMichael have been arrested for his death after more than 2 months of freedom. A third man, William "Roddie" Bryan, has also been charged after filming the crime.
- March 13, 2020: Louisville, Ky. police officers Jonathan Mattingly, Brett Hankison and Myles Cosgrove entered the apartment of 26-year-old Breonna Taylor to serve a "no-knock warrant" on her boyfriend and shot Taylor dead. No one has been charged with a crime.

- May 25, 2020: Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin kneels on the neck of George Floyd for 8 minutes and 46 seconds; 2 minutes and 53 seconds of which occurred after Floyd was unconscious. Floyd Dies. Chauvin is charged with third-degree murder after four days of freedom. Three officers who were present — Thomas Lane and J. Alexander Kueng, who helped restrain Floyd, and Tou Thao, who stood near the others, were not initially charged. After days of global public outcry and protests, Chauvin's charges have been upgraded to second degree murder, and Lane, Kueng, and Thao, are now charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder and aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter. Still, Derek Chauvin is eligible for over one million dollars in pension benefits.

These examples span a 30 year period, but racism can be traced back to the 15th century when European imperialists set out to colonize the rest of the world. Alongside these imperialist ventures, racialization also ensued, where colonized peoples were positioned as inferior. This process was extended across the planet and became embedded in countries colonized by Europeans, resulting in a redistribution of world resources through the politicization of biological attributes. In other words, the dynamic of racism, whereby individuals and groups of people are discriminated against and subjugated on the basis of perceived physical characteristics such as skin color, has been and continues to be a pervasive and destructive force in many human societies. In this section, we will examine the ideology and consequences of racism, and the interconnected concepts of power and privilege.

The United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination defines racial discrimination as: Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

Racism

Racism is a set of economic, political and ideological practices whereby a dominant group exercises control over subordinate groups. Racism is a concept founded upon the scientifically false premises that there are physical and psychological inequalities between human races (See Chapter 3). Racism can be expressed through more overt expressions of individual discrimination or exclusion based on race, and may also be expressed through institutional discrimination, where the disenfranchisement of groups based on race is embedded into the culture. Institutional discrimination based on race, or **Institutional racism**, refers to the way in which racial distinctions are used, whether intentional or not, to organize the policy and practice of state, judicial, economic, and educational institutions. As a result these distinctions systematically reproduce inequalities along racial lines. Just as institutional discrimination in general is often harder to prove and identify, institutional racism specifically is pervasive in our society and significantly impacts the lives of those in the nondominant group.

One of the most pressing examples of institutional racism can be seen by the disproportionate death rate of African-Americans due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As of the writing of this text, The United States has suffered more than 118,000 deaths due to the Covid-19 pandemic, more than any other nation, and nearly one fourth of all deaths worldwide. The actual number is likely to be much higher and is expected to rise considerably in the next few months. The latest report by *The Color of Coronavirus*, published June 9th, 2020, revealed that Black Americans are dying at 2.3 times the rate as White Americans. Considering institutional discrimination, you may reason that poverty helps explain this disparity. People in poor urban areas often live in food deserts, areas with no access to affordable, healthy food. You may consider that poor people live in areas with significant air and water pollution. These environments lead to higher rates of diabetes and asthma, which could influence the mortality rate of those who get infected with Covid-19. There may be some validity to this reasoning, but we need to explore further and recognize how racism distinguishes black poverty from white poverty, and makes black poverty more vulnerable to a lethal contagion. This notion reveals the hidden toll of institutional racism. An increasing amount of evidence suggests that being black in a society filled with racial prejudice, discrimination, and inequality takes what has been called a **“hidden toll”** on the lives of African Americans (Blitstein, 2009). African Americans on the average have worse health than whites and die at younger ages. In fact, every year there are an additional 100,000 African American deaths than would be expected if they lived as long as whites do. Although many reasons probably explain all these disparities, scholars are increasingly concluding that the stress of being black is a major factor (Geronimus et al., 2010).

In this way of thinking, African Americans are much more likely than whites to be poor, to live in high-crime neighborhoods, and to live in crowded conditions, among many other problems. As this chapter discussed earlier, they are also more likely, whether or not they are poor, to experience racial slights, refusals to be interviewed for jobs, and other forms of discrimination in their everyday lives. All these problems mean that African Americans from their earliest ages grow up with a great deal of stress, far more than what most whites experience. This stress in turn has certain neural and physiological effects, including hypertension

(high blood pressure), that impair African Americans' short-term and long-term health and that ultimately shorten their lives. These effects accumulate over time: black and white hypertension rates are equal for people in their twenties, but the black rate becomes much higher by the time people reach their forties and fifties. As a recent news article on evidence of this "hidden toll" summarized this process, "The long-term stress of living in a white-dominated society 'weathers' blacks, making them age faster than their white counterparts" (Blitstein, 2009, p. 48).

Privilege and Power

It is difficult to travel very far along the path of cultural understanding, and in particular an understanding of cultural difference, without running up against the issues of racism and privilege. A significant challenge in understanding the nature and impact of racism and privilege is being open to examining our own experience of these issues. Hopefully, you have been thinking about your own cultural identity as you have been reading this chapter. If so, then you have been thinking about labels that define you culturally. Maybe you have defined yourself as female, Latina, and heterosexual. Or maybe you have labeled yourself as gay, white, working-class, and male. When we give ourselves labels such as these, often we ask ourselves, "Where do I fit in?" This is a good question to ask and demonstrates a recognition of the fact that you belong to more than one culture and that your cultures intersect in various ways. The most significant manifestation of these intersections is **power**—the ability to influence others and control our lives. From the information given earlier in the chapter and from your own experiences, you should realize that some groups have more power than others. These people are what we refer to as the **dominant group**: white, male, Christian, middle-class, able-bodied, educated, and heterosexual. People whose cultural identities do not conform to this model are the **nondominant groups** and have less sociopolitical and economic power. As you think about privilege and the resulting advantages that some groups have over others, you should also keep in mind two facts. One, privilege is a relative concept that varies according to context. In some situations we may be more privileged than others, and in order to access some of that privilege we may decide to highlight or conceal parts of our identity. For example, unless a person tells you, you have no way of knowing their sexual orientation. Thus, a gay man might decide to "pass" as straight at a family reunion to avoid conflict from a heterosexist family. Two, we may have aspects of our identities that are simultaneously advantaged and disadvantaged. The gay, white, working-class, male above is advantaged by the fact that he has light skin and is male, and is disadvantaged by the fact that he is gay and working-class.

White Privilege

Skin color is one of the more disturbing, largely unexamined, and persistent social constructs that perpetuates discrimination and divides power. For Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson, the category of race subsumes all other sources of social division, including gender. Whether they realize them or not, White people enjoy societal advantages in their daily lives, simply because they are white. Social scientists term these advantages **white privilege**.

This chapter's discussion of the problems facing people of color points to some of these advantages. For example, whites can usually drive a car at night or walk down a street without having to fear that a police officer will stop them simply because they are white. Recalling the Trayvon Martin tragedy, they can also walk down a street without having to fear they will be confronted and possibly killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer. In addition, whites can count on being able to move into any neighborhood they desire to as long as they can afford the rent or mortgage. They generally do not have to fear being passed up for promotion simply because of their race. White students can live in college dorms without having to worry that racial slurs will be directed their way. White people in general do not have to worry about being the victims of hate crimes based on their race. They can be seated in a restaurant without having to worry that they will be served more slowly or not at all because of their skin color. If they are in a hotel, they do not have to think that someone will mistake them for a bellhop, parking valet, or maid. If they are trying to hail a taxi, they do not have to worry about the taxi driver ignoring them because the driver fears he or she will be robbed.

Peggy McIntosh defines white privilege as an invisible knapsack of advantages that some people carry around. They are invisible because they are often not recognized, seen as normative (i.e., "that's just the way things are"), seen as universal (i.e., "everyone has them"), or used unconsciously. Below is a list of some of the privileges McIntosh identifies. Can you think of others?

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area that I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.

6. When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser’s shop and find someone who can deal with my hair.
10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
12. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color, who constitute the world’s majority, without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge” I will be facing a person of my race.
19. If a traffic cop pulls me over, or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven’t been singled out because of my race.
20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children’s magazines featuring people of my race.
21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
23. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
24. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my race will not work against me.
25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.
26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color that more or less match my skin.

Social scientist Robert W. Terry (1981, p. 120) once summarized white privilege as follows: “*To be white in America is not to have to think about it.* Except for hard-core racial supremacists, the meaning of being white is having the choice of attending to or ignoring one’s own whiteness” (emphasis in original). For people of color in the United States, it is not an exaggeration to say that race and ethnicity is a daily fact of their existence. Yet whites do not generally have to think about being white. As all of us go about our daily lives, this basic difference is one of the most important manifestations of racial and ethnic inequality in the United States.

For those of us who come from a privileged racial background, unpacking what it means to be white can prove a challenging and confronting task. Research

found that the question ‘What does it mean to be white?’ was very challenging for white Euro-Americans – the question simply did not make sense. Interviewing in downtown San Francisco, researchers found that the most common response to this question was to ask if it was a trick. Incredulity was usually followed by a declaration that this was not something they ever think about.

Perhaps because whites do not have to think about being white, many studies find they tend to underestimate the degree of racial inequality in the United States by assuming that African Americans and Latinos are much better off than they really are. As one report summarized these studies’ overall conclusion, “Whites tend to have a relatively rosy impression of what it means to be a black person in America. Whites are more than twice as likely as blacks to believe that the position of African Americans has improved a great deal” (Vedantam, 2008, p. A3). Because whites think African Americans and Latinos fare much better than they really do, that perception probably reduces whites’ support for programs designed to reduce racial and ethnic inequality, such as Affirmative Action.

Engaging with issues of racism and privilege can be very challenging – both intellectually and personally. The above discussion about privilege and Whiteness is not meant to suggest that those people with white privilege should feel ashamed or guilty. This is

often a trap that people fall into and it can shut down important thinking and conversations about intercultural communication. It's important to realize that everyone has a racial identity. Effective change lies in making whiteness visible, by exploring it as a racial or cultural construct, and defining whiteness in a non-defensive and non-racist manner. When we remove the White race from the often-unidentified “normative” group, it provides a context for studying, talking about, and hopefully improving race relations. Such an understanding will involve thinking about these issues not just as abstract concepts but also as they manifest in our own lives. For some this may mean reflecting on the experience of racism themselves, while for others it will involve recognizing and understanding the often-invisible experience of privilege. In order to do this: White society must be willing to look at themselves honestly, to confront the truth about themselves and the world, and to liberate themselves from the invisible cultural conditioning of a racialized society.

From an intercultural communication perspective, the goal is to create a society that is **antiracist**, which involves the active practice of identifying, challenging, and changing organizational structures, policies, practices, and attitudes that perpetuate systemic racism. While this may seem like a daunting task, every person can do their part. Consider these three action steps:

1. Notice differences in treatment
2. Talk about white privilege and other forms of social privilege.
3. Be willing to teach other people about privilege and power.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Verbal Processes in Intercultural Communication

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[6.2: Moving Between Languages](#)

[6.3: Variations in Communication Styles](#)

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6.1: Language and Culture

How do you communicate? How do you think? We use language as a system to create and exchange meaning with one another, and the types of words we use influence both our perceptions and others interpretation of our meanings. Language is one of the more conspicuous expressions of culture. As such, the role of language is central to our understanding of intercultural communication.

The Study of Language

Linguistics is the study of language and its structure. Linguistics deals with the study of particular languages and the search for general properties common to all languages. It also includes explorations into language variations (i.e. dialects), how languages change over time, how language is stored and processed in the brain, and how children learn language. The study of linguistics is an important part of intercultural communication. Areas of research for linguists include **phonetics** (the study of the production, acoustics, and hearing speech sounds), **phonology** (the patterning of sounds), **morphology** (the patterning of words), **syntax** (the structure of sentences), **semantics** (meaning), and **pragmatics** (language in context). When you study linguistics, you gain insight into one of the most fundamental parts of being human—the ability to communicate. You can understand how language works, how it is used, plus how it is developed and changes over time. Since language is universal to all human interactions, the knowledge attained through linguistics is fundamental to understanding cultures.

World Languages

Languages differ in a number of ways. Not all languages, for example, have a written form. Those that do use a variety of writing systems. Russian uses the Cyrillic alphabet, while Hindi uses Devanagari. Chinese has a particularly ancient and rich written language, with many thousands of pictographic characters. Because of the complexity and variety of Chinese characters, there is a simplified equivalent called Pinyin, which enables Chinese characters to be referenced using the Latin alphabet. This is of particular usefulness in electronic communication. The arrival of touch-enabled smartphones has been of great benefit to languages with alternative writing systems such as Chinese or Arabic (Godwin-Jones, 2017d). Smartphones and word processors can now support writing systems that write right to left such as Hebrew.

Sample text in Korean (Hangeul)

모든 인간은 태어날 때부터 자유로우며 그 존엄과 권리에 있어 동등하다. 인간은 천부적으로 이성과 양심을 부여받았으며 서로 형제애의 정신으로 행동하여야 한다.

Translation:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Languages evolve over time. Historical linguists trace these changes and describe how languages relate to one another. Language families group languages together, according to similarities in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Languages within a same family derive from a common ancestor, called a **proto-language** (Nowak & Krakauer, 1999). Membership in a given family is determined through **comparative linguistics**, i.e., studying and comparing the characteristics of the languages in question. Linguists use the metaphor of a family tree to depict the relationships among languages. One of the largest families is **Indo-European**, with more than 4000 languages or dialects represented. Indo-European languages include Spanish, English, Hindi/Urdu, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian, and Punjabi, each with over 100 million speakers, followed by German, French and Persian. Nearly half the human population speaks an Indo-European language as a first language (Skirgård, 2017). How the languages are related can be shown in the similar terms for "mother" (see sidebar).

Mother in Indo-European languages

- Sanskrit *matar*
- Greek *mater*

Some regions have particularly rich linguistic traditions, such as is the case for Africa and India. In India, there are not only Indo-European languages spoken (Hindi, Punjabi), but also languages from other families such as Dravidian (Telugu, Tamil), Austroasiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, and a few other minor language families. Papua/New Guinea has a particularly rich variety

of languages; with over 850 languages, it is the most linguistically diverse place on earth. In such cultures, most people are multilingual, often speaking 3 or more languages, along with a **lingua franca** - a common denominator -, such as Swahili in parts of Africa, English in India, or Tok Pisin, an English-based creole, in New Guinea.

There are languages which do not belong to families, known as **language isolates** (Campbell, 2010). Well-known examples include Basque, a language spoken in the border area between France and Spain, and Korean. Language isolates tend to develop in geographical isolation, separated from other regions, for example, through mountain ranges or the sea. In some cases, geographical features such as dense forests may result in different dialects or even languages spoken in areas which are actually quite close to one another. A **dialect** refers to a variety of a language that is used by particular group of speakers, defined normally regionally, but could be related to social class or ethnicity as well. Dialects are closely related to one another and normally mutually intelligible.

Language Is Arbitrary and Symbolic

Words, by themselves, do not have any inherent meaning. Humans give meaning to them, and their meanings change across time. For example, there is no inherent, logical connection between "cat" or (or the German *Katze* or Chinese 猫) and the feline animal. We negotiate the meaning of the word "kat," and define it, through visual images or dialog, in order to communicate with our audience.

Words have two types of meanings: *denotative* and *connotative*. Attention to both is necessary to reduce the possibility of misinterpretation. The **denotative meaning** is the common meaning, often found in the dictionary. The **connotative meaning** is often not found in the dictionary but in the community of users itself. It can involve an emotional association with a word, positive or negative, and can be individual or collective, but is not universal. An example of this could be the term "rugged individualism" which comes from "rugged" or capable of withstanding rough handling and "individualism" or being independent and self-reliant. In the United States, describing someone in this way would have a positive connotation, but for people from a collectivistic orientation, it might be the opposite.

Language Evolves

Many people view language as fixed, but in fact, language constantly changes. As time passes and technology changes, people add new words to their language, repurpose old ones, and discard archaic ones. New additions to American English in the last few decades include *blog*, *sexting*, and *selfie*. Repurposed additions to American English include *cyberbullying*, *tweet*, and *app* (from application). Whereas *affright*, *cannonade*, and *fain* are becoming extinct in modern American English. Other times, speakers of a language borrow words and phrases from other languages and incorporate them into their own. *Wisconsin*, *Oregon*, and *Wyoming* were all borrowed from Native American languages. *Typhoon* is from Mandarin Chinese, and *influenza* is from Italian.

Language Shapes Our Thought

What would your life be like if you had been raised in a country other than the one where you grew up? Or suppose you had been born male instead of female, or vice versa. You would have learned another set of customs, values, traditions, other language patterns, and ways of communicating. You would be a different person who communicated in different ways. The link between language and culture and the idea that language shapes how we think about our world was famously described in the work of Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir. The **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** postulates that your native language has a profound influence on how you see the world, that you perceive reality in the context of the language you have available to describe it. According to Sapir (1929), "The 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. The world in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (p. 162). From this perspective, all language use – from the words we use to describe objects to the way sentences are structured – is tied closely to the culture in which it is spoken. In 1940, Whorf wrote:

The background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for people's mental activity, for their analysis of impressions, for their synthesis of their mental stock in trade. Formulation of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar and differs, from slightly to greatly, among different grammars...We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages (p. 231).

Whorf studied native American languages such as Hopi and was struck by differences to English which pointed to different ways of viewing the world, for example, how the Hopi language has no present, past, or future tense verbs. Instead, it divides the world into what Whorf called the manifested and unmanifest domains. The manifested domain deals with the physical universe, including the present, the immediate past and future; the verb system uses the same basic structure for all of them. The unmanifest domain involves the remote past and the future, as well as the world of desires, thought, and life forces. The set of verb forms dealing with this domain are consistent for all of these areas, and are different from the manifested ones. Also, there are no words for hours, minutes, or days of the week.

Taken to its extreme, this kind of **linguistic determinism** would prevent native speakers of different languages from having the same thoughts or sharing a worldview. This idea suggests that we cannot conceive of that for which we lack a vocabulary or that language quite literally defines the boundaries of our thinking. More widely accepted today is the concept of **linguistic relativity**, meaning that language shapes our views of the world but is not an absolute determiner of how or what we think. After all, translation is in fact possible, and bilingualism exists, both of which phenomena should be problematic in a strict interpretation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. It is also the case that many cultures are multilingual, with children growing up exposed to multiple languages.

- Linguistic determinism: language controls thought in culture.
 - Linguistic relativity: language influences thought in culture, and therefore differences among languages cause differences in the thoughts of their speakers.
- Hua (2014), p. 176

No matter what linguistic theory one may hold to be valid, there is little argument that the vocabulary of a language does in fact reflect important aspects of everyday life. Linguist Anna Wierzbicka (2013) provides interesting examples of expressions from the Australian aboriginal language of Warlpiri:

- *japi* — "entrance to sugar ant's nest"
- *laja* — "hole or burrow of lizard"
- *kuyu* — "meat; meatened animal" [including edible birds, but not other birds]
- *karnpi* — "fat under the skin of emu"
- *papapapa-ma* — "to make the sound of a male emu calling to its chicks"
- *yulu* — "limp, relaxed—of slain kangaroo whose hindleg have been broken (in preparation for cooking)"

From a Warlpiri speaker's point of view, these single words point to important features of the environment, as potential sources of shelter and food, but there are no corresponding words in European languages or in most other languages. Wierzbicka comments:

As these examples illustrate, the words of a language reflect the speakers' special interests. For the speakers of a particular language, their words "fit the world" as they see it—but how they see it depends, to some extent, on what they want to see and what they pay attention to. This is true also of European languages, and English is no exception, either. The conviction that the words of our native language fit the world as it really is, is deeply rooted in the thinking of many people, particularly those who have never been forced to move, existentially, from one language into another and to leave the certainties of their home language (p. 6).

Learning a second language leads one early on to appreciate the fact that there may not be a one-to-one correspondence between words in one language and those in another. While the dictionary definitions (denotation) may be the same, the actual usage in any given context (connotation) may be quite different. The word *amigo* in Spanish is the equivalent of the word friend in English, but the relationships described by that word can be quite different. During my travels in Guatemala, I experienced "*hola amigo*," as a common greeting, even among strangers. Just as in English, a Facebook "friend" is quite different from a childhood "friend". The German word *Bier*, refers as does the English "beer", to an alcoholic drink made from barley, hops, and water. In a German context, the word is used to describe an everyday drink commonly consumed with meals or in other social situations. In the American English context, usage of the word, "beer," immediately brings to the fore its status as alcohol, thus a beverage that is strictly regulated and its consumption restricted.



Figure 6.1.1: Beer in Germany: a drink like any other

Differences in available words to describe everyday phenomena is immediately evident when one compares languages or examines vocabulary used in particular situations. That might include a specific small culture, such as dog lovers or sailing enthusiasts, for example, who use a much more extensive vocabulary to describe, respectively, dog breeds or parts of a ship, than would be familiar to most people, no matter whether they are native speakers of the language or not. Sometimes, a special language is developed by a group, sometimes labeled a **jargon**, which often references a specialized technical language. A related term is an **argot**, a kind of secret language designed to exclude outsiders, such as the language used by criminal gangs.

Less immediately evident than vocabulary differences in comparing languages are differences in grammatical structures. If, for example, a language has different personal pronouns for direct address, such as the informal *tu* in French and the formal *vous*, both meaning 'you', that distinction is a reflection of one aspect of the culture. It indicates that there is a built-in awareness and significance to social differentiation and that a more formal level of language use is available. Native speakers of English may have difficulty in learning how to use the different forms of address in French, or as they exist in other languages such as German or Spanish. Speakers of American English, in particular, are inclined towards informal modes of address, moving to a first-name basis as soon as possible. Using informal address inappropriately can cause considerable social friction. It takes a good deal of language socialization to acquire this kind of pragmatic ability, that is to say, sufficient exposure to the forms being used correctly. While native speakers of English may deplore the formality of *vous* or its equivalent in other languages, in cultures where these distinctions exist, they provide a valuable device for maintaining relational distance when desired, for clearly distinguishing friends from acquaintances, and for preserving social harmony in institutional settings. Expanding on this notion, Students of Korean learn early on in their studies that there is not just a distinction between familiar and formal "you", as exists in many languages, but that the code of respect and politeness of Korean culture dictates different vocabulary, intonation, and speech patterns depending on one's relationship to the addressee. This can extend to nonverbal conventions as well, such as bowing or increasing personal space.

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6.2: Moving Between Languages

Bilingualism and Multilingualism

The complex identities created through the forces of globalization, mass migration, and the growth of social media, have also resulted in linguistic complexity (Piller, 2017). Individuals are much more likely than in the past to be exposed, in person or online, to speakers of other languages. The plurality of languages may well happen within one's own family. As travel and migration have brought more people from different cultures together, there has been a growth in families in which parents have different mother tongues. Children in such households are likely to be brought up speaking both languages, becoming bilingual. **Bilingualism** may as well result from individuals or families migrating and continuing to speak the language of their home culture, while learning that of the host country. Studies have shown that not only do bilinguals have the advantage of likely fluency in two languages, but that the process of growing up bilingual also has a positive effect on brain development (Albert & Obler, 1978).

Bilinguals may differ in their level of proficiency in the languages they speak. Normally a bilingual will have one dominant language (Grosjean, 2001). It may be, for example, that children speaking the language of their parents at home may not develop a good reading or writing ability in that language. Some schools and universities in which there are large numbers of such "heritage" speakers, often have specially designed courses which help such students develop full capabilities in those languages. People who know more than one language have been shown to be more adept at language learning (Kaushanskaya & Marian, 2009).

In most parts of the world today, most individuals have at least some capability in a second language: "The majority of the world's population uses more than one language on a regular basis and **monolingualism** is by and large a historical and Anglophone anomaly" (Piller, 2017, pp. 71-72). This is a matter of necessity in countries such as Luxembourg, Nigeria, or Indonesia in which there are multiple languages coexisting in geographically close quarters. Inhabitants of smaller countries, with their own national languages, such as Denmark, Estonia, or Nauru (an island country in Micronesia) will, due to economic and practical concerns, typically learn the language of larger neighboring countries. However, in this context as in others, political and nationalist issues may influence language learning choices.

Many countries have more than one officially recognized national language, including Canada (English and French), Switzerland (French, German, Italian, Romansch), South Africa (11 languages), and India (22 languages). It's not the case that in **multilingual** societies all speakers are necessarily multilingual. Particular languages may be spoken predominately in one region, as is the case for French in Canada or Italian in Switzerland. In other cases, language use may be distributed according to ethnic heritage, as can be seen in Singapore or Malaysia. In some countries, there may be different versions of a common language, as is the case in Switzerland with Swiss German and standard German, or in Arabic, with the "high" version being Modern Standard Arabic, used in writing and in formal speech, and the many regional, colloquial versions (Egyptian, Maghrebi, Peninsular, etc.).



Figure 6.2.1: Tamil, English and Hindi name board at the Tirusulam suburban railway station in Chennai.

Learning a Second Language

Learning a second language provides insight into how language works. Many monolinguals are likely to assume that the difference between languages is largely semantic, that is to say that moving from one language to another is simply a matter of substituting words. We have seen in the example of Warlpiri how far that can be from reality. In fact, the very same word equivalents can be put

dependent on the level of fluency and accuracy one hopes to attain. People learn languages for different reasons, and some learners may just need a reading ability.



Figure 6.2.2: Learning German at the Smarter Language Academy in Nigeria

Most current theories of **Second Language Acquisition** (SLA) advocate a sociocognitive approach, combining learning of vocabulary and grammar through drills and repetition and culturally strategic knowledge and strategic competence, i.e., what's appropriate to say in a given context. The current trend in language instruction is to put more emphasis on the latter. This involves developing practical and pragmatically appropriate speaking ability (Savignon, 1983). The emphasis is on use of functional language in real communicative contexts, often using a task-based approach. This involves having students use real world situations to practice language. There is a growing recognition that for most learners, functional ability in a second language should be the goal.

Immigrants sometimes reach a level of ability that provides basic functionality in the language. At that point they may stop formal training or making conscious efforts to improve, their pronunciation and grammar becoming "fossilized" at the functional level achieved (Acton, 1984). In the field of SLA today, it is recognized that language learners vary considerably in their goals and needs and that not every learner needs to develop native-like pronunciation or perfect grammar. The standard for most learners is likely to be intelligibility, being able to make oneself understood. In some cases, mispronunciation of individual sounds is less important for intelligibility than intonation or idiomatic word choice. Unfortunately, the public at large does not share the perspective of SLA, so that those who speak with a noticeable accent or use faulty grammar can face prejudice and discrimination, despite being eminently intelligible.

One of the other determiners of language learning ease or difficulty is the similarity or dissimilarity of the second language to one's native tongue. It is clearly much easier for a native English speaker to learn Spanish or German than to learn Arabic or Mandarin. For those languages, a completely different writing system must be learned. It's also the case that Spanish and German, like English, are members of the same language family of Indo-European, which means that they have similar genealogies. As a result, there are similarities in grammar and vocabulary. A high number of **cognates** – words which resemble each other – between the two languages can be very helpful, especially in the early stages of language learning.

Language and language learning are both such complex phenomena, that there is not likely to be one "right" way or best approach to SLA (see Godwin-Jones, 2018). The diversity of learner backgrounds, available learning resources, and level of need/interest mean that no individual is likely to learn a new language in precisely the same way. This has led to a great deal of interest in how language development can be personalized to individual learners (see Godwin-Jones, 2017c; Ortega, 2017).

Ultimately, if or how well learners acquire a second language depends on the individual. One's attitude is a crucial factor. If one is highly motivated to learn because of extrinsic factors, such as a migrant's need for functional ability in an adopted country, that can lead to more intense and faster learning. There may be compelling professional reasons for needing to learn a second language, such as being posted to a foreign country. Intrinsic motivating factors may play a role. Those might include a desire to learn more about another culture to maintain or establish a connection to one's ethnic heritage. **Polyglots**, speakers of multiple languages, are motivated to learn as many languages as possible.



Figure 6.2.3: Author JRR Tolkien knew many languages and invented languages

In any case, maintaining a positive attitude is important in intercultural communication generally, and is of great benefit as well in language learning. A spirit of openness and curiosity is needed. If one is willing to use the language learned to engage in conversation with other learners or native speakers, faster progress is likely. The author of a well-known textbook on intercultural communication entitled one of the chapters "Language as a barrier" (Jandt, 2012). In fact, the opposite is true, learning a second language is a gateway into another culture, the most effective way to get an inside track on the perspective from which speakers of the language view the world.

Language Learning and Technology

Today online resources have become invaluable for all language learners. Language learners may be using online resources in conjunction with instructed language learning in a formal school setting, or they may be independently learning or maintaining a second language. For the latter, there are a variety of options available. There are online language learning services online such as DuoLingo or Mango Languages. These typically provide instruction in multiple languages and, in addition to basic language instruction, also offer access to other learners and/or native speakers. These are typically commercial services, which usually offer a free trial. They vary considerably in scope and effectiveness. A free alternative is to connect online with other language learners through a site such as the Mixxer. One of the methods that has been popular in recent years is tandem learning, in which two learners of each other's language serve as conversation partners and native informants, sharing equally in time spent practicing with each language (Brammerts, 1996).

Informal language learning through the Internet has become increasingly popular, as it offers just-in-time learning, anytime access, and low cost. Depending on the tool or service used, it also offers the possibility of creating relationships with other learners or native speakers. This can provide valuable venues for real language use. Often classroom language learning is preparation or practice for actual communication, but the Internet provides opportunities for authentic communication. It supplies both opportunities for language use in real contexts and the opportunity for cultural learning. Having real conversations with real people (face-to-face or online) can be a powerful learning motivator. Using and learning languages online has the potential to expose learners to both high volumes and diverse ranges of language. This is an ideal environment for language learning.

"A foreign language is not simply something to add to our repertoire of skills, but a personalized tool that enables us to expand and express our identity or sense of self in new and interesting ways and with new kinds of people" (Ushioda, 2011, p. 204).

How one might use technology for language learning depends to a large extent on one's level of proficiency, time available, and the purpose for wanting to learn the language. For tourists, there are phrase books, virtual guided tours, and other language and cultural resources in electronic form. These are typically available as apps for mobile access (Godwin-Jones, 2017d). Also popular are flashcard programs for vocabulary learning as well as basic grammar tutorials. For those focused on learning to read in another language, dual-language and annotated texts are available, depending upon the L1 (native language) and L2 (target language) combination. Also possible are online courses or software programs for many languages. These include freely available Internet courses such as MOOCs (Massively Open Online Courses) or for-credit university classes.

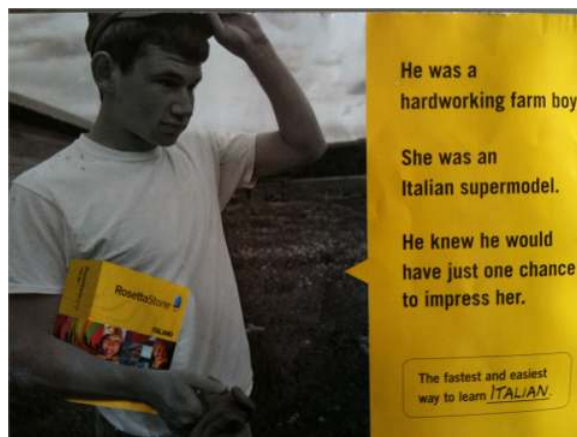


Figure 6.2.4: Ad for Rosetta Stones promising social benefits

Among the self-directed language learning software packages, one of the better-known products is Rosetta Stone. It features a sequenced presentation of the target language, initially in phrases and short sentences, and then moving on gradually to larger language chunks. It incorporates listening practice as well as speaking, providing feedback through automatic speech recognition. Rosetta Stone has been criticized for not incorporating a cultural component: the same generic sentences and stock illustrations are used for all languages. Moreover, it shares with other dedicated language learning software the disadvantage of not supplying opportunities for language use beyond simple phrases and sentences. One recent study of the use of Rosetta Stone in elementary Spanish found that students had gained considerable knowledge in the areas of vocabulary and grammar (Lord, 2015). However, they had considerable difficulty in conducting even a basic conversation in Spanish. They lacked strategic competence, the ability to negotiate conversations through rephrasing or asking for explanations or repetitions.

English as a world language

Often there is a close and natural connection between the language one learns and the culture represented by that language. In fact, interest in the target culture may be the starting point for learning a new language. In some cases, there is a tighter connection to a single culture than for others. Learners of Japanese, for example, are in a different position from learners of Spanish in that there are fewer regional variations and only one nation-state where Japanese is spoken. From that perspective, English is even more diverse culturally than Spanish. That derives not just from the fact that English is the official language of a variety of countries, but that it also functions as the lingua franca for exchanges between people with different native languages. In fact, it's estimated that there are today a larger number of people worldwide who speak English as a second language than as a native language (Crystal, 2003). English is seen in many countries as an essential tool for social and economic advancement. At the same time, English is sometimes seen as an instrument of cultural imperialism, given the history of colonization, evangelization and, spread of US consumer/popular culture from the Anglophone world. The spread of English is often accompanied by Western, more specifically Anglo-Saxon cultural values.

The role that English as a language plays in a given culture may vary considerably. Given its history as a former English colony, Hong Kong, for example, is a city in which there are many people who speak English in their everyday lives. Hong Kongers use English "quite comfortably with one another when they are at school or in the office. It is considered strange, however, to use it in daily conversation" (Scollon, Scollon & Jones, 2012, p. 6). This is in contrast to Singapore, India, or South Africa, where there may be speakers of a variety of other languages so that English is needed as a lingua franca. In Hong Kong, by contrast, English is not needed, as native Hong Kongers speak Cantonese. Scollon, Scollon & Jones (2012) point out that using English in Hong Kong outside of institutional settings carries with it social significance:

[This is] based partly on the groups of people that use it such as teachers and other authority figures as well as non-Cantonese speaking "foreigners," and so by appropriating English into casual conversation with another Cantonese speaker, one might be claiming a certain affiliation with those groups of people, or one might be thought by the people to whom one is talking to be claiming such an affiliation, to be "showing off," or, at the very least, to be acting unduly formal (p. 6).

The different social significance of speaking English across cultures points to the inherent cultural forces language embodies beyond serving as a means of communication. Language choice can be a way to position oneself socially. In many cultures, English may be an important component of individual identity and agency.

The interest in English has resulted in a boom in English classes in many countries. At the same time, there has been a shift in how English is taught as a second language. It is no longer the case that learning English is tied necessarily to learning as well about the culture of Great Britain or the USA. The kind of English taught may in fact not be either British English or North American English, but rather a version which adapts to a local variety of English or strives to model International or World English. The latter concept has evolved out of the desire to minimize cultural influences from North America and Great Britain in language learning, as well as to deal with differences in usage (spelling, vocabulary, pronunciation) among Englishes in Anglophone countries. There have even been attempts, such as Basic Global English, to create a kind of neutral, bare-bones version of the language (Grzega, 2006). On the other hand, there have been efforts locally to teach English within the context of a local culture. That has been the case, for example, in Vietnam (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996) and Pakistan (Malik, 1993).

Many people are learning English for highly utilitarian reasons, to advance socially or professionally. As a result, there is a lot of interest in "English for Special Purposes," English classes tailored to those with particular professional needs, such as business, tourism, or a highly technical field. This may lead to a limited proficiency in English within a narrow semantic field. An example is Aviation English, called *AirSpeak*, the version of English universally used by pilots and air traffic controllers (International Civil Aviation Organization, 2003). There have been some concerns expressed that pilots with *AirSpeak*-level English proficiency can deal very well with routine situations that occur in the air, but might have some difficulty describing unusual events in English. The example given in the sidebar illustrates potential issues with language, but also possibly with sociocultural factors, namely the possible reluctance of a pilot to admit ignorance.

Example: Airspeak

On August 2, 1976, a Boeing 707 cargo flight departed from Tehran to Seoul and collided with the mountain due to a wrong turn. The following is the conversation between Air Traffic Controller (ATC) and the pilot. Standard Instrument Departure (SID) is published flight procedure followed by aircraft immediately after takeoff from an airport

- ATC to Pilot: "Follow SID 11"
- Pilot to ATC: "What is SID 11?"
- ATC to Pilot: "Standard Instrument Departure 11"
- Pilot action: Silence

Hazrati & Touiserkani (2016)

In the early days of the Internet there was concern that English would crowd out all other languages. That has not, however, been the case. Statistics show much faster Internet growth in countries where English is not the dominant language (Internet World Stats, 2017). In 1996, more than 80 percent of Internet users were native English speakers. By 2010, that percentage had dropped to 27.3 percent. Online services are increasingly available in multiple languages, Wikipedia in 295 languages and Facebook in 101 (Ortega, 2017). However, it remains a reality that English growth may lead to the decline of other languages. In some countries, private universities have opened up in which the language of instruction is English. The popularity since 2012 of MOOCs, which have predominantly been offered in English, from US universities, has led some to worry about that form of distance learning in English replacing local educational resources (Godwin-Jones, 2014). Whether the cause is or is not the spread of English, it does remain that a large number of the world's languages are today threatened with extinction (Choi, 2014).

Endangered Languages

There are approximately 6500 languages spoken in the world today, but about 2000 of those languages have fewer than 1000 speakers (www.linguisticsociety.org, 2/10/19). As of 2018, the top ten languages spoken by approximately half the world's population are Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, English, Arabic, Hindi, Bengali, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, and Ladhna or Pundjabi (www.statista.com, 2/10/19). Chinese and Tamil are among the oldest spoken languages in the world (taleninstuut.nl, 2/10/19).

It is estimated that at least half of the world's languages are endangered and will become extinct within the next century. That is particularly the case with indigenous languages in the Americas and Asia. This is happening at an alarming rate, for multiple reasons; often cited are globalization and the rise of English as a world language. Of the 165 indigenous languages still spoken in

North America, only 8 are spoken by as many as 10,000 people. About 75 are spoken by only a handful of older people, and are believed to be on their way to extinction (www.linguisticsociety.org, 2/10/19)). Given the close connection we have discussed here between language and culture, losing language communities also means a loss of human cultural capital, which is irreplaceable. For the majority of the world languages which do not have a written language, losing the last remaining speakers can mean the disappearance of the spoken stories and traditions. It can also mean a significant loss of knowledge of the natural world. Losing words for native plants can mean loss of knowledge of how that plant can be used for medicinal or other purposes. Ultimately, losing a language entails losing a unique view of our world. When a language dies, a culture can die with it.

In an effort to preserve endangered languages, field linguists attempt to capture recordings from the remaining speakers of these languages. Modern technology makes it much easier to document and archive language use. However, those same technological advances bring the outside world into formally isolated areas, inevitably favoring the spread of dominant languages such as Spanish, Chinese, and English.



Figure 6.2.5: Linguist Gregory Anderson interviews a Koro speaker in India

Given the close connection we have discussed here between language and culture, losing language communities also means a loss of human cultural capital, which is irreplaceable. For the majority of the world languages which do not have a written language, losing the last remaining speakers can mean the disappearance of the spoken stories and traditions. It can also mean a significant loss of knowledge of the natural world. Losing words for native plants can mean loss of knowledge of how that plant can be used for medicinal or other purposes. Ultimately, losing a language entails losing a unique view of our world.

Translation & Interpretation

Because no one can learn every language, we rely on translators and interpreters. On the surface level, translation and interpretation seem to be much the same thing, with one skill relying on written texts and the other occurring orally. Both *translation* and *interpretation* enable communication across language boundaries from *source* to *target*. Both need deep cultural and linguistic understanding along with expert knowledge of the subject area and the ability to communicate clearly, but this is where the similarities end.

- **Translation** generally involves the process of producing a written text that refers to something written in another language. Traditionally, the *translator* would read the *source* in its original language, decipher its meaning, then write, rewrite, and proofread the content in the *target* language to ensure the original meaning, style and content are preserved. Some *translators* use computer-aided tools to convert the *source* into a file type for electronic translation, then proof-read each section of the text for quality of content, meaning, and style in the *target* language. Transferring meaning from one language to another can sometimes make for interesting twists. The *New York Times* Sterngold, J. (11/15/98) noted that the title of the 1998 film *There's Something About Mary* proved difficult to translate when it was released in foreign markets. In Poland, where blonde jokes are popular and common, the film title (translated back to English for our use) was *For the Love of a Blonde*. In France, *Mary at All Costs* communicated the idea, while in Thailand *My True Love Will Stand All Outrageous Events* dropped the reference to Mary altogether. Capturing ideas with words is a challenge when the intended audience speaks the same language, but across languages and cultures, the challenge becomes intense. **Translators** are often experts in their fields of knowledge as well as linguists fluent in two or more languages with excellent written communication skills.
- **Interpretation** is the process of orally expressing what is said or written in another language. Contrary to popular belief, *interpretation* isn't a word-for-word translation of a spoken message. If it was, it wouldn't make sense to the target audience. *Interpreters* need to transpose the *source* language within the given context, preserving its original meaning, but rephrasing idioms, colloquialisms, and other culturally-specific references in ways that the *target* audience can understand. They may have to do this in a simultaneous manner to the original speaker or by speaking only during the breaks provided by the original speaker. **Interpreters** are also often experts in fields of knowledge, cultures, and languages with excellent memories.

The roles of translators and interpreters are very complex. Not everyone who has levels of fluency in two languages makes a good *translator* or *interpreter*. Complex relationships between people, intercultural situations, and intercultural contexts involve more than just language fluency, but rather culture fluency.

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6.3: Variations in Communication Styles

As has been established, language is not culture free. If your intercultural communication is to be effective, you cannot ignore the broader cultural context that gives words meaning. Cultural rules about when and how certain speech acts can be performed may differ greatly. Routine formulas such as greetings, leave-taking, thanking, apologizing and so on do not follow the same, or even similar rules, across cultures causing misunderstandings and confusion. How language is used in a particular culture is strongly related to the values a culture emphasizes, and how it believes that the relations between humans ought to be.

An offer of coffee: what does it really mean?

In some cultures an offer of coffee after a meal is generally recognized as a polite way to indicate to the guests that they ought to leave soon if they do not wish to outstay their welcome. In other cultures, an offer of coffee on a similar occasion is just an act of the host's kindness (or even an invitation to the guests to stay a little bit longer than they had intended). If interactants from different cultural backgrounds are unaware of the differences in their respective mental sets, misunderstandings are likely to occur. Misunderstandings of this sort involve the carryover of culture-specific knowledge from a situation of intra-cultural communication to a situation of intercultural communication.

Žegarac & Pennington, 2000, p. 169



Communication Styles

Social scientists and linguists have been studying for some time how individuals and groups interact through language, both within the same language and between languages. They have sought to discover how and why language uses vary. An understanding of communication style differences helps listeners understand how to interpret verbal messages.

High and Low Context

Think about someone you are very close to—a best friend, romantic partner, or sibling. Have there been times when you began a sentence and the other person knew exactly what you were going to say before you said it? For example, in a situation between two sisters, one sister might exclaim, “Get off!” (which is short for “get off my wavelength”). This phenomenon of being on someone’s wavelength is similar to what anthropologist Edward Hall describes as high context. In high context communication the meaning is in the people, or more specifically, the relationship between the people as opposed to just the words. In high-context cultures, body language is as important and sometimes more important than the actual words spoken. In high-context cultures, such as those found in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, the physical context of the message carries a great deal of importance. People tend to be more indirect and to expect the person they are communicating with to “read between the lines” to decode the implicit part of their message. *High context* cultures are very often collectivistic as well.

In low-context messages, little (or “low”) context is needed for comprehension because the essence of the communication is conveyed by the words used and little information is conveyed by nonverbal means. In low context communication, the speaker is expected to be responsible for constructing a clear message that the listener can decode easily. You’re probably familiar with some well-known low-context mottos: “Say what you mean” and “Don’t beat around the bush.” The guiding principle is to minimize the margins of misunderstanding or doubt. Low-context communication aspires to get straight to the point. Many *low context* cultures are individualist so people openly express their views, and tend to make important information obvious to others. The American legal system, for example, relies on low context communication.

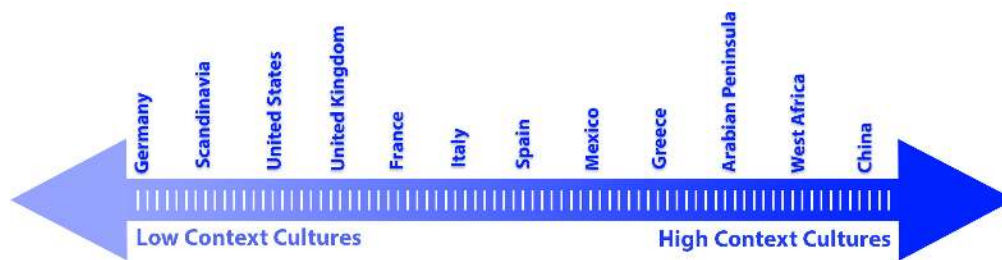


Figure 6.3.1: A graph which shows the level of context in various world cultures

While some cultures are low or high context, in general terms, there can also be individual or contextual differences within cultures. People who spend a lot of time together in the same group inevitably develop high context ways of communicating. In the example above between the two sisters, they are using high context communication, however, The United States is considered a low context culture. Countries such as Germany and Sweden are also low context while Japan and China are high context. Communication between people from high-context and low-context cultures can be confusing. In business interactions, people from low-context cultures tend to listen primarily to the words spoken; they tend not to be as cognizant of nonverbal aspects. As a result, people often miss important clues that could tell them more about the specific issue.

Direct / Indirect

The direct / indirect continuum has to do with the explicitness of one's talk, or how much of their thoughts are communicated directly through words and how much is hinted at. Direct speech is very explicit while indirect speech is more obscure. If I say, "Close the window" my meaning is quite clear. However, if I were to ask, "Is anyone else cold in here?" or, "Geez, this room is cold," I might also be signaling indirectly that I want someone to close the window. As the United States is typically a direct culture, these latter statements might generate comments like, "Why didn't you just ask someone to shut the window?" or "Shut it yourself." Why might someone make a choice to use a direct or indirect form of communication? What are some of the advantages or disadvantages of each style? Think about the context for a moment. If you as a student were in a meeting with the President of your university and you were to tell them to "Shut the window," what do you think would happen? Can you even imagine saying that? An indirect approach in this context may appear more polite, appropriate, and effective.

Direct styles are those in which verbal messages reveal the speaker's true intentions, needs, wants, and desires. The focus is on accomplishing a task. The message is clear, and to the point without hidden intentions or implied meanings. The communication tends to be impersonal. Conflict is discussed openly and people say what they think. In the United States, business correspondence is expected to be short and to the point. "What can I do for you?" is a common question when a business person receives a call from a stranger; it is an accepted way of asking the caller to state his or her business.

Indirect styles are those in which communication is often designed to hide or minimize the speaker's true intentions, needs, wants, and desires. Communication tends to be personal and focuses on the relationship between the speakers. The language may be subtle, and the speaker may be looking for a "softer" way to communicate there is a problem by providing many contextual cues. A hidden meaning may be embedded into the message because harmony and "saving face" is more important than truth and confrontation. This indirect verbal behavior is often associated with Asian cultures. The Japanese version of "yes" (*Hai* はい) does not necessarily mean "yes" in the sense of agreeing or accepting. It is used often to equivocate, to indicate to the speaker that you are listening, but not necessarily expressing an affirmation. In indirect cultures, such as those in Latin America, business conversations may start with discussions of the weather, or family, or topics other than business as the partners gain a sense of each other, long before the topic of business is raised.

Elaborate / Understated

Elaborate and Understated communication styles refer to the quantity of talk that a culture values. The elaborate style uses more words, phrases, or metaphors to express an idea than the understated style. It includes the use of rich and expressive language in everyday conversation. It may be described as descriptive, poetic or too wordy depending on your view. Commenting on a flower garden a Japanese (Understated) speaker may say, "That's a beautiful garden" An Egyptian (Elaborate) speaker may go into much more detail about the specific varieties and colors of the blossoms, "This garden invokes so many memories for me. The deep purple irises remind me of my maternal grandmother as those are her favorite flowers. Those pink roses are similar to the ones I sent to my first love." The French, Latin Americans, Africans, and Arabs tend to use exaggerated communication because in their cultures, simple statements may be interpreted to mean the exact opposite.

The understated style in contrast values simplicity and silence. As many parents usually tell their children, “If you can’t say anything nice, then don’t say anything at all.” People who speak sparingly tend to be trusted more than people who speak a lot. Prudent word choice allows an individual to be socially discreet, gain social acceptance, and avoid social penalty. In Japan, the pleasure of a conversation lies “not in discussion (a logical game), but in emotional exchange” (Nakane, 1970) with the purpose of social harmony (Barnlund, 1975). Many Asian cultures and the Amish value this form.



Figure 6.3.2: In the US there have been conflicts between Korean store-keepers and African-American customers

The conflicts in the elaborate / understated communication styles can occur from interactions among members of different ethnic groups. In one study of an immigrant Korean shopkeeper and an African-American customer in Los Angeles, the clash of styles is evident (Bailey, 1997). In a conversation Bailey analyzes, the African-American customer uses an elaborate style, featuring informal and emotional language, in an effort to establish a personal connection to the Korean shopkeeper. He uses swear words and volunteers personal information about himself. The shopkeeper, however, remains detached and impersonal, resulting in an unsatisfying conversation. This is not unusual in such encounters, as Bailey comments:

The seeming avoidance of involvement on the part of immigrant Koreans is frequently seen by African Americans as the disdain and arrogance of racism. The relative stress on interpersonal involvement among African Americans in service encounters is typically perceived by immigrant Korean retailers as a sign of selfishness, interpersonal imposition, or poor breeding (Bailey, 1997, p. 353).

Personal / Contextual

Remember when we were talking about the French and Spanish languages and the fact that they have a formal and informal “you” depending on the relationship between the speaker and the audience? This example also helps explain the third communication style: the personal and contextual. The contextual style is one where there are structural linguistic devices used to mark the relationship between the speaker and the listener. If this sounds a bit unfamiliar, that is because the English language has no such linguistic distinctions; it is an example of the personal style that enhances the sense of “I.” While the English language does allow us to show respect for our audience such as the choice to eliminate slang or the use of titles such as Sir, Madame, President, Congressperson, or Professor, they do not inherently change the structure of the language.

Instrumental / Affective

The final continuum, instrumental/affective, refers to who holds the responsibility for effectively conveying a message: the speaker or the audience? The instrumental style is goal- or sender-orientated, meaning it is the burden of the speaker to make themselves understood. The affective style is more receiver-orientated thus, places more responsibility on the listener. Here, the listener should pay attention to verbal, nonverbal, and relationship clues in an attempt to understand the message. Asian cultures such as China and Japan and many Native American tribes are affective cultures. The United States is more instrumental. Think about sitting in your college classroom listening to your professor lecture. If you do not understand the material where does the responsibility reside? Usually it is given to the professor as in statements such as “My Math Professor isn’t very well organized.” Or “By the end of the Econ. lecture all that was on the board were lines, circles, and a bunch of numbers. I didn’t know what was important and what wasn’t.” These statements suggest that it is up to the professor to communicate the material to the students. As I was raised in the American educational system, I too am used to this perspective and often look at my teaching methods when students fail to

understand the material. A professor was teaching in China and when her students encountered particular difficulty with a certain concept she would often ask the students, “What do you need—more examples? Shall we review again? Are the terms confusing?” Her students, raised in a more affective environment responded, “No, it’s not you. It is our job as your students to try harder. We did not study enough and will read the chapter again so we will understand.” The students accepted the responsibility as listeners to work to understand the speaker.

Variations in Context Rules of Communication Styles

While there are differences in the preferred communication styles used by various cultures, it is important to remember that no particular culture will use the same communication style all the time. It is helpful to think about these descriptors as a continuum rather than polar opposites because it allows us to imagine more communicative options for speakers. They are not fixed into one style or another but instead, people can make choices about where to be on the continuum according to the context in which they find themselves. When a person either emphasizes or minimizes the differences between himself /herself and the other person in conversation, it is called **code-switching**. In other words, it’s the practice of shifting the language that you use to better express yourself in conversations. This can include, but is not limited to, language, accent, dialect, and vocalics or paralinguage.

There are many reasons why people may incorporate code-switching in their conversations. People, consciously and unconsciously, code-switch to better reflect the speech of those around them, such as picking up a southern accent when vacationing in Georgia. Sometimes people *code-switch* to ingratiate themselves to others. What teenager hasn’t used the formal language of their parents when asking for a favor like borrowing the car or asking for money? Code-switching can also be used to express solidarity, gratitude, group identity, compliance gaining, or even to maintain the exact meaning of a word in a language that is not their own.

Interracial Communication

Race and communication are related in various ways. Racism influences our communication about race and is not an easy topic for most people to discuss. Today, people tend to view racism as overt acts such as calling someone a derogatory name or discriminating against someone in thought or action. However, there is a difference between racist acts, which we can attach to an individual, and institutional racism, which is not as easily identifiable. It is much easier for people to recognize and decry racist actions than it is to realize that racist patterns and practices go through societal institutions, which means that racism exists and doesn’t have to be committed by any one person. As competent communicators and critical thinkers, we must challenge ourselves to be aware of how racism influences our communication at individual and societal levels.

We tend to make assumptions about people’s race based on how they talk, and often these assumptions are based on stereotypes. Dominant groups tend to define what is correct or incorrect usage of a language, and since language is so closely tied to identity, labeling a group’s use of a language as incorrect or deviant challenges or negates part of their identity (Yancy, 2011). We know there isn’t only one way to speak English, but there have been movements to identify a standard. This becomes problematic when we realize that “standard English” refers to a way of speaking English that is based on white, middle-class ideals that do not match up with the experiences of many. When we create a standard for English, we can label anything that deviates from that “nonstandard English.” Differences between standard English and what has been called “Black English” have gotten national attention through debates about whether or not instruction in classrooms should accommodate students who do not speak standard English. Education plays an important role in language acquisition, and class relates to access to education. In general, whether someone speaks standard English themselves or not, they tend to negatively judge people whose speech deviates from the standard.

Another national controversy has revolved around the inclusion of Spanish in common language use, such as Spanish as an option at ATMs, or other automated services, and Spanish language instruction in school for students who don’t speak or are learning to speak English. As was noted earlier, the Latinx population in the United States is growing fast, which has necessitated inclusion of Spanish in many areas of public life. This has also created a backlash, which some scholars argue is tied more to the race of the immigrants than the language they speak and a fear that white America could be engulfed by other languages and cultures (Speicher, 2002). This backlash has led to a revived movement to make English the official language of the United States.



Figure 6.3.3: The “English only” movement of recent years is largely a backlash targeted at immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries. [Wikimedia Commons](#) – public domain. Courtesy of www.CGPGrey.com.

The US Constitution does not stipulate a national language, and Congress has not designated one either. While nearly thirty states have passed English-language legislation, it has mostly been symbolic, and court rulings have limited any enforceability (Zuckerman, 2010). The Linguistic Society of America points out that immigrants are very aware of the social and economic advantages of learning English and do not need to be forced. They also point out that the United States has always had many languages represented, that national unity hasn’t rested on a single language, and that there are actually benefits to having a population that is multilingual (Linguistic Society of America, 2011). Interracial communication presents some additional verbal challenges.

Some people of color may engage in code-switching when communicating with dominant group members because they fear they will be negatively judged. Adopting the language practices of the dominant group may minimize perceived differences. This code-switching creates a linguistic dual consciousness in which people are able to maintain their linguistic identities with their in-group peers but can still acquire tools and gain access needed to function in dominant society (Yancy, 2011). White people may also feel anxious about communicating with people of color out of fear of being perceived as racist. In other situations, people in dominant groups may spotlight nondominant members by asking them to comment on or educate others about their race (Allen, 2011). For example, I once taught at a university that was predominantly white. Students of color talked to me about being asked by professors to weigh in on an issue when discussions of race came up in the classroom. While a professor may have been well-intentioned, spotlighting can make a student feel conspicuous, frustrated, or defensive. Additionally, I bet the professors wouldn’t think about asking a white, male, or heterosexual student to give the perspective of their whole group.

Attitudes Towards Speaking, Silence, and Writing

In some cultures, such as the United States, speech is highly valued, and it is important to be articulate and well-spoken in personal as well as public settings. People in these cultures tend to use language as a powerful tool to discover and express truth, as well as to extend themselves and have an impact on others. Such countries tend to take silence as a sign of indifference, indignation, objection, and even hostility. The silence confuses and confounds them since it is so different from expected behavior. Many are even embarrassed by silence, and feel compelled to fill the silence with words so they are no longer uncomfortable. Or if a question is not answered immediately, people are concerned that the speaker may think that they do not know the answer. Countries reflecting these attitudes would include the United States, Canada, Italy, and other Western European countries.

Silence in some Asian cultures can be a sign of respect. If a person asks a question, it is polite to demonstrate that you have reflected on the question before providing an answer. In differences of opinion, it is often thought that saying nothing is better than offending the other side, which would cause both parties to lose face. Sometimes words do not convey ideas, but instead become barriers. In his ethnographic study of the Western Apache Native American tribe, Keith Basso (1970) reported that silence was used for “unscripted” social situations, such as unforeseen encounters, talking with strangers, first dates, times of mourning, or greeting those who had been away for an extended period of time. Later, Charles Braithwaite (1999) expanded the study of the role of silence to a variety of cultures, in which silence tends to be part of the communicative pattern. He confirmed Basso’s findings that silence is seen in communication situations in which there is uncertainty, ambiguity, or unpredictability. He also found that silence

is often used in conversations in which the participants represent different positions of power or authority. In hierarchical cultures, speaking is often the right of the most senior or oldest person so others are expected to remain silent or only speak when spoken to and asked to corroborate information. In listening cultures, silence is a way to keep exchanges calm and orderly. In collectivistic cultures, it is polite to remain silent when your opinion does not agree with that of the group. In some African and Native American cultures, silence is seen as a way of enjoying someone's company without a need to fill every moment with noise. Or silence could simply be a case of the person having to speak in another language, and taking their time to reply.

The act of writing also varies widely in value from culture to culture. In the United States written contracts are considered more powerful and binding than oral consent. A common question is "did you get that in writing?" The relationship between writing and speaking is an important reinforcement of commitment. Other cultures tend to value oral communication over written communication or even a handshake over words.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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7.1: Principles of Nonverbal Communication

In 2015, the "Boston bomber", Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, was sentenced to death. He and his brother had placed bombs near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, resulting in multiple deaths and injuries. At the trial, his involvement in setting the bombs was not at issue; he admitted his guilt. The question was if he would be sentenced to life in prison or to death. That decision rested with the jury and their perception of Tsarnaev. Character witnesses, family members, and bombing survivors testified. The defense tried to make the case that he was acting under the controlling influence of his older brother. The prosecution portrayed him as a heartless terrorist. A key factor for the jury was to evaluate Tsarnaev's character. His body language during the trial was not helpful to the defense. He seemed uninvolved and bored. He showed no emotional reaction to the horrific scenes and stories from the bombing shown and narrated in court. He didn't look at the jury or make eye contact with those on the witness stand. In mainstream US culture, an averted gaze could be interpreted as an admission of guilt and shame, while the lack of emotional response points to an absence of remorse. The jury was also shown a picture from a surveillance camera in jail in which Tsarnaev held up his middle finger in a gesture of defiance and hostility. The jury also was given the text of tweets Tsarnaev had sent, as well as the anti-US manifesto he had written on the side of the boat where he was captured. The messages no doubt condemned him in the eyes of the jury, but certainly his bearing in court contributed to the jury's ultimate decision. Nonverbal signals rarely decide life or death, but they do play a central role in human communication. In this unit we will be examining how that plays out in cross-cultural communication.



Figure 7.1.1: Tsarnaev, from a jail surveillance camera

Principles of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is those aspects of communication, such as gestures and facial expressions, that do not involve verbal communication, but which may include nonverbal aspects of speech itself such as accent, tone of voice, and speed of speaking (Dictionary.com 3/3/19). In other words, **nonverbal communication is communication through means other than language.**

Table 5.1: Vocal and Nonvocal Elements of Communication

	Verbal Communication	Nonverbal Communication
Vocal	Spoken words	Paralanguage (pitch, volume, speaking rate, etc.)
Nonvocal	Writing, sign language	Body language (gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, etc.)

Source: Adapted from Owen Hargie, *Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2011), 45.

It is likely that most individuals would be surprised to learn how important nonverbal behavior is in conveying messages during conversations. The common perception is that what we are mostly paying attention to are the words being said. We tend to be unaware of the many other factors that can impact the nature of a verbal interaction. The relative importance of nonverbal codes varies with context and culture, but some estimates of what weight is conveyed by nonverbal versus verbal means gives a much higher percentage to nonverbal. Albert Mehrabian (1971) asserted that we develop our attitude towards the other person (like or dislike) overwhelmingly through nonverbal means. In fact, he claimed that 93% of that process happens nonverbally, through vocal tone and gestures (38% and 55% respectively), rather than through the literal meaning of the words (7%). More recent studies have indicated that determining the impact of nonverbal elements on communication meaning is extremely difficult, and results can vary

from 60-93%. In the bigger picture, the exact results don't matter as much as the fact that nonverbal communication can contribute to well-over half of the emotional or relational meaning of any given message.



Figure 7.1.2: Sometimes words are not needed, as the body language here shows

Nonverbal communication is crucial to the study of intercultural communication as nonverbal elements can take many different forms and can vary significantly in its manifestations and usage across cultures. You might have studied a second language for many years, and considered yourself fluent, but still find it difficult to communicate with others when you travel to a country where that second language is spoken. Most of us have to live within a culture before we learn the nonverbal communication aspects of culture. Learning nonverbal communication is important and challenging. It's important because much communication meaning is conveyed nonverbally, and challenging because nonverbal communication is often multi-channeled and culture-specific. The important role that nonverbals play in communicating across cultures is demonstrated in the fact that the study of intercultural communication originated with investigations into the "silent language" and "hidden dimensions" of time and space in communication (titles of seminal books by Edward Hall, 1959, 1966).



Figure 7.1.3: Two rock climbers who speak different languages communicate non-verbally.

Nonverbal Communication Uses Multiple Channels

When we use verbal communication, we use words, and we transmit through one channel at a time. We can speak words, read words, type words, or listen to words, but the channel is words. Nonverbally, when I talk to a friend, I listen to my friend's tone of voice, I watch my friend's facial expressions, use of eye contact, and gestures, and possibly touch them (multiple channels) all while trying to make sense of the words (one channel). Nonverbal signals also come through the presence (or absence) of personal objects or artifacts. Those may be articles of clothing, jewelry or accessories we wear or hold, or might be physical items

surrounding us. Signals may be sent by more intangible means such as smell or sound. There may be a complex array of nonverbal factors at play, as in this example of nonverbal behavior at a military checkpoint:

A Sunni driver coming up to a security post he believes is under Shia control should not only have the right ID to hand, but should also push in a tape playing Shia religious songs and turn up the volume. He should hang a picture of Imam Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and the most revered figure in the Shia faith, from the rear-view mirror. He might also slip on the large silver ring worn only by Shias, especially those considered to be descendants of the Prophet, and perhaps carry a “torba”, the round piece of clay that Shias often place on their foreheads when they bow down in prayer. These and other handy tips are given on the Iraqi Rabita website, designed to advise Sunnis on how to get through Shia checkpoints (Checkpoints, 2007).

The situation is not likely one most of us will ever encounter, but it dramatizes the importance of nonverbal codes in particular contexts. In such situations, nonverbals can play a significant role in easing tensions. On the other hand, inappropriate nonverbal behavior can easily have the opposite effect, exacerbating potential tensions and causing open conflict.

Nonverbal Communication is More Ambiguous

Unlike most verbal communication, nonverbal communication and its meanings are primarily learned unconsciously. A smile can express friendliness, comfort, nervousness, and sarcasm, just as catching someone's eye can convey intimacy, humor, or a challenge, depending on the situation. This ambiguity can pose difficulties for the interpretation of messages—especially across cultural boundaries. Chances are you have had many experiences where words were misunderstood, or where the meaning of words was unclear. When it comes to nonverbal communication, meaning is even harder to discern. We can sometimes tell what people are communicating through their nonverbal communication, but there is no foolproof “dictionary” of how to interpret nonverbal messages.

Nonverbal Communication Has Fewer Rules

One reason that nonverbal communication is more ambiguous than verbal communication is because it is governed by fewer rules—and most of those will be informal norms. Verbal communication has literally thousands of rules governing grammar, spelling, pronunciation, usage, meaning, and more. Yes, your parents might tell you to “it's not polite to stare at people,” but most of these declarations are considered models of good behavior and not something that dictates the meaning of a communication act.

Popular culture is filled with references to “body language” and promises that you can read your boss/lover/parent/friend like a book by the end of the article/tweet/video. Because nonverbal communication is ambiguous, has fewer rules, and co-creates meaning with verbal communication, it would be impossible to teach a universal shorthand for interpreting how individuals express attitudes and emotions through their bodies. There is not a universal code used that could be considered as a “language of the body” with conventionalized meanings which equate to the components that constitute spoken language (Haller & Peeters, retrieved 2/13/19).

Nonverbal Messages Communicate Emotions and Meaning

Nonverbal communication often gives our thoughts and feelings away before we are even aware of what we are thinking or how we feel. People may see and hear more than you ever anticipated. Your nonverbal communication includes both intentional and unintentional messages, but since it all happens so fast, the *unintentional* ones can contradict what you know you are supposed to say or how you are supposed to react. Our reliance on nonverbal communication becomes even more intense when people display mixed messages or verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey contradictory meanings (Burgoon & Hoobler, 2002). In such cases, we almost always trust the nonverbal message over the verbal one as nonverbal behavior is seen as more honest and revealing in that it is often instinctive and unconscious. Still, we often assign intentional motives to nonverbal communication when in fact their meaning is unintentional, and hard to interpret.

Nonverbal behavior also communicates status and power. Touch, posture, gestures, use of space and territory, are good indicators of how power is distributed in the relationship, and the perks that status brings. And although research indicates that deceptive behaviors are idiosyncratic to particular individual people, the interplay between verbal and nonverbal communication can help receivers determine deception.

Nonverbal Communication is Influenced by Culture

The close bond between culture and nonverbal communication makes true intercultural communication difficult to master. Yes, some cues can be learned, but because nonverbal is ambiguous and has fewer rules, it takes most people many years of immersion within a culture before they can fully understand the subtle meanings encompassed within that culture's nonverbal communication (Chen & Starosta, 2005).

In a 2009 meeting with the emperor of Japan, then president Barak Obama, bowed rather deeply in greeting. US conservative commentators called the bow 'treasonous' while former vice-president, Dick Cheney, believed that "there was no reason for an American president to bow to anyone" (Slate, retrieved 3/8/19). The Japanese press, on the other hand, acknowledged the bow as a sign of respect, but believed the 45 degree bend or 'seikeirei' bow to be much more exaggerated than it needed to be.

Nonverbal and Verbal Communication Work Together to Create Communication

Often nonverbal communication accompanies speech. In such cases, the relationship between the two can vary. Body language can reinforce or emphasize the verbal message – smiling, for example, while complementing someone. Gestures can also substitute for speech – nodding or shaking the head for yes or no. On occasion, nonverbal gestures might repeat verbal messages, as in giving directions, through pointing to the way to go. Sometimes, a person's nonverbal message might contradict what is said. A person appearing downcast might respond "Oh, nothing," in response to the question "What's the matter?", but the body language may send a different signal. In such situations, the nonverbal action is likely to be perceived as the authentic message, not the stock verbal response.

Despite the differences between verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, and the importance of nonverbal noted by Mehrabian and others, both forms are essential. They both work together to create meaning (Jones & LeBaron, 2002). As communicators, we do not experience or express them separately, but rather jointly to create meaning (Birdwhistell, 1973). We need *both* to communicate competently.

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7.2: Types of Nonverbal Communication

Types of Nonverbal Behaviors

One reason that nonverbal communication is so rich with information is that humans use so many different aspects of behavior, appearance, and environment to convey meaning. These types of nonverbal communication can vary considerably across cultures. Every culture interprets posture, gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, vocal noises, use of space, degree of territory, and time differently. Scholars call the different means used for transmitting information nonverbal communication codes (Burgoon & Hoobler, 2002). The general codes for nonverbal communication we examine in this section are: kinesics, vocalics, proxemics, haptics, physical appearance and artifacts, olfactics, music, chronemics, and space. As you read through this section, remember that the cultural patterns embedded in nonverbal codes should be used not as stereotypes for all members of particular cultures, but rather as tentative guidelines or examples to help you understand the great variation of nonverbal behavior in humans.

Kinesics

The word kinesics comes from the root word kinesis, which means “movement,” and refers to the study of hand, arm, body, and face movements. It is thought by some to be the richest nonverbal code in terms of its power to communicate meaning. Specifically, this section will outline the use of gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and posture as kinetic forms of nonverbal communication.

Gestures

One of the most common forms of gestures involve greetings and departures, which have rituals that are largely nonverbal, such as shaking hands or waving. These tend to vary across cultures. In Japan, for example, it is common to bow when greeting someone, with the nature of the bow (how deep and how long) being determined by the nature of the occasion and social connection of the persons involved. In some cultures, kissing on the cheek is the usual greeting, although how many times the kisses are exchanged and which sexes are included can vary. In other parts of the world there may be hugs and kisses, depending on the context and relationship. In Arab countries it is common to bow and touch the forehead and chest (the *salaam*) when meeting someone. The *Wai* is used in Thailand and in other Asian cultures, consisting of a bow with the palms pressed together. In other cultures, people rub noses, such as in the *hongi*, a traditional greeting of the Maori people in New Zealand. Knowledge of such rituals can be helpful in avoiding awkwardness in first encounters.



Figure 7.2.1: The bow is common in Japan as a greeting and is used in other contexts, such as apologies.



Figure 7.2.2: David Beckham receives a *hongi*

One of the richest array of gestures are for communicating insults and obscenities. Insult gestures tend to vary across cultures and are different as well in the extent to which they are used. In Greece, for example, the *moutza* (μούτζα) is a commonly seen insult

gesture. It consists of spreading the fingers (one hand or both) and thrusting them outwards, towards the other person (as if flinging something unpleasant). In other cultures, the arm-thrust (*bras d'honneur*) is used, forging a fist and slapping it upwards under the biceps of the arm. Such gestures can be highly offensive and are often considered obscene. Other gestures may convey skepticism or disbelief, such as the French *mon oeil* (my eye), using a finger to pull down the lower eyelid. The gesture is also used in Japan, known as the Akanbe (あかんべえ).



Figure 7.2.3: Moutza against the parliament by Greek protesters



Figure 7.2.4: Akanbe gesture in Japan

The caution in using gestures extends to those which may be widespread in a culture, and which we may interpret as universal. The North American A-OK sign (circled thumb and pointer finger, with the other fingers spread out) is an obscene gesture in many European cultures. Likewise, the inverted peace sign – two fingers facing inwards is an insult in England and Australia. The thumbs-up gesture signals in North America well done; in Greece and other countries, it is equivalent to the insulting "Up yours!" (Cotton, 2013). US President George W. Bush famously used the *hook 'em horns* gesture of the Texas Longhorn football team to signal his approval of the marching band of the University of Texas. In Italy, that gesture is well-known, but it doesn't signal fan enthusiasm or let's rock. It is called *il cornuto*, indicating that the other person is a cuckold, that is, that his wife is cheating on him (Cotton, 2013).

Pointing with the forefinger is a gesture North Americans frequently use. Using that gesture to point at people is in some cultures extremely rude. Likewise, the beckoning gesture with palm turned upward and extending one finger or the whole hand is considered an insult in Japan and other countries. There are a variety of beckoning gestures, in Afghanistan and the Philippines, for example, one motions downward with the palm of the hand facing the ground (Cotton, 2013). These gestures have traditionally been culture-specific. However, the forces of globalization and technology have exposed people worldwide to gestures used in popular media (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2012). Through the greater availability globally of North American television shows and movies, as well as the popularity of social media such as Facebook and YouTube, some North American gestures, such as those for greeting and departure, have become familiar in many other cultures. (Jackson, 2014).



Figure 7.2.5: Thumbs-up may be an insult



Figure 7.2.6: US President George Bush

Facial Expressions

Facial Expressions communicate an endless stream of emotions, and we make judgments about what others are feeling by assessing their faces. Our use of emoticons to communicate attitudes and emotions in electronic media testifies to the importance of this type of kinesics. It is often claimed that facial expressions – called affects displays – tend to be universal, the idea being that expressing basic emotions is an elemental, instinctive behavior common to all humans. This idea goes back to Charles Darwin (1872) who claimed all humans express emotion in the same way. This was later contradicted by anthropologists such as Margaret Mead (1975). It wasn't until the 1960s that so-called "universality studies" were conducted by Paul Ekman and others. In a series of experiments involving participants from a variety of cultures, they showed that there were six universal expressions — anger, disgust, fear, sadness, happiness, and surprise (Ekman, 1972). Later, a seventh expression, contempt, was added (Ekman & Heider, 1988). As the studies involved people from industrialized countries, who may have learned to interpret faces from mass media, other studies were conducted among tribal groups in New Guinea, which came to similar results (Ekman & Friesen, 1971). An interesting experiment conducted with blind athletes produced the same results as their sighted colleagues (Matsumoto & Willingham, 2009). Because the blind athletes could not have learned the behaviors, one can assume there is an innate capacity to display facial expressions.



Figure 7.2.7: Joy is expressed the same across cultures

What causes particular emotions and determines their intensity can be quite different, both personally and culturally. Ekman and Friesen (1969) coined the term **cultural display rules** to describe such cultural differences in facial expressions. Consider the smile: People in all cultures have the ability to smile, but cultures value and interpret smiles in different ways. In other words, the meaning behind a smile is not universal. For example, in Russian, people do not smile because it implies that you are foolish, or possibly sneaky and manipulative. Even in family photos, adults often appear with flat or scowling faces. Many Latin American cultures prefer a proud and elegant facial appearance, which does not include smiling. In Japan, smiling is a way to show respect or to hide what you are actually feeling. In the United States, we smile to show a pleasant face to the people around us, to express happiness and gratitude. We often tend to smile for the purposes of getting along with others (Solomon, 2017). Some cultures tend

to be much more expressive and rich in their use of facial expressions than others. Italians and Mediterraneans in general are normally placed in that category, while northern Europeans and Asians are seen as more restrained.

Codes of general conduct, politeness, or social harmony may influence the public display of emotions. This was shown in a cross-cultural experiment (Matsumoto & Ekman, 1989), which studied facial expressions of Japanese and US students while watching emotionally disturbing films. When both groups of young people were among themselves, they showed the same expressions. However, when the Japanese students were with an older, male observer, they displayed neutral expressions or even smiled, while the US students continued to display the same negative emotions. These cultural display rules explain the difference in expressions of the Japanese students in the experiment, as due to the cultural mandate in Japan of managing and minimizing expressions of feelings in the presence of a third party. In Japan it is culturally appropriate to hide unhappiness by smiling or embarrassment by laughing. While weeping in public is considered in Japan to be inappropriate, in Middle Eastern or Latin American cultures it is normal to express one's emotions openly and visibly.

Using the concept of cultural display rules, Matsumoto (1990) developed a theory of the expression of emotions that incorporates Hofstede's taxonomies, particularly as they relate to individualism versus collectivism. According to the theory, because individualistic cultures encourage and reward self-expression, individuals in those cultures are free to express fully and instinctively their feelings, whether they be positive or negative. On the other hand, those in collectivistic cultures are bound by conventions of the collective good and social harmony to regulate their expression of emotion when not alone. Matsumoto also incorporates the concept of power distance:

Large power-distance cultures endorse displays of emotion that reinforce hierarchical relations (i.e., status reminders), such as showing anger toward a low-status person or appeasing a high-status person (e.g., smiling). Small power-distance cultures embrace egalitarian values and teach the importance of treating people as equals. Thus, there is less pressure in these cultures for members to adjust displays of emotion according to the status of another person. (Remland et al., 2014)

Large power distance cultures tend to be correlated with collectivism, just as small power distance cultures are correlated with individualism. As always, in such broad-stroke generalizations, caution is needed in applying these labels to individuals. While dominant cultural forces may be powerful, they may be contradicted and potentially negated by values associated with group membership, whether those be ethnic, regional, or other. It is also the case that individual personalities play a significant role in the degree to which emotions are displayed or suppressed. The patterns we've identified in nonverbal behavior should be seen as examples not as absolutes. Being aware of such potential variations can be helpful in adjusting expectations and suspending judgments.

Eye Contact

Eye contact, or *Oculistics*, serves many purposes. We use our eyes to express emotions, regulate a conversation, indicate listening behavior, show interest in others, respect, status, hostility, and aggression (Burgoon, Buller & Woodall, 1996). Patterns of eye contact vary significantly by culture. Generally, eye contact is considered a good thing in the United States. It can mean that you are interested, confident, and bold (a good thing), but people often avoid eye contact in crowded, impersonal situations such as walking down a busy street or riding a crowded bus. In France, however, someone may feel free to watch someone interesting on the street and consciously make eye contact to indicate interest. In the Middle East, direct eye contact is less common and generally less appropriate, whereas lack of eye contact in Asia is often a sign of respect and considered polite. Within the US, different ethnic groups have been found to follow different norms in the use of eye contact to regulate conversations. African-Americans maintain eye contact when speaking but avert their gaze when listening, but just the opposite is true for European Americans (LaFrance & Mayo, 1978). This distinction can lead to conflict:

Interethnic expectancy violations exist when African Americans expect the European Americans to look them in the eyes when speaking but instead receive “non-responsiveness” or “indifference” cues. European Americans, on the other hand, may view the direct eye gaze during speaking as “confrontational” or “aggressive” (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p.126).

In both pluralistic societies and in cross-cultural encounters, being mindful of variations in this area is important. Nora Dresser's book, *Multicultural Matters* (2005), chronicles how Korean-American shopkeepers, who did not make eye contact with their customers, were perceived as disrespectful, something contributing to the open confrontation taking place in US urban centers between some Asians and African-Americans. In some contexts in the US, such as in urban areas among teens and young adults, looking directly at someone can be seen as a provocation, reflected in the term "mad-dogging" (Remland et al., 2015).



Figure 7.2.8: Groups may have different expectations in maintaining eye contact in conversations

Posture

Posture is the last item in our list of kinesics. Humans can stand up straight or slouch, lean forward or backward, round or slump our shoulders, and tilt our heads. Mehrabian (1972) believed that posture communicates immediacy and power. Immediacy is the degree to which you find someone interesting and attractive. Typically, when someone from the United States finds someone attractive, they face the person when talking, hold their head up, and lean in. Whereas a reaction to someone they don't like might have them look away and lean back. Power is the ability to influence people or events. In the United States, high-status communicators typically use relaxed postures (Burgoon et al., 1996), but in Japan, the opposite is true. Japanese display power through erect posture with feet planted firmly on the floor.

Vocalics

Vocal characteristics we use to communicate nonverbal messages are called vocalics or **paralanguage** (with-language). Vocalics involves verbal and nonverbal aspects of speech that influence meaning, including rate, pitch, tone, volume, intensity, pausing, and even silence. Tone and intonation can have a determining effect on the message conveyed, turning a statement, for example, into a sarcastic comment. The volume, fluency, or rhythm of speech can transmit to the listener information such as degree of confidence, nervousness, or even perceived trustworthiness of the speaker. The voice qualities of a speaker can be as important in conveying a message as the semantic value of the words spoken. Scholars who engage in conversation analysis have shown even slight modifications in voice tone or intonation can send a message to the listener.

One of the roles vocalizations play is to function as a **backchannel** or filler in conversations, a way for a listener to send messages to the speaker (Yngve, 1970). This may consist in English sounds such as "uh-huh" or "hmm", or words and phrases like "yes" or "go on". Backchannel responses play different roles; they may encourage the speaker to continue, indicate the extent of interest, or assess the speaker's statements, i.e., agreeing ("Right") or expressing doubt ("Do you really think so?"). There may be more than simple words or phrases involved, namely longer utterances completing the speaker's sentences, requesting clarification, or attempting to take the floor. Backchannel communication occurs across cultures, but may vary in norms and expectations, which can cause confusion or awkwardness. The Japanese filler *hai hai* is often used by natives in the meaning of "I hear you", but given that *hai* literally means "yes" there may be misunderstanding in a non-native assuming a positive affirmation, rather than merely an acknowledgement of having heard the speaker.

How conversations flow varies with culture and context. In situations in which a strict hierarchy is present or when the interaction is highly formal, there may be fixed patterns for managing a conversation and signaling when it is over. In such situations, interrupting a speaker may be inappropriate. There are conversational norms which may play a role. In particular cultures, it is common, even expected, for others to interrupt a speaker frequently. In France, for example, this is seen as part of what constitutes a good conversation.

[Interruptions] signal interest in the other's remark, which merits a commentary, a word of appreciation, denial, protest, or laughter—in short, a reaction without which the remark

would 'fall flat.' The ball is tossed to be caught and tossed back. Where there is no 'interruption,' when each person speaks sedately in turn (as in American conversation, according to the French), the conversation never 'takes off'; it remains polite, formal, cold (Carroll, 1988, p. 37).

While this kind of spontaneity and frequent back-and-forth is seen by the French (and in other cultures) as stimulating, it may be seen by some as chaotic or rude. Our cultural backgrounds tend to lead us to make assumptions about others based on paralinguistic clues. One of these clues is the speaker's accent. Non-native accents can often stigmatize the speaker, evoking stereotypes associated with social class, ethnic background, economic status, or level of education. In some cases, a particular accent, such as a British accent in the US, is perceived positively. In most cases, however, accents are perceived negatively and may have real-world consequences for the speaker in terms of discrimination in personal encounters or institutional settings. As is the case with other forms of nonverbal communication across cultures, paralinguistic behaviors vary across cultures and can lead to misunderstanding of another person's intentions or feelings. Harry Triandis (1994) provides a dramatic example of misinterpreting vocal clues:

In January, 1991, James Baker, then the United States Secretary of State, met with Tariq Aziz, the Foreign Minister of Iraq. They met in an effort to reach an agreement that would prevent a war. Also present in the room was the half-brother of Saddam Hussein, whose role included frequent calls to Hussein with updates on the talks. Baker stated, in his standard calm manner, that the US. would attack if Iraq did not move out of Kuwait. Hussein's half-brother heard these words and reported that "The Americans will not attack. They are weak. They are calm. They are not angry. They are only talking." Six days later Iraq saw Desert Storm and the loss of about 175,000 of their citizens. Triandis argued that Iraqis attend to how something is said more than what is said. He further suggests that if Baker had pounded the table, yelled, and shown outward signs of anger, the outcome may have been entirely different (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 277).

Proxemics

Coming from the Latin *proximus*, meaning "near," proxemics refers to communication through the use of physical distance or space. Edward Hall (1966) pioneered the study of proxemics, the perception and use of physical space, including territoriality and personal space. Territoriality is related to control. Who gets the corner office? Who sits at the head of the table and why? Personal space refers to the conversation distance, or the "bubble" of space surrounding each individual. One of the actions which can affect the course of the conversation is for one or the other of the conversants to move closer or further away. Following complaints from both Arab and US students in a North American university setting, O.M. Watson (1970) investigated the nonverbal behavior of the two groups. He found that the US students viewed the Arabs as pushy and rude, while the Arabs considered the US students to be distant and rude. He discovered that a substantial part of the problem were different conceptions of personal space, with the US students feeling the Arab students were invading their bubbles and the Arab students seeing the US students as unfriendly because they were keeping their distance. Hall (1966) developed a four-level classification of social distance. For the US, he defined intimate space, reserved for highly personal relationships, as 9 to 18 inches (23 to 45 cm), and personal distance ("arm's length") at 1.5 to 4 feet (.5 to 1.2 m), the normal spacing for conversations. Social distance he established at between 4 and 12 feet (1.2 to 3.6 m), the spacing normal in casual gathering and work environments. Public distance he defined as being 12 feet (3.6 m) or longer, used for public speaking or large gatherings. Researchers have identified particular cultures as having a preference for closer proximity and a high degree of physical contact (Aiello, 1987). Examples frequently given are Arabs, Latin Americans, and southern Europeans. Cultures who prefer further interaction distances include the USA, Northern Europe, and Australia. There are other factors besides regional culture which may affect personal distance, such as gender, age, ethnicity, or topic of conversation.



Figure 7.2.9: In some cultures, people like to keep their distance



Figure 7.2.10: Inside a men's bathroom at a University in Madrid, Spain (CC By; Tom Grothe)

Haptics

Touch in communication interaction is called haptics, from the ancient Greek word “*haptien*.” Cultural norms have a strong impact on how people use and perceive touch. Touch conventions vary significantly across cultures and are dependent as well on age, gender, and relationship. In some Arab cultures, it is common for men to hold hands in particular situations. Some cultures have a taboo on touching the top of someone's head, as in patting a child, as the head is considered sacred. Another taboo, in India, the Middle East, and Africa, is the use of the left hand in certain social situations, such as eating. Cooper, Calloway-Thomas & Simonds (2007) provide a set of rules in relation to touch in Thai culture:

- Don't touch anyone's head for any reason. The head is the most important part of the body. It is the seat of the soul.
- Do not touch a female on any part of her body.
- The feet are considered the “dirtiest” part of the body. They are used only for walking. Thus, it is an insult to rest your feet on someone else's backrest, such as in the cinema or on a train.
- Women must never touch a monk or his robe. Even in a bus or train, Women cannot sit next to a monk.
- Always accept things with your right hand. The left hand is used to Wash the posterior and is therefore regarded as unclean (p. 138).

Hall (1963) suggests that the use of proxemics and haptics merge within a culture to create what researchers now call contact and noncontact cultures. In **contact cultures**, people stand closer together while talking, touch more frequently, and speak in louder voices. Some examples of contact cultures are cultures in Central and South America, the Middle East, and Eastern and Mediterranean Europe. For example, Latin American cultures tend to hug more than do Northern Europeans. In **noncontact cultures**, people stand farther apart while talking and touch less. Some examples of noncontact cultures are Great Britain, the United States, and Japan. This difference is exemplified in a study of outdoor cafes in London, England and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Researchers found that Puerto Ricans touched each other an average of 180 times per hour whereas the British average was zero

(EPA, 2002). Being aware of such norms in visiting another culture can make seemingly strange behavior understandable and help to avoid embarrassing faux-pas.

Physical Appearance and Artifacts

Physical appearance and artifacts profoundly influence our communication encounters. In other words, how you look conveys as much about you as what you say. Physical appearance includes attributes such as hair, clothing, body type, and personal grooming. Across cultures, people credit individuals they find physically attractive with higher levels of intelligence, persuasiveness, poise, sociability, warmth, power, and employment success than they credit to unattractive individuals (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). Communication researchers call this tendency to make a blanket judgment of a person based on one trait the **halo** (positive) or **horns** (negative) **effect**. As physical attractiveness is variable across cultures, and constantly being redefined, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Artifacts are the things we possess that influence how we see ourselves and that we use to express our identity to others. They can include rings and tattoos, but may also include brand names and logos. From clothes to cars, watches, briefcases, purses, and even eyeglasses, what we choose to surround ourselves with communicates something about our sense of self. They may project gender, role or position, class or status, personality, and group membership or affiliation.

Many cultures have rules and conventions for dress and appearance, established through custom or religious beliefs. Women in Muslim countries, for example, dress so that their hair is covered and, in some cases, also their bodies and faces. In some cases, dress can provide information about social/economic position, marital status, or age. In Japan, women's *kimonos* vary according to the time of year and occasion, but also based on marital status and age. For the Masai tribe in Kenya, earrings and necklaces designate the marital status of women, while men wear earrings and arm rings that show their social status, indicating whether they are elders or warriors (Vandehey, Buergh & Krueger, 1996). In rural northern India, the level of a woman's veil over her face can indicate romantic interest or disinterest (Lambert & Wood, 2005). Dress and physical appearance can be important identifiers for membership in particular groups. Members of motorcycle gangs wear black leather and heavy boots. Japanese businessmen ("salarymen") wear dark, conservative suits and plain ties. Japanese tourists often wear a resort hotel's *yukata* (a lightweight kimono) signaling to others in the town their role (Ting-Toomey, 1999). In this way, forms of dress serve as identity markers. Certain uniforms signal professions, as in the case of police officers or members of the military, while also conveying a sense of authority and power.



Figure 7.2.11: Woman wearing a niqab (veil)

Body piercings and tattoos, in bygone days, indicators of low-prestige socio-economic status (sailors, carnival workers), have become mainstream among young people in the US and elsewhere. Older people are likely to retain the images from the past and may have a negative view of heavily tattooed or pierced young people. One of the persistent stereotypes is in regards to women's dress and appearance. Young women in mini skirts and tank tops, especially if blonde, may be perceived as flighty and unintelligent. Muslim women wearing a *hijab* face prejudice and discrimination in many non-Muslim countries, which is even more pronounced for those wearing a whole body *burqua*. In some Western countries, wearing traditional Muslim female dress in public or in schools has been banned. In the US, hooded sweatshirts (*hoodies*) are often associated with young black men. In Florida, a young black man, Trayvon Martin, was wearing a hoodie when shot dead by a white "neighborhood watch" member as he was returning from a convenience store. The white man found Martin "suspicious", due to his skin color and attire.

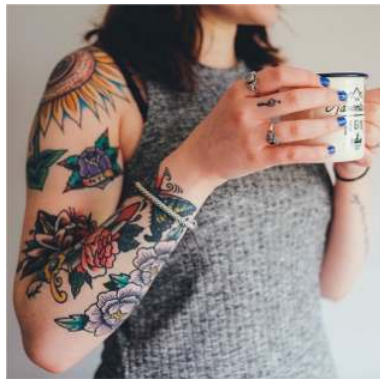


Figure 7.2.12: Tattoos have become commonplace in American culture

Appearance messages are generally the first nonverbal codes we process, sizing up the other person based on skin color, appearance, and clothing. The first impression might determine our attitude towards another person, helping to determine whether we want to get to know that person or not. Sometimes, some features of the other person's appearance might lead to specific pre-judgments. One of those might be the particular shade of skin. Black people with darker skin are sometimes viewed as somehow less attractive or having lower status than Blacks with lighter skin. Light-skinned Blacks may feel discriminated against as well (see sidebar). In South American countries such as Brazil, there is a rich mix of ethnicities and races, resulting in a wide range of skin colors and a complex social hierarchy, built in part on the particular shade of one's skin.

Different Shades of Black Identity

If you are a light-skinned Black person, you are looked upon as "uppity" or thinking that you're too good. This is something I have come across a lot. For my first year of college, I attended the first historically Black college, Lincoln University. It was my first time being around that many African Americans (the high school I attended was mostly Caucasian). I am naturally shy, so I would walk around not speaking to anyone. In many cases I would walk around looking at the ground or just with no expression on my face whatsoever. I was viewed as the "uppity" light-skinned girl who thought she was too good for everyone else. - Ami

Remland et al., 2014, p. 149. Different Shades of Black Identity Example 7.2.1

In some cases, we are conscious of the distinctive views we may have towards those with a certain appearance. Many US Americans, for example, have heard so much since 2001 about Muslims and terrorism, that someone perceived to be Muslim by their appearance and dress likely triggers already well-established and self-acknowledged views on Muslims. The largely negative stereotypes can have tragic consequences, as the acts of violence towards Muslims in the US and elsewhere has shown. In some cases, the perceived target may not even represent the intended group. The first victim of revenge killing in the US following the September 11, 2001 attacks was not a Muslim, but a Sikh gas station manager in Arizona shot down by a man vowing to kill "towel heads" (Basu, 2016).

In many cases individuals may not be aware of the negative attitudes towards others. Humans naturally tend to categorize, and that process includes grouping together other humans. We likely do that with individuals we meet without being aware of this process of **implicit bias**. This is a phenomenon that scientists have been studying for some time, namely that even well-meaning people have hidden prejudices against those of other races. Studies have shown subtle biases are widespread in the US, especially against African-Americans, and lead to discrimination in many areas, including in education, professional life, and housing (Yudkin at al., 2016). In the US recently, the issue has arisen in connection with white police officer's using violence against unarmed young black men. Studies have shown that "implicit bias can be overcome with rational deliberation" (Yadkin & Van Bavel, 2016). Many police departments in the US have begun the process of making police officers aware of their biases. Project Implicit from Harvard university provides an online process for analyzing one's possible biases in a number of areas, including attitudes towards race, skin tone, religion, sexuality, Arab/Muslims, age, disability, and weight. These are all areas in which implicit bias may be present in individuals in the US. Other cultures are likely to have some of the same biases, along with others. In recent years, corporations in North America have begun to offer training to employees to make them aware of hidden biases in an effort to treat their customers equitably, regardless of race or ethnicity. Whether such training is effective – particularly when offered in one-time short training seminars — is questionable (Godwin-Jones, 2018).

Olfactics

The study of smell in humans is called **olfactics**. In some cultures (in Africa and the Middle East, for example) there's a preference for standing close enough to a person in conversation to be able to detect body odor. Odor is used in such cases to categorize people according to status, power, or social class. In many cultures wearing an expensive perfume or cologne can signal status and wealth. On the other hand, the smell of sweat or strong body odor is likely to suggest manual labor and lower social status. Some smells are associated with particular ethnic groups and may lead to prejudicial treatment. The smell of curry, linked to South Asians, has been used as a basis for discrimination, such as refusing to rent apartments to Indians or Pakistanis (Jackson, 2014). Although some smells seem to be universally attractive (jasmine, lavender, roses) others may vary in how they are perceived across cultures. The smell of onions, for example, is considered unpleasant in many cultures, but the Dagon people of Mali find the smell attractive, even to the point of rubbing onions on their bodies (Neuliep, 2006).



Figure 7.2.13: The smell of roses seems universally positive

Music: Another way to communicate nonverbally

Music is a "universal language" in that it is understood without the need for language. Music plays many different roles in human society – entertaining, comforting, inspiring, socializing, and more. It can bring people together (anthems, concert venues, singing together, celebratory music) or pull them apart (protest songs, generational differences in taste, distasteful/hateful lyrics). Two examples from Germany illustrate that contrast. The *Horst Wessel Lied* was the anthem of Nazi Germany, celebrating violence and hatred. Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* (the last movement of the 9th Symphony, based on a poem by Friedrich Schiller) has been adopted as the unofficial anthem of the European Union. It celebrates brotherhood and solidarity. Our interest here is in music as a marker of cultural identity and as a nonverbal form of contact and communication across cultures.

Ethnomusicology is the study of music in cultural context. Like intercultural communication, the field involves contributions from many different disciplines. From the beginning, a major focus has been on non-Western music, with many practitioners engaged in ethnographic fieldwork. That involves learning about and documenting the music, language, and cultural practices of underrepresented ethnic groups. One of the pioneers of this field was Alan Lomax, who recorded folk music in the US and Europe in the 1940s and 1950s. His work contributed to the folk music revival of that time. Today, there are efforts underway to preserve endangered indigenous music traditions, just as there are to save languages from extinction. Catherine Grant's book, *Music Endangerment* (2004) chronicles some of those efforts.



Figure 7.2.14: Recording Blackfoot chief Mountain Chief in 1916

In recent decades, ethnomusicologists have been particularly interested in the effects of globalization on music traditions worldwide. The popularity of rock 'n' roll music in the late 20th century, for example, spread not only the English language worldwide, but also particular values and practices of Anglo-American youth culture. Globalization has resulted in the development of many hybridized musical forms. Traditional folk music in many parts of the world, and among diaspora communities, is often mixed with modern musical genres, resulting in new musical and cultural mixes. Immigrant communities will often have complex music practices. Young people are likely to listen to mainstream popular music but also be exposed to traditional music of their culture by way of religious, celebratory, or family events. Older members of the community may try to maintain a "pure" musical tradition as a means to maintain their culture within an encompassing foreign culture with different values and language.

Fock (1997) examines the complexity of such an immigrant community in the case of Turks in Copenhagen, Denmark. She chronicles how Turkish music is viewed differently when heard in different locales. If played in a Turkish restaurant, for example, Turkish music is received favorably by Danes, as a contribution to an appropriately "exotic" atmosphere. However, hearing Turkish music played at a street kiosk may be perceived negatively, giving the "Danish customers the feeling of not belonging" (Fock, 1997, p.56). A third encounter might be even more irritating for Danes:

Out on the street again you might hear heavy Turkish pop from a car driving by. Again the result probably is irritation, but now combined with an interpretation in the direction of social rejection: 'They are giving the Danish society the finger'. Car-blasting is a normal phenomenon within youth culture, yet when it is performed by youngsters with Turkish background it is often interpreted in a special cultural and provocative way (p. 56).

In fact, the young Turks are likely intent not on irritating Danes, but on attracting the attention of those of their own generation, especially girls.

Music has been a vital part of worldwide youth cultures since at least the 1950s. Today, musical genres easily cross political and linguistic boundaries. In some cases, imported musical genres are subsequently adapted to local conditions. That is the case for hip-hop or rap music. It originated in the Bronx section of New York City, soon moving to urban centers on both the east and west coast of the US, and then around the globe. Hip-hop involves not just music, but also socio-political narratives about poverty and street life. It is also associated with certain forms of dress – low hanging pants, gaudy jewelry, caps worn sideways, and dark glasses. From the beginning, hip-hop culture was linked to place, with DJ's (disc jockeys) having their own "territory" (Sorrells, 2015). It was also early associated with the use of gang-derived "tagging" (marking territory), transformed eventually into graffiti. As hip-hop has found its way into other cultures, the local characteristics and concerns have been integrated. In Germany, for example, some of the best known rap music has been created by Turkish Germans and touches on issues of identity and integration. Similar trends are evident elsewhere:

While the communicative practices of hip hop cultures around the world are clearly linked to the African diasporic colonial experience, they also rework the qualities of flow, layering, and rupture in their place-based specificity as global forces converge with local forces...Hip hop culture and styles developing in France and Italy provide spaces to address local issues of racism and concerns over police brutality. In Sweden, the hip hop scene among ethnic minorities focuses on constructing a collective oppositional identity to resist the White skinhead youth culture...For Maoris in New Zealand, rap music groups speak out for the rights of indigenous groups around the world. Hip hop in Japan is often used as a means of identity distinction by youth who want to mark themselves as different from the mainstream culture (Sorrells, 2015, pp. 85–86).

The use in other contexts of certain forms and practices originating in US black inner-city environments raises the issue of **cultural appropriation**. Some may find it disrespectful or inauthentic for white rappers to borrow and rework Black cultural practices, developed out of a struggle for recognition and identity in ghetto communities. Others may point out that in fact rap music is today a profit-making business and this commodification of an art form liberates it in some way from being bound to its origins. However that may be, rap has become so integrated into the music scene in so many countries as to make its origins moot. The music itself

retains many critics, who may accept the music as supplying a voice to those on the fringes of society, but who still find that many rappers continue to perpetuate unfortunate stereotypes and prejudices around communities of color, violence, misogyny, and homophobia (Remland, 2014).

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7.3: Time and Space

Chronemics

Time orientation, known as Chronemics, is the study of how we refer to and perceive time. The different perceptions of time, such as the importance of punctuality, can be a source of friction in intercultural encounters. Edward Hall (1959) distinguished between **monochronic** and **polychronic** orientations to time. In monochronic time orientation, time is a commodity. Being punctual, completing tasks, and keeping schedules is valued, and may be more important than building or maintaining personal relationships. “Time is money” is a common saying across cultures monochronic-oriented cultures. Those growing up in a culture with a monochronic time orientation are likely to see this view of time as natural and universal. In fact, it is culturally determined and learned. In such cultures, like the US or Germany, children are taught early, at home and in school, the importance of time, scheduling, and promptness. Tardiness and missed appointments are a source of anxiety. Monochronic-oriented cultures perceive time as linear, flowing along in a straight line. We did one task, we’re doing another task now, and we are planning on doing something else later. Plans are not easily changed. People live by an external clock.

In polychronic time oriented cultures, however, the attitudes towards time are very different. Representative cultures include southern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. Schedules are less important, and punctuality is not considered an essential virtue. Such cultures are used to having more than one activity or conversation going on at the same time. Individuals are more tolerant of interruptions and going beyond scheduled time. Time is bent to meet the needs of people, with the attitude that there is always more time. Consequently, plans are fluid. People live by an internal clock. Greater importance is placed on the natural progress of conversations than in keeping to a pre-arranged schedule. Life is lived in the moment, not in relation to a schedule.

Different perceptions of time can vary dramatically when it comes to arranging meetings. Some Mexican American friends may invite you to a barbecue at 8 p.m., but when you arrive you are the first guest, because it is understood that the gathering actually doesn’t start until well after 9 p.m. Similarly in France, an 8 p.m. party invitation would be understood to indicate you should arrive around 8:30, but in Sweden 8 p.m. means 8 p.m., and latecomers may not be welcome. Of course context plays a role in time orientation. Japanese have a monochronic time orientation when it comes to business meetings, but are more polychronic in social gatherings.

Cultural Spaces

A final way in which we communicate nonverbally is through our environment. The *environment* involves the physical aspects of our surroundings. More than the tables and chairs in an office, environment is an important part of the dynamic communication process. The perception of one’s environment influences one’s reaction to it.

Wal-Mart is the largest and most successful retailer in the world. It offers low prices through economies of scale, an efficient purchasing and delivery system, and low employee wages. Its home base is in the US, but it operates in countries across the globe. In many of those markets, Wal-Mart has been successful, for example in Great Britain and South America. However, Wal-Mart has been less successful in Japan, Korea, and India. Given the location of those markets, one might be tempted to assign Wal-Mart’s lack of success to differences in Asian cultures and in consumer preferences. However, Wal-Mart has been largely successful in China. Moreover, it has not been universally successful in cultures closer to that of the US. Germany provides the clearest example.



Figure 7.3.1: A closed Wal-mart store in Germany

There are many differences between Germany and the US, but they share a number of cultural traits including a strong work ethic, a generally individualistic orientation, a fundamentally egalitarian social and political structure, a monochronic time orientation, and a shared linguistic family (Germanic language group within the Indo-European family). However, it was in fact largely cultural issues that led to Wal-Mart's failure in the German market. The stores in Germany were run very much like those in the US, and that was the cause of many of the problems that arose. Here are the most important cultural factors:

Consumers. Wal-Mart stores had smiling "greeters" at their entrances. The company instructed cashiers to smile at customers. Germans do not tend to smile at strangers. German consumers found the personal greetings of the smiling greeters offensive – this kind of informal chatting with strangers is not the norm in Germany. The smiles from the cashiers were interpreted as mocking or flirtatious.

Products. The product line did not match the cultural habits and preferences of German consumers. Meats, for example, were prepackaged; many Germans prefer to have meat cut on demand. Products were in some cases packaged in large quantities. Storage in refrigerators and cupboards in Germany is much more limited than in the US; German consumers tend to buy smaller quantities and shop more often. Local or regional products were not offered. To achieve economies of scale, Wal-Mart tends to carry the same products across all stores. Germans often identify closely with their home region, which often will include specific food and beverage preferences (sausage or beer, for example). German consumers are used to putting purchased items into bags they themselves have brought to the store, and they found Wal-Mart's practice of bagging products for consumers into plastic bags unfamiliar and undesirable.

Employees. It's common practice at Wal-Mart's in the US to have employees engage in group chants before the store opens, designed to build store morale and company loyalty. This practice is not common in Germany, and was perceived negatively by Wal-Mart employees. Because of regional differences and family relationships, most Germans prefer to remain near the area in which they grew up. Wal-Mart expected employees – especially managers – to be willing to relocate based on company needs. In the US, it's not uncommon for someone to seek employment far from one's home base; that's less likely in Germany. The anti-union policy of Wal-Mart also ran up against the German tradition of strong trade unions. It's also the norm in German companies that there be institutionalized employee input into company decision-making. That was not the case at Wal-Mart Germany.

The impact of the Environment on Conversations

The nature of conversations is determined by the conversation partner, the purpose of the encounter, and the context in which it occurs. Germans who went to Wal-Mart were there to buy goods, not to engage in conversations with strangers. Those same Germans may have a quite different attitude towards talking with strangers if they happen to be sitting at the same table with tourists at a local beer garden. How they talk with those tourists will be quite different than a conversation over a beer with friends or co-workers. Where a conversation takes place can have a significant effect in terms of language used. In a beer garden, one may have to speak louder than normal and, because of the mixed clientele, be prepared to speak using a simplified version of one's native tongue or English. The language used will likely be quite different from that at the workplace, more informal, with quite different subjects discussed.

Quiet, isolated environments are likely to lead to different conversation dynamics than a crowded, noisy environment. Environmental psychologist Albert Mehrabian devised a theory in which he emphasizes the varying **information rates** in different environments (1977). Information rate is the amount of information contained or perceived per a certain unit of time; the more information available to process, the greater the information rate. An environment with a high information rate is said to have a **high load**. Examples would be a busy airport or popular restaurant at lunch time. Environments with a **low load** might be a library reading room or a Japanese garden. According to Mehrabian, the higher the information load, the higher the anxiety, leading to discomfort and possibly anxiety. Those feelings are exacerbated by the presence of people we don't know, particularly if they are from a different culture. It's likely that most people would avoid whenever possible high load situations. From that perspective, encounters with strangers work best if carefully managed, with small numbers of conversants in a quiet setting.



Figure 7.3.2: Crowded airport in Zurich, with a high load



Figure 7.3.3: Japanese garden, with a low load

Some cultures purposely create spaces with low information loads for particular purposes or cultural practices. Japanese gardens are intended to facilitate silent contemplation and meditation (Itoh, 1981). They feature carefully designed landscapes with flowing streams, rock formations, meandering walkways, and well-placed benches or other seating. The impression is one of informal natural beauty. In reality, everything in a Japanese garden is carefully planned out to create impressive views and perspectives. In contrast, the US "backyard" is a setting for socialization and sport. Typically, there will be an extensive lawn, well-maintained, allowing room for outdoor activities. This might be used for informal social gatherings, featuring meats cooked on the grill. The overall impression of an American backyard is a human-made environment, while that of a Japanese garden is a harmonious blend of natural elements. There will clearly be a different dynamic at work in conversations held in an American backyard compared to a Japanese garden. In fact, a Japanese garden is more an invitation to silence (highly valued in that culture) than to conversation. The different spaces also point to contrasting views of the relationship between humans and nature. Western culture tends to want to change and dominate nature. Asian cultures look to harmonize with nature.



Figure 7.3.4: A US backyard featuring games & socializing

Built environments and communication patterns

The design of **built environments**, such as private homes or office buildings also has a significant effect on communication. The traditional design of Japanese homes points to particular cultural norms and values, as well as typical communication patterns and practices in Japan. Because the Japanese believe in harmony with nature, traditionally Japanese homes are unobtrusively integrated into the landscape. The most important room, the sitting room, typically opens up onto the garden, with wide doors which can be opened to eliminate the barrier between house and garden. Often the garden offers its best views from the multiple open spaces along the outside of the house. One has the impression that the garden and the house flow into one another. The sitting room of a traditional Japanese family home is typically large and can be subdivided using semi-transparent screens called *shoji*. This allows considerable versatility, with divisions of the rooms easily changed. This modularity carries over to the traditional flooring of Japanese homes. Straw mats called *tatami* are used for sitting or sleeping. The flexibility in arranging living quarters accommodates the easy sub-division of space to allow for additional members of an extended family. It also enables creation of semi-private space as needed. In that way, it satisfies the need for social space for conversation as well as the possibility of withdrawal into silence and contemplation. Japanese society has changed significantly in recent decades, becoming less homogeneous and less traditional, under Westernizing influences. That has affected housing styles as well. Research has indicated however that the majority of Japanese still favor a traditional style (Ueda, 1998), with elements of traditional design typically incorporated into modern homes and office space whenever possible.



Figure 7.3.5: Japanese house in harmony with the surrounding garden

In contrast to the **semi-fixed featured space** of traditional Japanese homes, houses in Germany tend to favor **fixed-featured space** in which room divisions are permanent. These distinctions and terms were made by Edward Hall (1966) initially and are often used in descriptions of built environments. Germans tend to divide up space according to its function and to find and maintain an ordered space for all household objects and possessions. Important is that there be clear divisions, with the ability to close doors to all rooms, secure windows with heavy shutters, and surround the garden with tall hedges, fences, or walls. The house design reflects cultural aspects of life in Germany. There tends to be a strong sense of orderliness in German society (reflecting the German saying *Ordnung muss sein* – order is a must), with a strict adherence to rules. In accordance with that respect for order, Germans expect commitments and promises to be kept. That includes agreements regarding appointments and meet-ups; Germans

are punctual and expect others to be as well. That sense of order carries over to personal interactions. Germans seek clarity in relations with others, which is reflected in the careful differentiation of people with whom one uses a formal level of address (the formal you *Sie*) from those with whom one is informal (*du* form). In contrast to other cultures which also have formal and informal modes of address (French, Spanish), Germans tend to be more rigid and systematic in their use of those forms. It's not unusual for Germans to maintain the *Sie* form even with close work colleagues. The desire for clarity tends to lead Germans to use a very direct style of communication, with the reputation of being sometimes overly blunt, leading to charges of insensitivity.



Figure 7.3.6: Tall hedge surrounding house in Höfen, Germany

Greg Nees, in his cultural study of Germans (2000), draws a connection between the cultural theme of order and the design of space (see sidebar). These two examples illustrate the connection between environments and communication, but they by no means exhaust the options for living environments to be found in human cultures. Another option discussed by Hall is **informal space**, with no permanent divisions or walls. Informal space plays a major role in the everyday living experiences of people in Africa, parts of the Middle East, and rural areas world-wide, where outdoor space and non-permanent housing becomes an integral and vital aspect of work and family life. Living in a tent or in a communal space clearly can have a major impact on communication.

Close that door! You're in Germany

The mutual influences of clarity and order reinforce one another and help create a strong tendency toward compartmentalization in all areas of their lives, for example, inside their dwellings. The open architecture typical of American houses and apartments in which the front door opens into the living room is not common. Walk into a traditional German home or apartment and you will usually find yourself in a small, closed corridor, or Gang. This corridor provides access to the other rooms of the house or apartment, and the doors to these other rooms will generally be closed. This configuration is considered orderly...Doors remain closed in most German public and office buildings, where a closed door does not mean a private meeting is taking place, but only that the door is closed as German notions of orderliness and clear boundaries dictate (p. 48).

Privacy across Cultures

Although human beings are by nature social animals, we all also need time alone. The degree to which people seek and value solitude varies across cultures, as does the means and mechanisms for being alone. Knowing about norms and conventions regarding privacy can be important in encounters with others. The extent to which one's home is considered a private sphere, for example, can vary. In the US, guests invited over for a dinner party are likely to be given a "house tour" and be shown even intimate space such as a master bedroom. Guests will often congregate in the kitchen to converse while the host or hostess is preparing the meal. They are likely to be invited to help themselves to a drink from the family's refrigerator. The dinner party is likely to play out quite differently in other cultures. In the two environments discussed above, in Japan and Germany, guests are likely to see only the main rooms for guest entertaining. They will likely not be invited to roam freely throughout the house, or to use space designed for family use (except for the toilet). Guests are unlikely to socialize in the kitchen, which in both countries is a smaller space than is typical in the US. In both countries, that space is intended for the dedicated use of food preparation. The kitchen is not viewed in any case as an appropriate location for extended conversation. The informality of communication patterns in the US allows for great flexibility in where casual conversations can take place. In other cultures, more formal rules of etiquette and social interactions will limit the range of options. In Germany in particular, social space and interactions are carefully

compartmentalized, with clear distinctions and divisions in place. Separating off one's garden with a hedge or fence, for example, signals that the space is reserved for family use.

Germany and Japan are densely populated countries in which privacy is particularly valued. There are different ways to achieve that privacy. Architectural scholar Jon Lang (1987) identified four types of privacy: a) **solitude**, in which one is free from observation by others; b) **intimacy**, or shared privacy; c) **anonymity**, going unnoticed by others especially in a crowd; and d) **reserve**, in which one uses psychological means to create imagined isolation. Living in Tokyo (or other large metropolitan areas), office workers on the morning commute are likely to seek "anonymity" in crowded buses or subway cars. Once at the office, they may use "reserve", the only means of achieving privacy in a cubicled office environment. Once back home, the office worker might seek "solitude" in a specifically Japanese cultural way, by retreating into the bathroom. In Japanese houses, the bathroom is separated from the toilet and typically consists of two distinct areas, one for bathing (using a shower and soap) and one for soaking (the tub). The space is kept absolutely clean and made as attractive as possible, with the soaking water often scented with flowers or lemons. It can be a place for private relaxation and meditation.



Figure 7.3.7: Wireless toilet control panel in Japan

The toilet offers the worker another opportunity for privacy, a valued commodity in a culture that places high value on social harmony, consensus building, and teamwork, all activities calling for contact with others. The toilet itself points to another key aspect of contemporary Japanese culture, the fascination with gadgets and electronics. Many Japanese toilets are high-tech, with a sophisticated control panel allowing for seat warming, massaging, and cleansing sprays. It may also play sounds and music. Soft music may help in relaxation and contemplation, while louder sounds may mask from others the personal activity occurring. That latter feature demonstrates that even in the search for privacy, Japanese tend to take into consideration those around them. Privacy in such a culture is fleeting, and therefore is all the more sought and cherished.

Naked? "This is Brazil. No one cares"

When I lived in Brazil, I was on the Amazon river...The environment clearly interacted with everyday life. Daily temperatures were usually in the 90s and 100s F. [35-40 C.], with a very high humidity. When you show up at someone's home, they offer you a shower instead of a drink. You take off your clothes, hop in the shower to cool down (but never after eating, because faz mal ["it harms you"]), then put on the same clothes. One time, I went to the shared shower-shed between the houses in the housing area (a wooden shed with a garden hose hanging down). There was a wood plank missing. I went back and asked my host, "What do you wear to shower here?" He laughed and said, "Nothing, of course!" "But there's a board missing," I said. "John," he replied—"this is Brazil. No one cares." This leads to the notion that, because of climate and social factors, the notion of modesty was also quite different...Many of my friends thought nothing of using my cologne, my toothpaste., even my toothbrush...Because of crowdedness, especially among the working classes, privacy is conceptualized differently. If I stayed at a friend's house, I would expect to bring my own hammock and string it across the living room—often with other family members

Baldwin, 2008

Notions of privacy are related to the sense of private ownership, which can also differ markedly across cultures. In the US, with a strong tradition of individualism and private ownership rights, mainstream cultural norms include sharp divisions between one's own possessions and those of others, including in a family environment. In other cultures, there are traditions of sharing and communal ownership, such as in Native American cultures. John Baldwin, a US scholar of intercultural communication recounts his personal experiences of privacy and attitudes towards personal possessions while living in Brazil (see sidebar). Brazil has a great variety of living spaces, with immense differences between life in the Amazonian rain forest and in major metropolitan areas like Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo. One of the indigenous tribes are the Mehinaku Indians. They live in communal villages with no privacy. Their huts house families of ten or twelve people. They have no windows or internal walls, and have doors that open unto an open area that is in constant view. The family members sleep in hammocks, suspended from a common house pole. According to anthropologist, Thomas Gregor (1980), "Each individual's whereabouts and activities are generally known to his relatives and often to the community as a whole. A Mehinaku has little chance of staying out of the public eye for any length of time" (p. 67). To be alone, villagers have only one option, to leave the village.



Figure 7.3.8: Xavante villagers in Brazil

There is clearly a connection between the spaces humans inhabit and the cultural practices which take place there. Living in an Amazonian village will dictate behaviors and communication patterns quite different from those in an urban environment such as Paris. Donald Carbaugh (1999) describes the practice of "listening" (silent contemplation and meditation) of the Native American Blackfeet tribe in sacred locations or inspired by certain sky conditions or landscapes. The practice illustrates the Indian sense of connectedness of humans and all of life with nature. Non-Indians are not likely to have the equivalent experiences in the same physical setting (see sidebar). Thus, individuals and groups may experience the same physical space very differently. Paris, for tourists, is a place of wonder and discovery. For inhabitants of the Parisian suburbs (*banlieux* in French), where many Muslim immigrants live in crime-ridden high-rise apartment buildings, Paris might have a very different meaning, suggesting a life of poverty and hopelessness. For business people, Paris represents a center of commerce and economic opportunity. In recent years, Paris has served as a place for terrorists to engage in brutal attacks for maximum visibility.

The example of Paris reminds us of the complexity of modern urban spaces. Villages and rural spaces tend to be monocultural, an environment in which strangers are infrequently encountered and can be ignored (see Rogers & Steinfatt, 1998). With the advent of the industrial age, beginning in 18th century England, there's been a major demographic shift in many countries, as rural inhabitants move to cities to find employment and more opportunities for themselves and their families. In the process, cities have absorbed groups representing a variety of cultural backgrounds. In the US in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, ethnic or racial neighborhoods were created with inhabitants living largely separated from mainstream communities. These neighborhoods and ghettos were often created through segregation, not through the wishes of the group members. In San Francisco, for example, racial politics isolated Chinese immigrants within Chinatown:

The sense of being physically sealed within the boundaries of Chinatown was impressed on the few immigrants coming into the settlement by frequent stonings which occurred as they came up Washington or Clay Street from the piers. It was perpetuated by attacks of white toughs in the adjacent North Beach area and down- town around Union Square, who amused themselves by beating Chinese who came into these areas (Nee & Nee, 1974, p. 60).

Patterns of discrimination and separation have persisted in the US, with African-Americans, Latinx communities, and other cultures concentrated in particular neighborhoods. That process occurs worldwide. In Europe, Turkish communities occupy particular districts in German cities, as do North Africans in French cities. This dynamic can vary with the particular ethnic group and city.

Martin and Nakayama (2010) discuss the concept of "postmodern cultural spaces" in which city neighborhoods and boundaries in many places are becoming more flexible and fluid (see sidebar). This kind of fluidity stands in contrast to the traditional notions of fixed space and time, just as online communities today, too, challenge these same notions. In the process, identities have become more complex, as we navigate communication in different locations and contexts, both physical and virtual.

Polish-Americans today in Phoenix, Arizona

The ideology of fixed spaces and categories is currently being challenged by postmodernist notions of space and location. Phoenix, for example, which became a city relatively recently, has no Chinatown, or Japantown, or Koreatown, no Irish district, or Polish neighborhood, or Italian area. Instead, people of Polish descent, for example, might live anywhere in the metropolitan area but congregate for special occasions or for specific reasons. On Sundays, the Polish Catholic Mass draws many people from throughout Phoenix. When people want to buy Polish breads and pastries, they can go to the Polish bakery and also speak Polish there. Ethnic identity is only one of several identities that these people negotiate. When they desire recognition and interaction based on their Polish heritage, they can meet that wish. When they seek other forms of identification, they can go to places where they can be Phoenix Suns fans, or community volunteers, and so on. Ethnic identity is neither the sole factor nor necessarily the most important one at all times in their lives.

Martin and Nakayama (2010), p. 296

Car and Driving Behavior in a Cultural Context

When we talk about human living spaces today, one of those difficult to ignore is the automobile. Most of us spend large blocks of time driving or riding in the car. Anyone who has done much traveling outside one's home country has likely been struck by the difference in car cultures, driving behaviors, and traffic patterns. In the US and the UK, for example, drivers generally follow traffic rules and drive in an orderly and predictable way. In other countries, such as Nigeria, traffic regulations are largely ignored. In that country, as well as in others in Africa, cars must compete for space on the road with vehicles of all kinds in addition to pedestrians and street hawkers. In India, cows roam freely over roads, including on the Indian equivalent of major, divided highways.

As is the case in schools and businesses, driving behaviors often reflect aspects of national cultures. North American and German drivers, for example, will assume that they have the freedom and the individual right to claim the right-of-way if traffic rules allot it to them. They are likely to be upset if others do not respect that right and go out of turn or cut them off. The pattern of driving behavior in cultures deemed collectivistic is quite different. In China and India, for example, drivers behave in a very different fashion, allowing others to merge or turn, even if that goes counter to the right of way or to traffic regulations. For those used to Western patterns of driving, the seemingly chaotic flow and merge of traffic in India may seem inexplicable and dangerous. Yet in India, it is a functional chaos which actually does have informal rules of order. Precedence is given by size of vehicle, with pedestrians yielding to bikes and carts, bikes and carts to cars, cars to buses, and buses to trucks.



Figure 7.3.9: Road traffic in India - functional chaos.

It's not just how we drive that may be different, but as well what it is we use our cars for. Europeans in general see cars as a dedicated means of transportation and when driving focus exclusively on that activity, with the goal of getting from A to B as quickly as possible. US Americans, on the other hand, see their cars as extensions of their personal living space and as an appropriate location in which to carry out all kinds of everyday activities, from eating/drinking to dating. In the US, drive-throughs are available for all kinds of activities, from picking up medications at a pharmacy to getting married (in Las Vegas). Edward Hall commented in *Hidden Dimensions* (1966) on the size of American automobiles, contrasting it with French cars:

The French automobile is designed in response to French needs. Its small size used to be attributed to a lower standard of living and higher costs of materials; and while there can be no doubt but that cost is a factor, it would be naive to assume that it was the major factor. The automobile is just as much an expression of the culture as is the language and, therefore, has its characteristic niche in the cultural biotope. Changes in the car will reflect and be reflected in changes elsewhere. If the French drove American cars, they would be forced to give up many ways of dealing with space which they hold quite dear. The traffic along the Champs-Élysées and around the Arc de Triomphe is a cross between the New Jersey Turnpike on a sunny Sunday afternoon and the Indianapolis Speedway. With American-size autos, it would be mass suicide (p. 145).

Today, globalization has affected the automobile industry, as it has all others. The same kind of cars are sold and driven all over the world, and their national prominence is difficult to determine, as parts typically come from suppliers in multiple countries, with manufacturing plants also spread worldwide.

Although the idea of *cultural space* doesn't fit neatly into the category of nonverbal behaviors, many scholars find significance in the idea as it merges *culture*, *environment* and *identity*. Culture is dynamic and redefines itself from one generation to the next so examining these social and cultural contexts is critical to intercultural communication research.

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7.4: Nonverbal Communication Challenges

Nonverbal Expectancy Violation Theory

As in other areas tied to cultural values and behaviors, people develop an expectation of conformity with the conventions of the culture, in this case with the unwritten rules of nonverbal behavior. In the US, we don't expect women to wear headscarves as normal everyday attire. We do expect to shake hands upon meeting someone for the first time, which may not happen if, as a non-related man, we are meeting a Muslim woman. Such occurrences are, in the formulation of Judee Burgoon (1978), violations of **nonverbal expectancy**. According to this theory, people have expectations about the appropriateness of nonverbal behavior, which is learned and culturally driven. When these expectations are violated, it produces a reaction she describes as "arousal", which can be physiological or cognitive, positive or negative. Our reaction depends on the severity of the violation, the nature of the person (such as attractiveness), and the implicit message associated with the violation. The context and the person will determine our reaction. If a person standing too close at a party (thereby violating personal space) is attractive and well groomed, the reaction is likely to be quite different than if that person is perceived as slovenly and unattractive.

Reactions to violations of nonverbal codes depend as well on the nature of our communicative and cultural environment. If we are accustomed to high-context communications, we may be more dependent on nonverbal messages and are therefore more adept at decoding nonverbal behavior. In that case, for example, silence might be evaluated positively and perceived quite differently than it is in cultures where periods of silence in a conversation run counter to expectations. In intercultural communication contexts, violations of expectations by a non-native could be seen as naïve/endearing or strange/rude depending on how we view that person. Using Hofstede's cultural categories, Burgoon points out that violating norms in strong uncertainty avoidance cultures is likely to be less acceptable. On the other hand, countries with smaller power distance may be more flexible in terms of rules about verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

In the South Asian countries, sitting with one's back towards someone older in age or authority, or having the soles of one's feet face someone older in age or stature or authority, or books – the source of knowledge, or the altar, is considered very rude (Malik, personal communication, September 18, 2017). That is the reason why one is unlikely to find bookshelves or altars at the feet of the bed or against or on the wall facing the feet of the bed. It is also considered inappropriate to have an altar or the photographs of one's ancestors in a bedroom that is likely to be used as a conjugal bedroom.

One of the cultural norms that may lead to adverse reactions is the public display of affection. In most Western cultures, there has long been acceptance of heterosexual couples touching and kissing in public. The degree to which this occurs differs. Researchers have found that this is more common, for example, among French and Italian young couples than in the US (Field, 1999; DiBiase & Gunnoe, 2004). Acceptance of homosexual couples is widespread today in many Western countries, but not in many other parts of the world. In most Muslim cultures, the strict separation of unmarried people disallows even heterosexual contact in public. In India, some public displays of affection are taboo. In 2007, US actor Richard Gere faced widespread condemnation in India, after kissing Indian actress Shilpa Shetty at a televised fund-raising event. A photo of the kiss made front-page news across India, and effigies and photos of both Gere and Shetty were burned. An Indian court issued an arrest warrant for Gere, as he had "transgressed all limits of vulgarity" (Indian Court, 2007).



Figure 7.4.1: Richard Gere kisses Shilpa Shetty

It is of course not possible to know all the ins and outs of nonverbal transgressions in every country. On the other hand, it is certainly possible to be informed about the cultural practices in countries which we plan to visit or among local communities with whom we are likely to have contact. To the extent possible, we should act in accordance with the cultural expectations. That might mean taking off shoes before entering a home, or dressing more modestly than we would normally. On the other hand, we may oppose particular practices for religious, political, or philosophical reasons, and consciously refuse to adapt to local customs. That might mean, for example, women not accepting the prescribed cultural role in behavior, bearing, or dress expected in a particular culture. In general, it is good practice to anticipate nonverbal expectations to the degree possible. Even if we don't know the specifics of expectations in a given culture, we can certainly observe and learn. Burgoon's theory suggests that if we are well-intentioned, yet unaware of specific practices, it is likely others will be lenient in overlooking transgressions. In fact, it may be that expectations for foreigners in this regard are different than they are for natives. Koreans, for example, would likely not expect foreigners be familiar with the intricacies of bowing as they interface with Korean social hierarchies.

Suggestions for Communicating Nonverbally Across Cultures

Here are some considerations in respect to nonverbal communication in intercultural encounters:

- *Be cautious in making assumptions based on nonverbal actions.* The same gestures may have quite different meanings in different cultures. We often tend to assume body language and gestures are universal, but that is not the case.
- *Try to understand the cultural values attached to nonverbal conventions.* Try to penetrate beneath the surface of the behavior. Consider as well whether the behavior may be personal and idiosyncratic, rather than cultural and typical.
- *Watch and imitate as appropriate.* As the saying goes, "when in Rome, do as the Romans." In some cases, adopting the different nonverbal behavior might be easy and straightforward, for example, bowing in Japan. In other cases, divergence might be more appropriate, for example, refraining from kneeling along with Muslims in prayer services.

Wrapping Up

People may not understand your words, but they will certainly interpret your nonverbal communication according to *their* accepted norms. Notice the word *their*. It is *their* perceptions that will count when you are trying to communicate, and it's important to understand that those perceptions will be based on the teachings and experiences of their culture—not yours. The ideas and theories presented in the previous sections note how we look at the structures of cultures, values, and communication. They also provide a framework for talking about and comparing cultures, but it's always important to remember that cultures are heterogeneous, and constantly changing. One size does not fit all and nonverbal communication is ambiguous even in the best of times.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: Culture Shock

[8.1: Introduction to Culture Shock](#)

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8.1: Introduction to Culture Shock

Introduction to Culture Shock

In your reading of this textbook thus far, we have discussed many theories and principles to help you understand many dynamics of intercultural communication. But understanding intercultural communication is not the same thing as experiencing it. To experience intercultural communication, one needs to get off the couch and set foot into a new and unfamiliar culture. When a person moves from to a cultural environment that is different than their own, they often experience personal disorientation called culture shock. Culture shock refers to the anxiety and discomfort we feel when moving from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one. In our own culture, through time, we have learned the million and one ways how to communicate appropriately with friends, family members, colleagues, and others. We know how to greet people, when and how to give tips, whether to stand or sit, how much eye contact to make, when to accept and refuse invitations, how to understand directions, whether others are being sarcastic or not, how holidays are and are not celebrated, how to shop for and prepare food, and generally how to communicate verbally and nonverbally in any given social situation. When we enter a new culture, many of those familiar signs and signals are gone, leading us to feel helplessly lost in many circumstances.

The ABC's of Culture Shock

Culture shock is first and foremost an emotional response to a change in our culture environment. But it also impacts how we act and how we think. The ABC's of culture shock refer to the affective, behavioral, and cognitive changes brought on by culture shock. The **affective** dimension of culture shock refers to the anxiety, bewilderment, and disorientation of experiencing a new culture. Kalervo Oberg (1960) believed culture shock produced an identity loss and confusion from the psychological toll exerted to adjust to a new culture. The **behavioral** dimension refers to confusion over behaviors of people in the host culture. We don't understand why people are behaving they way they are in certain situations and we are not sure how to act appropriately. The **cognitive** dimension refers to our inability to interpret our new environment, or understand these "bizarre" social experiences.

Underlying Factors

Over the past several decades, there have been numerous peer reviewed, scholarly studies documenting the effects of culture shock. The research suggests that nearly everybody who enters a new culture will experience some form of culture shock, but not everybody experiences culture shock the same way. How long culture shock lasts and the degree to which it is felt will vary according to several underlying factors. One of the most important factors is **motivational orientation**. Some people travel willingly and are excited to enter a new culture. Students who decide to study abroad, travelers who want to explore the world and families who go on vacations provide few examples. These groups generally have a high motivational orientation and generally have an easier time adapting to culture shock. By contrast, others enter a new culture reluctantly or unwillingly. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are 70.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. These include refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced people. To put that number in perspective, that is 1 out of every one hundred people on the planet. This is the highest number in human history and it is only expected to grow as war and conflicts continue, and catastrophic climate change threatens to make many parts of the world uninhabitable in the near future. These people generally have a low motivational orientation as they do not want to leave their home cultures but do so because their very survival depends on it.

When I was in graduate school in San Francisco, I took a semester off and traveled for 4 months through several Asian countries. On that trip, I met a German woman while on a boat from Sumatra to Malaysia. We traveled together up to Thailand before parting ways. Months later, she came to visit and later moved into my apartment in San Francisco. Eventually we married, and have been together ever since. But back in those days in San Francisco, we had a roommate who saw our relationship develop firsthand. He wasn't having much luck with the dating scene in San Francisco and decided that he, too, would like to meet a "European girl." So he set off for a month to Thailand and India, hoping he would find "the girl of is dreams." This anecdote speaks to another underlying factor, **personal expectations**. People with high expectations for their cultural experiences tend to struggle more with culture shock. Those who travel with an open mind and heart, who take the experiences as they come in a more spontaneous way tend to adapt better. Needless to say, my former roommate did not find his ideal partner and returned home sharing more stories of frustrating experiences rather than enriching ones.

When we travel to a new culture, the cultural distance between our home culture and host culture impacts our level of culture shock. This distance can be physical, but more importantly, **cultural distance** refers to the degree of difference in culture between the known, home environment and the new one. When we travel to destinations where people speak a different language, have

different racial features, practice a different religion and have significantly different customs and traditions, we typically feel a greater degree of culture shock. As someone born and raised in Northern California, I experienced much more culture shock when I traveled to India than when I visited Vancouver, Canada.

Another factor that influences the degree of culture shock is **sociocultural adjustment**, which refers to the ability of the traveler to fit in and interact with members of the host culture. The level of sociocultural adjustment largely rests on the hosts attitudes toward visitors to their culture. One attitude of hosts towards tourists is retreatism. **Retreatism** basically means that hosts actively avoid contact with tourists by looking for ways to hide their everyday lives. Tourists may not be aware of this attitude because the host economy may be dependent upon tourism. Such dependence could possibly force the host community to accommodate tourists with tolerance. Hawaii is a place that depends heavily on tourism and often uses various forms of retreatism to cope with the tourist invasion. Several students have mentioned that other than people who worked at restaurants or on tourist excursions, they didn't see many locals when vacationing in Hawaii. Another attitude of hosts towards tourists is **resistance**. This attitude can be passive or aggressive. Passive resistance may include grumbling, gossiping about, or making fun of tourists behind their backs. Aggressive resistance often takes more active forms, such as pretending not to speak a language or giving incorrect information or directions. In the summer of 2019, Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau pledged to reduce the number of tourists, cutting cruise ships and limiting expansion of its airport. These actions came in response to an incredible surge of tourism. As The Guardian reported in 2016, the number of visitors making overnight stays in the city increased from 1.7 million in 1990 to more than 8 million in 16 years. That's an astonishing increase for a city that is not as big as other European equivalents, such as Paris or London, and where many of the major tourist sites such as Sagrada Familia and Parc Güell are in residential areas where space to expand simply doesn't exist. Further, traveling can be expensive, and travelers are often—but not always—more economically and socially privileged than their hosts. This dynamic can lead to power imbalances between hosts and tourists. Not all host attitudes are protective or negative. Some communities may capitalize on tourism and accept it as the social fabric of their community. Other communities actively invest money to draw tourists as a way to create economic well-being. This attitude is called **revitalization**. Residents do not always share equally in the revitalization, but sometimes it does lead to pride in the re-discovery of community history and traditions. Dolly Parton's "Dollywood" located in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee was created as a way to revitalize a community that she loved much as eco-tourism is a revitalizing force in Costa Rica.

Of course, individual **personality attributes** play a factor in how well one copes with culture shock. Generally speaking, people with greater tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity respond better to unknown and unanticipated experiences that occur when encountering other cultures. Those who are inflexible or set in their ways tend to struggle more with culture shock. Experience matters here. First-time travelers are likely to experience more culture shock simply because of the novelty of the situation. Experienced travelers have experienced culture shock in the past and have developed coping mechanisms when they find themselves in that situation again. In 2017, I found myself hopelessly lost walking inside the Medina in Fez, Morocco. The Medina is a walled city formed in the 9th century. It is home to the oldest University in the world. The Medina consists of over 9,000 unmarked narrow alleyways. I had been walking for nearly 2 hours trying to get back to my guest house. I asked dozens of people for help, but due to language and cultural barriers, I was having no luck. I had been warned that tourists shouldn't walk through the Medina alone at night, and as night began to fall, I started to wonder if I would ever find my way out of that incredibly complex labyrinth. Fortunately, this wasn't my first rodeo, as the saying goes. I had previously traveled to 47 different countries on 5 continents. I hiked a volcano alone in the middle of the night in Panama, trekked to the glacial source of the Ganges River in India, sat beside burning human bodies at cremation ceremonies in Nepal, and endured harrowing bus rides on roads cut from cliffs in the Andes of Bolivia. Drawing on those past experiences I didn't let culture shock get the best of me and eventually found my way back home.



Figure 8.1.1: A tannery in the Medina, Fez, Morocco.

Travelers and Tourists

How one travels into a new culture can significantly impact the degree of culture shock one experiences. While the words "traveler" and "tourist" may seem synonymous, to those in the travel community, the implications differ greatly.

Travelers

Travelers are intellectually curious. They desire to explore new places, taste new foods, meet new people, and immerse themselves in cultures that are different from their own. Travelers prefer to ride in local busses or trains, eat in local markets, and stay in small guest houses, run by local families. Travelers take an interest in their new surroundings by learning the language (or at least a few phrases) and customs of the new culture. Travelers typically travel alone or in small groups. Travelers are spontaneous. They may have a general travel plan, but are willing to deviate from it as opportunities and diversions arise. Travelers attend local festivals and gatherings and share in the traditional celebrations of the host culture.

Tourists

Tourists are more interested in cultural exploitation rather than cultural exploration. A tourist would rather spend all day on a tourist beach than exploring a local, hidden beach. Tourists are more comfortable eating familiar foods at multinational restaurant chains like McDonalds or KFC. Tourists stay in large hotels specifically designed for tourists. They appreciate all-inclusive resorts like Club Med and often miss sleeping in their own bed. Tourists appreciate the convenience of air-conditioned tourist busses and look to spend their days with other tourists on guided tours. Tourists would rather go on a group tour rather than venture out on their own. Tourists like to follow a strictly regimented plan, with little opportunity for deviation. That way, they can see as many famous sites in as short amount of time as possible. Tourists tend to engage in culturally simulated cultural experiences rather than authentic ones. For example, tourists will go to performances held in the ballroom of their hotels where the only other guests are other tourists. The performance usually entails locals dressing up in traditional garb, singing and dancing for tourists, before returning to their day to day lives. Typically, the only locals that tourists meet are those who work in the tourism industry and serve them.



Figure 8.1.2: A pedestrian walkway in Suzhou, China. (CC BY; Tom Grothe)

Tourists generally have a filtered exposure to the other culture, while traveling in national groups largely isolated from native communities. Because of the short time frame and the lack of in-depth exposure to the new culture, tourists normally have an unproblematic relationship to the culture, often experiencing it in a positive light, if perhaps somewhat exoticized. On the other hand, some studies have shown that tourists may have ethnocentric views reinforced. That may occur because tourists, living in an "environmental bubble" (Cohen, 1972), see only selected aspects of a culture. The aspects of the culture encountered (food, dress, festivals) do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the culture as a whole, as they represent outward manifestations of the culture, not its hidden values and beliefs. The result can be that tourists and representatives of the host culture do not see each other in their entirety as human beings:

The mass tourist travels in a world of his own, surrounded by, but not integrated in, the host society. He meets the representatives of the tourist establishment — hotel managers, tourist agents, guides —but only seldom the natives. The natives, in turn, see the mass tourist as unreal. Neither has much of an opportunity to become an individual to the other (Cohen, 1972, p. 175).

This example applies to mass tourism. Cultural tourists, interested primarily in historical and artistic aspects of a country or region, may gain a fuller picture of the culture (Cohen, 1972). It's more likely in that case that the tourists will have prepared for the visit through some degree of study of the history and geography of the region. Optimally, that would include learning basics of the language as well.

Stereotypical images of a culture may be perpetuated through a desire on the part of the host country to accommodate tourist expectations. That may in fact be a practical necessity, if the tourist industry constitutes a major contributor to a region's economy. Hua (2013) provides the example of how topless dancing, a traditional aspect of Zulu culture, has been affected by the tourist industry (see sidebar).

📌 Topless Zulu dancers: Only for tourists?



Figure 8.1.3: The Reed Dance Festival 2006. (Public Domain; [Amada44](#) via [Wikipedia](#))

Naidu (2011a, 2011b) investigates the 'topless' dance tradition of Zulu girls in a cultural village in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, and perceptions of indigenous cultural bodies in tourism. In the cultural village reported in Naidu's study, a small number of Zulu-speaking girls took part in a Zulu dance as 'ethnic' performers. As unmarried virgins, they wear no tops, only beaded skirts and some jewellery when dancing. However, although 'topless' has been a tradition for Zulu girls, things are very different now. As reported by two girls interviewed by Naidu (2011b), girls nowadays do not have to dance 'topless' to show that they are unmarried. Instead, they only do it at home and when there is a special celebration. Nevertheless, the girls feel that this is what tourists want to see and dancing 'topless' is a business exchange, despite the fact that they find it somewhat awkward when dancing in front of and posing along with tourists (Hua, 2013, p.88)

Tourism may have a complex relationship to a host culture, sometimes reducing culture to a commodity. Some scholars have pointed to positive aspects of tourism (Jack & Phipps, 2005), as at least one widely available means for cross-cultural contact. The TED talk on tourism by Aziz Abu Sarah argues that tourism can play a positive role in peace-keeping. Tourism, in fact, may lead to activism. Baldwin et al. (2013) give the example of the founding of the TOMS One for One shoe company, which donates a pair of shoes to poor Latin-American families for each pair sold. The founder got the idea and incentive for the company while traveling through Argentina.

Of course the characterizations of "traveler" and "tourist" are not mutually exclusive categories. There are many overlapping and gray areas. But in general, the distinction between traveler and tourist is a matter of orientation. Because travelers are more willing to get out of their comfort zones, they are more likely to experience a greater degree of culture shock. At the same time, the opportunity for personal growth and enrichment is much greater when people visit other cultures as travelers rather than tourists. Culture shock, while difficult, should be welcome as an opportunity for growth and development.

Study Abroad

Culture shock has been studied extensively in connection with study abroad programs (see Kinginger, 2008; Salisbury, An & Pascarella, 2013). Large numbers of students internationally go to study at a university in a different country for a time ranging from a short-term summer or winter program (4 to 6 weeks) to a semester or longer. Students may participate as part of a group, through an exchange program, or independently. The European Erasmus Exchange Program has enabled large numbers of students from European countries to study and receive university credit at other universities in Europe. The kind of experience one has through study abroad varies considerably depending on the manner in which it is organized. Going abroad with a group from one's own culture, and attending special university classes together, limits the exposure to the target culture and its language. Organizing independent study abroad experience is more difficult, as one must arrange oneself for university registration, selection of courses, and housing. In the process, however, one is likely to gain greater socio-cultural competence and more integration into the target culture and language. On the other hand, independent students lack the support system available to groups.



Figure 8.1.4: Students on a Butte College Study Abroad program learn the art of coffee cultivation in Costa Rica. (CC BY; Tom Grothe)

Whether one engages in study abroad independently or as a member of a group, individual disposition/personality and the local context will determine the degree of success and personal satisfaction. Hua (2013) points out that many study abroad experiences result in an increase in oral proficiency in the target language and in intercultural understanding and competence. However, that varies tremendously depending on the individual. One might have the kind of limited exposure described here:

Her daily routine included attendance at required classes, after which she would go immediately to the study abroad center sponsored by her home university where she would stay until closing time, surfing the English language Internet and exchanging emails and Instant Messages with her friends and family in the U.S. Outside of service encounters, framed in various ways in her journal as threats to her well-being, she made little effort to engage speakers of French, limiting her use of the language to her courses. (Kinging & Belz, 2005, p. 411)

In fact, the issue of technology in study abroad is controversial. Some have advocated a restricted use of technology while abroad, so as to maximize real-life contact with the members of the target culture (Doerr, 2013). Some programs go so far as to forbid use of phones while participating in the program (Godwin-Jones, 2016). On the other hand, online access to home communities can be a tremendous help in psychological adjustment and in recovering from culture shock. Maintaining a blog, diary, or reflective journal provides a mechanism for sharing the experience and reflecting on what one discovers, as described in the last section of this chapter.

In addition to study abroad, there are other avenues for university-age students to have meaningful longer-term encounters with a foreign culture. There are opportunities to engage in volunteer services abroad, through government agencies, NGOs, or religious groups. One method that has a long history, particularly in Europe, is to serve as an "au pair", living with a host family and helping with childcare and other light domestic work. Working abroad in other capacities is possible as well, although finding appropriate jobs and obtaining necessary work permits, depending on the country, may be difficult. All these options carry with them the advantage over being a tourist or student in that they tend to offer more complete integration into the everyday life in the foreign country. Living with a host family or entering into a working environment automatically supplies contacts with members of the culture. Particularly attractive are internships abroad, which, in addition to supplying cultural and work experience, offer the possibility of future employment.



Figure 8.1.5: Colombian working as an au pair.

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8.2: Managing Culture Shock

The experience of culture shock can range from mildly annoying to profoundly disturbing. Fortunately, many studies have been conducted and a few models have emerged that help explain the stages of culture shock. When we have a better understanding of this phenomenon, we are better suited to manage it. One of the best known models is The **W-curve model**, proposed by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963). The W shape represents the fluctuation of travelers' emotions when adapting to a new culture, and then when re-adapting to their home culture.

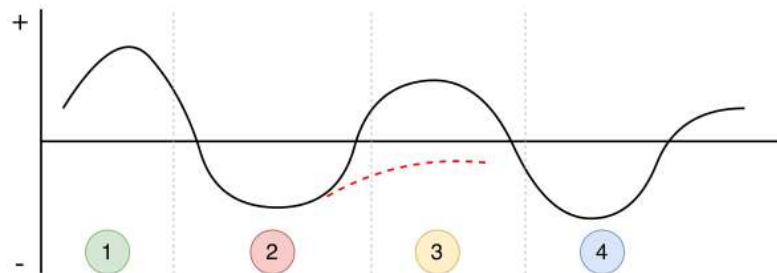


Figure 8.2.1: The **W-curve model**, proposed by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) demonstrates the stages of culture shock and reentry shock.

To understand this model, the vertical axis represents satisfaction, or happiness, and the horizontal axis represents time. The first stage, often called the **honeymoon stage**, happens right at the beginning of the journey. It represents the hope and excitement in anticipation of new experiences. For students who study abroad, the honeymoon stage signifies the start of the adventure. The long-awaited day has finally come! In this stage, the traveler may become infatuated with the language, food, people, and overall environment of the host culture. Stage two, the **culture shock stage**, is characterized by frustration and fatigue of not understanding the norms of the new culture. Common symptoms of the culture shock stage include: homesickness, feelings of helplessness, disorientation, isolation, depression, irritability, sleeping and eating disturbances, loss of focus, and more. As time progresses, the traveler begins to become more comfortable with the new environment. Navigating the new culture becomes easier, friendships and communities of support are established, the language and customs become more familiar. This adaptation to the new culture is the third stage, called the **adjustment stage**. The longer one stays in a new culture, the more one acclimatizes to it. These first three stages represent time spent in the new culture. This U-shape describes many of the early models of culture shock. The W-curve model expands on earlier models and recognizes that the return home can be marked by feeling let down and mental isolation. This fourth stage is referred to as reverse culture shock, or **re-entry shock**. Traveling can be profoundly enriching, even life-changing. Many students who have studied abroad claim it was the most significant thing they had done in their lives. When they first arrive home, they are eager to share their experiences with family and friends. This initial eagerness quickly fades as they have trouble relating the profound experience to those who stayed home. Further, they realize that nothing at home has changed and people grow tired of their stories and just want the traveler to return to "normal," meaning the way they were before the journey. The traveler has a new sense of identity that is not validated by their loved ones. Fortunately, through time, the traveler accepts their home culture and integrates their experiences into a new sense of self.

Some scholars have suggested other models for describing the process. Young Yun Kim (2005) sees adjustments happening in a cyclical pattern of **stress – adaptation – growth**. She sees stress as useful for an individual's growth and prefers "cultural adjustment" over "culture shock". It's also the case that acculturation is not just within the power of the individual. It also depends on the willingness of the host culture to accept (or not) the individual. A physician or engineer from abroad coming into a new country will likely be given a much better reception than poor immigrants; this can have a significant impact on the adjustment process. It can be the case as well that the co-cultures in the new country may be welcoming to the new arrival, if there are similarities which make acculturation smoother, such as national origin, sexual orientation, or professional affiliations. Adjusting to a new culture is facilitated by the presence of linguistic or cultural resources linked to the home culture, such as food markets, schools, and clubs.

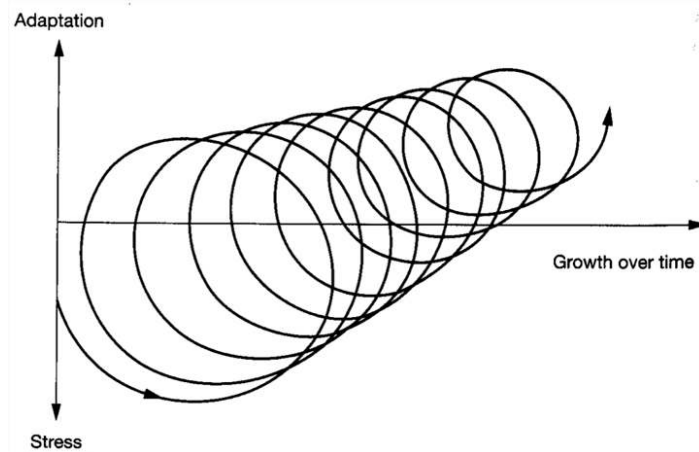


Figure 8.2.2: Diminishing stress-adaptation-growth over time; Kim, 2001, p. 59

As with all explanatory models, it is important to remember that there is no one-size-fits-all model. Some people skip certain stages, experience them in a different order, or have a longer or shorter adjustment period than others. What researchers do agree upon is that it is natural to feel some degree of culture shock. Although most people recover from culture shock fairly quickly, a few find it to be profoundly disorienting, and take much longer to recover, particularly if they are unaware of the sources of the problem, and have no idea of how to counteract it. The following tips can help travelers manage the emotional roller coaster of culture shock.

Tips for Managing Culture Shock

One of the best remedies for managing culture shock starts with simply understand that culture shock exists. Culture shock can catch us by surprise. We feel emotions that we don't expect or are novel to us. A traveler once told me, "I don't know what's happening. I've always been really easy going, but lately I feel irritable all the time, even aggressive. This is not me." When we **realize that culture shock exists**, we have an explanation for the emotional turmoil caused by culture shock. If we don't know about culture shock, we are left wondering, "what's happening to me", which can be profoundly unsettling. Many years ago, I was traveling through Honduras with a few other sojourners I met along the way. One afternoon, a young woman in our cohort just started crying. We asked her what happened and why she was crying. She just shook her head, and through her tears she said "Nothing happened, I don't know why I am crying!" In hindsight, it was clearly an effect of culture shock.

Culture shock by definition is the stress and anxiety we experience when we are in unfamiliar territory. Therefore, if we **learn more about the host country**, we may begin to have an understanding of the different norms and customs in our new environment. If we know we will be traveling, we should do our homework. There are countless guidebooks and websites that discuss different cultural tendencies exhibited by people of different nations. For example, cultureready.org has country specific information on greetings, communication style, gender issues, law and order, dress, socializing, business basics, and gift giving, to name just a few.

In the summer of 2005, I accepted a visiting professor position in Chengdu, China. Chengdu is a large city in western China. Very few locals spoke English, and the language difference between Mandarin and English is significant, making communication nearly impossible. Knowing that trying to bridge this language barrier is daunting, the resident director had students break into small groups and go to different sites within the city on the public busses on the first day. Once students arrived at their respective sites, they had some time to look around and then take a taxi to reconvene in the larger group for lunch. All students were given a small card with the name and address of the restaurant written in Chinese to hand to the taxi driver. This strategy was meant to give students an early opportunity to get out and experience the culture. In retrospect, this was an excellent strategy to help students manage culture shock. A common coping mechanism when confronting culture shock is to turn inward, and isolate oneself from the host culture. Some people may choose to stay in their rooms all day instead of interacting with others. A better approach is to **develop friendships** or acquaintances with the locals. In Chengdu, there were certain locations called *English corners*, where people gathered to practice English. The American students who went to the English corners were surrounded by local Chinese people who invited them to their homes, took them out for meals, and showed them the hidden jewels of the city that they otherwise never would have encountered. To help meet locals, students who study abroad are encouraged to join campus clubs or community organizations that match their interests. When I taught in Spain for a semester, the study abroad organization set up *intercambios* between American study abroad students and local Spanish students. The stated purpose of these intercambios were for each party to practice the others' language, but they also served as a way for American students to meet locals and integrate into

the local culture. I had a hard time meeting locals when I spent a week in Jamaica. I didn't like being perceived as just another white tourist, staying in the boundaries of an all-inclusive hotel. As a life-long soccer player, I started joining the local pick-up soccer games in the evenings. This was a perfect way to get to know local people outside of the oppressive relationship of the servers and the served.

When we enter an unfamiliar culture, we confront situations that we just don't understand. We may not understand the language people use when speaking to us. We might not understand the behavior of the locals, the significance of ceremonies, etc. To better manage culture shock, we need to **learn to tolerate ambiguity**. You can frustrate yourself to no end if you need to have explanations for everything happening all around you, all the time. By tolerating ambiguity, we become more comfortable with knowing that there is so much happening that we just don't understand, and that's okay. One of my favorite examples comes from traveling in rural Tibet. It was common for children to approach me and stick out their tongues at first greeting. I had no idea why this kept happening to me. Later I learned that this was a common greeting. According to Tibetan folklore, a cruel ninth-century Tibetan king had a black tongue, so people stick out their tongues to show that they are not like him (and aren't his reincarnation).

Humans have a natural desire to reduce uncertainty in any given situation. When traveling through unfamiliar cultures, the increased levels of uncertainty can leave people feeling insecure. This insecurity is often projected outward and can manifest in disparaging the norms of the host culture. It is easy to compare our home culture with the unknown, and this can lead to ethnocentric thinking. Ethnocentrism is the tendency to evaluate other groups according to the values and standards of one's own ethnic group, especially with the conviction that one's own ethnic group is superior to the other groups (dictionary.com). The best advice for managing culture shock is be mindful of ethnocentrism and **suspend ethnocentric evaluations**.



Figure 8.2.3: Outdoor market in Chengdu, China (CC BY; Tom Grothe)

Culture shock is stressful. Our attitude can profoundly influence our experience. To manage that stress, we need to cultivate a positive attitude. We can't always change our environment, but we can change how we react to it. It's important to **have faith in yourself, in the essential goodwill of your hosts, and the positive outcome of the experience**. Not everybody is out to get you. If someone laughs, it doesn't mean they are laughing at you. Of course we need to be careful when traveling abroad, but we don't need to be afraid. The most enriching experiences don't come from visiting historical landmarks, they come from deep, authentic connections we make with people along the way. Of course I will always remember visiting the Taj Mahal in India. But what warms my heart was sharing the long train journey with an Indian family, sharing foods and singing songs along the way.

Perhaps the International Institute for Peace through Tourism offers the best attitudinal advice in the *Credo of the Peaceful Traveler*:

Grateful for the opportunity to travel and experience the world and because peace begins with the individual, I affirm my personal responsibility and commitment to:

Journey with an open mind and gentle heart

Accept with grace and gratitude the diversity I encounter

Revere and protect the natural environment which sustains all life

Appreciate all cultures I discover

Respect and thank my hosts for their welcome

*Offer my hand in friendship to everyone I meet
Support travel services that share these views and act upon them and,
By my spirit, words and actions, encourage others to travel the world in peace*

Advice for dealing with culture shock varies as much the symptoms and is dependent upon individual traits. Additional helpful tips include:

1. Be flexible and try new things.
2. Get involved in the things that you already like.
3. Do not expect to adjust overnight.
4. Process your thoughts and feelings.
5. Use the resources available to help you handle the stress.

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