

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN CONTEXT



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This text was compiled on 06/13/2026

Preface

In teaching intercultural communication in the past, I have used a standard North American textbook, Neuliep's *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach* (2012). At that time, a recent comment on amazon.com about this textbook was as follows:

A Jesus stomping good time!

By Gigs

I was looking for a book about stomping on Jesus, man this one really fit the bill. Sure, there are other books about stomping on Jesus, but this is really the authority on the matter. I was a little disappointed that there wasn't more coverage of stomping on Buddha, considering that the title of this book is "Intercultural Communication" so it loses one star for that.

As a review of a commercial textbook, this is unusual; its tone, however, rich with sarcasm, reflects frequent language use on the Internet when a writer feels strongly about a topic. This is, in fact, one of many reviews posted on the textbook in response to media reports about a professor in Florida [carrying out a suggested class activity](#) in which students were asked to write "Jesus" on a slip of paper, step on it, and then discuss with classmates their reactions. The expectation in designing the activity is that most students will not step on the paper. What the exercise was intended to reveal to students was how central to many people's core values religion is and what power there is in symbolic actions. The public reaction in the US, as seen in the Amazon reviews was very different, namely that this was a denigration of Christianity. The episode is informative in a couple of ways:

- *It dramatizes how volatile and emotion-laden issues related to religious beliefs or spiritual views can be*, topics that inevitably arise in discussing communication across cultures. There are often knee-jerk reactions to perceived slights to religious beliefs. This is by no means limited to Christians, as the virulent reaction to [Mohammed cartoons](#) from Denmark in 2010 demonstrated. When we perceive our core values to be under attack, we don't reason or look to see in what context the incident occurred. This can quickly lead to misunderstandings and conflict, making any kind of reasoned communication unlikely.

Flag burning: A powerful symbolic act

In the United States there has been at times quite a bit of controversy over whether it is okay to burn the U.S. American flag... Many of the problems related to this controversy are due to the symbolic nature of what is done when a flag is burned. The flag represents the United States and the principles upon which the United States as a political entity is based. Thus, burning the flag, whether it is in the U.S. or in Iran, is not simply destroying a piece of cloth. It is making a statement about a way of life. Some argue that the burning itself is symbolic of the freedoms that exist in the United States and others feel that the burning represents an effort to destroy those freedoms. Thus, symbolic acts are open to great differences of interpretation.

-Hall, Covarrubias & Kirschbaum, 2017, p.

- *It demonstrates the power of symbols.* The name of Jesus written on a slip of paper is not in itself a religious document or statement of faith – rather it evokes the beliefs associated with that name. Symbols can have profound cultural significance. National flags, for example, may carry strong emotional power, so that defacing, burning, or disrespecting a flag may be taken as a rejection of the values, beliefs, and behaviors associated with that particular national culture (see sidebar). Language itself is a system made up of symbols (words point to meanings) and is a central mechanism for conveying elements of a culture.
- *It points to the misperception that intercultural communication competence is about giving up personal beliefs and values.* This is absolutely not the case. In fact, the exercise described above was designed to make students aware of the emotional intensity of their own religious beliefs. This can help build self-awareness as well as an appreciation of the fact that others' beliefs and values may be as crucially important in their lives. It can be safely assumed that in inter-religious groups, the reaction would be similar to the one cited above if students were asked to write down the word they used to refer to the God they worshipped as compared to 'Jesus'.
- *It illustrates how rapidly an event can go viral on the Internet.* Almost all comments on the incident echoed those of the commenter above. The kind of groupthink in evidence here is a common phenomenon on the Internet, which can sometimes function as a repeating amplifier, with the tendency for many people to interpret events or news in a way that confirms already-held beliefs.

The reaction to the suggested "step on Jesus" exercise illustrates something else, the importance of context in understanding and interpreting human actions and speech. The context in this case is a formal classroom environment in which an academic experiment is being carried out, designed as a learning and self-awareness experience. The Amazon reviews ignored this context,

instead viewing the incident as a direct attack on Christianity. This points to the fact that the very same words used or identical behaviors performed can have very different meanings and outcomes depending on when, where, and how they take place. Using slang, for example, is fine if among friends or family but may be unacceptable at work or in the classroom. Propping one's feet up to relax may be common in the US but might result in a reprimand if done on a German train (author's personal experience), or even be perceived as a personal insult in an Arab setting, should the soles of the shoes be facing out. This text takes a contextual approach to intercultural communication, meaning that the environments — physical, cultural, local, electronic, etc. — will be seen as key elements in considering the dynamics and significance of human encounters. That involves looking in all its complexity at the intersection of the individual(s) and the conversational context. Rather than trying to understand outcomes based on a person's background or status, interactions instead will be analyzed to understand their myriad dynamics. The goal is not to predict behaviors and outcomes but to describe and understand.

Neuliep's textbook (latest version 2017) is representative of many used in the US, in that it focuses on intercultural communication from the perspective of communication studies (see also Jandt, 2017; Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2015; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). Increasingly in recent years – and particularly outside the US – introductory textbooks tend to orient more towards applied linguistics with a greater emphasis on the role of language (Hua, 2014; Jackson, 2014; Piller, 2017). That includes texts emphasizing conversation analysis (McConachy, 2017) and critical discourse analysis (Scollon, Scollon, & Jones, 2011). We are also seeing textbooks which embrace critical approaches to intercultural communication (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2017; Martin & Nakayama, 2018), social constructivist approaches (Kurylo, 2012), peace-building (Remland, Jones, Foeman, & Arévalo), and social justice (Sorrells, 2015). This textbook draws on concepts from all these approaches, referencing recent research in the field as broadly as possible. Those concepts include:

- *Complexity theory*. Originating from chaos theory and used initially in the natural sciences, complexity theory "sees the world as complex to the extent that it consists of always-changing, unstable and dynamic systems" (Ang, 2011, p. 781). We shall see that it is particularly helpful in gaining hold of the slippery concept of "culture," given its variety of sources, influences, and manifestations. It is also useful in untangling the fluid and complex dynamics of personal identity formation today (Godwin-Jones, 2018).
- *Cultural intelligence*, initially developed within Business Management Studies (Earley & Ang, 2003). This concept can be helpful in understanding the complexity of our globalized world through "strategic simplification", breaking down interactional difficulties based on contextual framing.
- *Critical realism*. The "critical turn" in social science research has led researchers in critical discourse analysis to look at how power and privilege inform and shape conversational dynamics (Gee, 2004; Van Dijk, 1993). The emergent outcomes, as they are affected by class, gender, place, and wealth are central concerns with scholars – most associated with sociology – using critical realism (Collier, 1994).
- *Global citizenship*. The concern with the social forces shaping discourses and the need not only to learn, but also to act point to the growing recognition within the field of second language acquisition that social justice needs to be an ultimate goal in intercultural communication, leading to a sense of global responsibility (Byram, Golubeva, Hui, & Wagner, 2017).

Common to these approaches is the prominence of context, leading to a view of human interactions as dynamic and changeable, given the complexity of language and culture, as human agents interact with their environments. This aligns with the principal approach used in this textbook, which is broadly ecological, looking at the multiple factors of individuality and context (including but not limited to national origin) that influence intercultural communication.

There is an attempt throughout the text to incorporate views on intercultural communication from a geographically diverse array of scholars, supplementing the author's North American perspective. How intercultural communication is envisioned as a discipline varies considerably from country to country. In many cases, intercultural communication is associated with professional areas such as business, education, healthcare, or hospitality services. These are all areas in which communication with those who represent different cultures and languages is crucially important, and where encounters between those representing different cultures is increasingly the norm. While in the US, intercultural communication is often associated with communication studies, in Europe and Australia, it is commonly seen as a field within applied linguistics. This text strives to incorporate findings and perspectives from many different approaches, but considers language, broadly conceived, as central to intercultural communication, and thus different dimensions of language use are woven into each unit. This is in contrast to most IC textbooks in which "language" is the topic in one of 10 or 12 chapters. Piller (2007) points out that surprising fact (from the perspective of linguists) "as if language and languages were a negligible or at best minor aspect of communication" (p. 215).

The text introduces some of the key concepts in intercultural communication as traditionally presented in (North American) courses and textbooks, namely the study of differences between cultures, as represented in the works and theories of Edward Hall (1959) and Geert Hofstede (1980). The perspective presented here is that, despite changes brought on by globalization, demographic shifts, and Internet communication, there still exist identifiable cultural characteristics associated with nation-states and particular social groups. However, the default norms and behaviors derived from being part of a national culture in no way determine an individual's cultural and personal identity, which increasingly is complex, derived from many different sources. Moreover, individuals may resist adopting certain values of the culture in which they were raised or they may be members of ethnic or regional groups which hold different values and exhibit contrasting behaviors from the majority. While distinctions such as individualism versus collectivism can be helpful in some contexts, they are less useful in describing or predicting individual behavior. National (or ethnic) characteristics and comparisons oversimplify the increasingly complex and fluid nature of identity formation today.

As the title of this text implies, the operating assumption throughout is that language and culture are inseparable and need to be understood contextually. Traditionally, culture and language have been treated as monolithic entities, comprised of discrete sets of knowledge and skills, which are enacted by an individual. As in other fields within the humanities and social sciences, that view has changed significantly in recent decades, with the so-called "social turn" in a variety of disciplines (Hawkins, 2013, pp. 1-2; Block, 2007, p. 31). Culture and language are increasingly seen from socially situated perspectives. That emphasis is maintained here, with an exploration of how people use language (and other means) to create, maintain, and change identities. Culture is treated as socially constructed, not as a set of fixed values and behaviors. Although some attention is paid to the mechanics of language, the principal emphasis is on language use in social settings. This includes areas of intersections of language and culture such as speech communities, social language codes, conversational analysis, speech acts, and cultural schemas.

Another key concern is the role of technology today in communication and identity formation. The availability of networked communication tools and services has changed dramatically how humans communicate and interact with each other. While traditional Internet access is not universally available, mobile devices are becoming ubiquitous almost everywhere, supplying the means for electronic messaging and information retrieval that affect all areas of human activity including commerce, education, health care, journalism, and social/political institutions of all kinds. The ease of communicating brings the possibility of connecting electronically with people in far-flung locations. This has enabled the rise of communities of interest which span geographically and culturally diverse communities. The potential for cooperation and shared endeavors is tremendous, but, given different communication styles and strategies, so is the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. This makes the need for intercultural communication competence all the more necessary.

Each of the text units concludes with a set of practical recommendations for implementing in personal use, both online and in face-to-face encounters, some of the concepts and behaviors presented. The recommendations attempt to highlight useful information in the three areas traditionally seen as constituting intercultural communicative competence, namely knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Following the "Intercultural Knowledge and Confidence Value Rubric," developed by the AACU, "knowledge" here references both cultural self-awareness and knowledge of other cultures, including their "history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices" (Rhodes, 2010). The position advocated in this text is that in fact intercultural learning is also a journey of self-discovery, about one's own cultural identity. The "skills" needed are first in the area of competence and proficiency in verbal and nonverbal communication. Speaking a second language provides a necessary, but not sufficient, entry into another culture. Beyond the linguistic knowledge, an understanding of the cultural enactments of language use is needed, i.e., an understanding of language pragmatics - how language is used in real, everyday situations. This can be seen as "cultural literacy", a familiarity with the rules and conventions of a culture and the ability to navigate among them appropriately.

An equally important skill is the ability to interpret intercultural experiences from an empathetic and thoughtful perspective, going beyond superficial stereotyping and looking at people as individuals, not types. This necessitates avoiding snap judgments and easy categorizations, and instead, critically examining one's own instincts and values. In terms of attitudes, a spirit of openness and curiosity is needed. Learning to be interculturally competent does not mean one has to give up personal beliefs and values, but it does necessitate accepting that others have the right to their own strongly-held perspectives and worldviews. Needed as well is a willingness to seek out and explore those other perspectives. That process can lead to greater acceptance of difference, while developing a sense of empathy and solidarity. In today's world of extreme political partisanship and growing nationalism, however, it may be necessary to move beyond an attitude of tolerance. In the face of dire threats to the environment, mistreatment of minorities, and suspicion of democracy, intercultural competence should include today as well the need to engage actively (locally or globally) for social justice and for the health of our planet.

The chapters of this text are by no means exhaustive treatises on the topics covered. They are short introductions, with the hope that the student-reader will gain enough interest to follow up by seeking more information on the topics. There are recommended links included in each chapter for that purpose. One source which is referenced repeatedly deserves a brief note of explanation. A good number of TED talks are listed, as they often provide entertaining and informative explorations or illustrations of the concepts discussed. Moreover, they represent stable, reliable resources, likely to continue to be accessible (in contrast to many hyperlinks). They feature transcripts and subtitles provided in multiple languages, as well as low band-width versions. These are important considerations for a set of resources intended for use by students from a variety of countries. TED talks have been criticized for being slickly produced "edutainment", providing a platform for "experts" who may exaggerate the significance of findings, sometimes qualifying as innovative breakthroughs, what has long been known or has been debunked by others. They are suggested here as resources, not because they represent the most up-to-date or accurate research in a given field, but rather because they can stimulate discussions, including discoveries about alternative views to those presented.

In any course on intercultural communication, critical reception of media and ideas about culture, language, and technology (the content of many of the TED talks) should be an essential component. Another rationale for incorporating TED talks is the importance of storytelling in intercultural communication. Many of the talks focus on personal insights or developments around an epiphany of some kind. Along with other kinds of stories (for example, language autobiographies), the narratives presented in TED talks can be used to explore the nature of narration and the dynamics of identity formation.

I need to conclude this preface by thanking those who have contributed to this text. At the same time, the ultimate responsibility for the content rests with me. Comments and corrections are very welcome, addressed to rgjones@vcu.edu. Thanks go to Dorothy Chun, UC Barbara, for her encouragement, to the VCU Cabell Library for support, and especially to a team of reviewers that includes Mayda Topoushian and Jill Bowman, both of VCU, Antonie Alm (University of Otago), Aradhna Malik (Indian Institute of Technology), and Wen-Chuan Lin (Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Licensing

1: Broadening Horizons

- 1.1: Introducing Intercultural Communication
- 1.2: Cultures under study and in the media
- 1.3: Technically speaking- Information literacy
- 1.4: Broadening Horizons (Summary)

2: Building Identities

- 2.1: How Identities are Built
- 2.2: Judging and Treating Others Fairly
- 2.3: Technically Speaking - Online identities
- 2.4: How identities are Built (Summary)

3: Using Language

- 3.1: Language and Culture
- 3.2: Second Language Learning
- 3.3: Technically Speaking - Language Learning and Technology
- 3.4: Language and Culture (Summary)

4: Conversing and Relating

- 4.1: Communication in Practice
- 4.2: Language in society
- 4.3: Technically Speaking - Conversing and Relating Online
- 4.4: Conversing and Relating (Summary)

5: Communicating Nonverbally

- 5.1: Body Language
- 5.2: Nonverbal Messaging
- 5.3: Technically Speaking - Semiotics and the Internet
- 5.4: Communicating Nonverbally (Summary)

6: Contextualizing Intercultural Communication

- 6.1: Environmental Contexts
- 6.2: Professional and Institutional Contexts
- 6.3: Technically Speaking - Professional discourse and privacy online
- 6.4: Contextualizing Intercultural Communication (Summary)

7: Encountering Other Cultures

- 7.1: Communicating across Cultures
- 7.2: Moving Among Cultures
- 7.3: Technically Speaking - Reflective writing
- 7.4: Encountering Other Cultures (Summary)

[Index](#)

[Index](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Detailed Licensing](#)

Licensing

A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in [Back Matter/Detailed Licensing](#).

Table of Contents

The text introduces some of the key concepts in intercultural communication as traditionally presented in (North American) courses and textbooks, namely the study of differences between cultures, as represented in the works and theories of Edward Hall and Geert Hofstede. Common to these approaches is the prominence of context, leading to a view of human interactions as dynamic and changeable, given the complexity of language and culture, as human agents interact with their environments.

- [Preface](#)
- [1: Broadening Horizons](#)
 - [1.1: Introducing Intercultural Communication](#)
 - [1.2: Cultures under study and in the media](#)
 - [1.3: Technically speaking- Information literacy](#)
 - [1.4: Broadening Horizons \(Summary\)](#)
- [2: Building Identities](#)
 - [2.1: How Identities are Built](#)
 - [2.2: Judging and Treating Others Fairly](#)
 - [2.3: Technically Speaking - Online identities](#)
 - [2.4: How identities are Built \(Summary\)](#)
- [3: Using Language](#)
 - [3.1: Language and Culture](#)
 - [3.2: Second Language Learning](#)
 - [3.3: Technically Speaking - Language Learning and Technology](#)
 - [3.4: Language and Culture \(Summary\)](#)
- [4: Conversing and Relating](#)
 - [4.1: Communication in Practice](#)
 - [4.2: Language in society](#)
 - [4.3: Technically Speaking - Conversing and Relating Online](#)
 - [4.4: Conversing and Relating \(Summary\)](#)
- [5: Communicating Nonverbally](#)
 - [5.1: Body Language](#)
 - [5.2: Nonverbal Messaging](#)
 - [5.3: Technically Speaking - Semiotics and the Internet](#)
 - [5.4: Communicating Nonverbally \(Summary\)](#)
- [6: Contextualizing Intercultural Communication](#)
 - [6.1: Environmental Contexts](#)
 - [6.2: Professional and Institutional Contexts](#)
 - [6.3: Technically Speaking - Professional discourse and privacy online](#)
 - [6.4: Contextualizing Intercultural Communication \(Summary\)](#)
- [7: Encountering Other Cultures](#)
 - [7.1: Communicating across Cultures](#)
 - [7.2: Moving Among Cultures](#)
 - [7.3: Technically Speaking - Reflective writing](#)
 - [7.4: Encountering Other Cultures \(Summary\)](#)
-

Back Matter

- [Index](#)
- [Glossary](#)

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Broadening Horizons

Learning Objectives

Successful interaction with this and associated course content will enable students to...

- Recognize the need for IC competence in today's increasingly diverse communities
- Develop balanced and informed views on the concepts of culture and communication
- Perceive patterns in cultural traditions/values but be alert to over-simplifications
- Recognize the ethnic issues in IC and the need for global citizenship
- Understand the role of media in framing cultural values

In this initial chapter we will be discussing some of the fundamental aspects of intercultural communication, including its importance in today's world, its history as an academic discipline, and the typical approaches to its instruction. There will also be discussion of the role of media in intercultural communication as well as its relationship to ethics. This chapter, as do each in this text, concludes with a section related to technology; in this case, dealing with the importance of digital and information literacy for intercultural communicative competence.

[1.1: Introducing Intercultural Communication](#)

[1.2: Cultures under study and in the media](#)

[1.3: Technically speaking- Information literacy](#)

[1.4: Broadening Horizons \(Summary\)](#)

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1.1: Introducing Intercultural Communication

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 global warming. 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 deindustrialised 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.

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). As we saw from the example at the beginning of this chapter, 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 1.1.1: Sushma Swaraj, External Affairs Minister of India at an Indian Diaspora event in London. Great Britain is home to many families originating in India or Pakistan.

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. 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 1.1.1: 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. That is further explored in the next section.

Culture from the perspective of complexity theory

We live in a world that has become increasingly complex, with a host of problems both global and intractable:

Economic instability, the widening gap between rich and poor, climate change and the environmental crisis, the unstoppable transnational flow of refugees despite increasingly harsh regimes of border control, the threat of terrorist movements, rising geopolitical tensions as the hegemony of the West declines, urban gridlock and conflict in our hyper-diverse cities, the unsustainable costs of health care in times of population ageing, and the unsettling impact of rapid technological change – these are only a few of the large conundrums facing our globalized, interconnected world today (Ang, 2011, p. 779).

One could easily add to the list a host of issues surrounding the Internet, from cyber security to the loss of privacy and addiction to social media. These problems are long-term and have a variety of causes. They have repercussions in human lives, both local and global. In recent years, the forces of globalization, mechanization, and mass migration have led to social divisions and political upheaval. Economic uncertainty and resentment towards immigrants have led to the growth of economic nationalism, populism, and isolationism across the globe. Common to these developments are ubiquity and complexity – the problems are interwoven in local and global contexts and evince multiple causes and unpredictable outcomes:

In short, everywhere in the world complexity is staring us in the face; its overwhelming impact – socially, economically, ecologically – is increasingly undeniable and inescapable. That the world is terribly complex is now a vital part of global cultural experience, a structure of feeling which has grown more pervasive in the twenty-first century (Ang, 2011, p. 779).

One way of dealing with this increasingly complex world is to pretend the problems do not exist, to engage in willful ignorance, by, for example, disbelieving scientific evidence. Another option is to ignore what happens beyond one's neighborhood. Yet in the 21st-century it is virtually impossible in any part of the world to withdraw completely from interconnections and interdependencies which may be global in scale, but often local in effect. One path is to put forward short-term or partial measures. The danger in that approach is that it tends to lead to simplistic solutions, that may be popular, but in reality misrepresent both the issue and its

complexity. Complex problems are not solved by single, simple cause-and-effect explanations. There are typically multiple, changing variables at play, so that any problem-solving is likely to be both complicated and provisional. As conditions change, problem-solving approaches must adapt.

The first step is to recognize and accept the complexity of a problem and seek to understand its origins and developmental path. An approach that has gained currency in both natural and social sciences is **complexity theory** (CT), an ecological approach which stresses nonlinearity, unpredictability, and self-organization in how systems work. An expanded version of chaos theory, complexity theory looks to uncover a system's beginning (its "initial conditions") and to trace development as variables and subsystems are added to combine and shape outcomes in ways that are unpredictable. Studies have shown the extent to which language and language learning can be understood as complex systems, given the variability of language use and the multiple factors which affect learning a second language (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). That approach has recently been used as well to analyze the dynamics of informal language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2018). In chapters three and four we will look at that topic in more detail. Another area within intercultural communication that invites a CT analysis is personal identity, a topic we will address in the next chapter.

Culture and intercultural communication competence from a CT perspective helps us understand that reducing culture to national origin is a simplistic misrepresentation of the dynamics of identity formation today, in which multiple influences – in person, online, and in the media – combine in unique ways that are varied and unforeseeable. Holliday (1999) uses the term "networked individual" to point to the myriad influences on individuals in our time. Culture from this perspective is fluid and dynamic, impacted by diverse, intersecting factors and not reducible to a single point of origin. The complexity of culture can also lead us to realign the typical approach in intercultural communication studies of focusing on similarities or differences. There are too many variables in play for contact between cultures to be understood in such binary terms. It is preferable to imagine instead a sliding scale, with both context and individual affecting interactions.

Communication: A Human Necessity

Communication occurs in many different contexts, and conversations will have different characteristics depending on who is speaking, where the exchange takes place, and what the purpose of the encounter is. Human conversation is highly contextual and infinitely variable. The linguist Noam Chomsky has made us aware of the fact that virtually every sentence we speak is something brand-new, combining a basic set of elements into endless combinations, a phenomenon known as **digital infinity** (Chomsky, 2005).

According to the popular conception of human speech, language is used primarily for the transmission of information. This familiar transmission model breaks communication down into a transmitter and a receiver, whose roles may be reversed in the course of a dialogue, but whose purpose in talking is to send a message of some kind. This is a concept derived from early work in electronic communication, such as that done by Bell Labs in the US in the 1940's and 1950s (see Shannon, 1948). In 1960, Berlo expanded the communication model to include factors such as the purpose and objectives of the message being transmitted, as well as nonverbal communication. His "SMCR" model breaks down communication into the Sender, Message, Channel, and Receiver, each of which is affected by a variety of factors. One of the important modifications in the model is emphasis on the channel's influence on message transmission. This was later popularized in the phrase, "the medium is the message," by Marshall McLuhan (1964), meaning that a message is tightly tied to the means of transmission. This is of particular relevance today, as digital media have provided multiple channels of communication — texting, email, *Facebook* messaging, tweets, *Instagram* posts, etc. — all of which have a shaping influence on how a message is received.



Figure 1.1.2: Conversing is often less about information transmission and more about building relationships

In the traditional model of communication, the major emphasis is on how a message is transmitted. Yet linguists, from observing and studying actual conversations, have learned that rarely does a conversation have only a **semantic** purpose, i.e., used to convey meaning. Instead, talking is often a social action, used to maintain relationships and convey feelings and emotions. Sometimes conversations are shaped by social status and function as a way to affirm or contest a hierarchical status quo (see Sorrells, 2013). Humans are social animals and the need to communicate is fundamental to our nature. Communication is what builds and maintains communities. Historically, the worst kind of human punishment has been exclusion from a community and enforced verbal isolation (see sidebar). Like culture, we take human communication for granted, and feel its importance only when it is lost.

The nature of human speech affects intercultural communication. If talking is essentially a socialization process, holding conversations has the potential to build relationships. But that also means that the language we need for engaging in normal conversation is not simply vocabulary useful for expressing meaning. We need, importantly, to know about the social dimensions of language, i.e. the appropriate way to greet others, how to express gratitude, or what topics are appropriate to introduce in a conversation. Communication is fundamentally cultural. To be effective, conversation partners need to be sensitive to a range of factors beyond verbal communication. That includes nonverbal actions, such as how close to stand to the other person or whether to maintain eye contact (see Hall, 1966).

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

Those kinds of considerations we need not think about if the conversation is with a person or a group with whom we are familiar (Hall, 1959). When we speak of intercultural communication, we are moving away from that comfort zone, engaging in exchanges with people representing different cultures, that is to say different sets of values, beliefs, and behaviors; a different historical memory; quite possibly a different language (or dialect). The individual may not, in fact, represent the mainstream culture. Thereby we construct and convey different meanings in unfamiliar contexts. That type of communication can be very different from encounters with those with whom we share a culture, in which the context is familiar. As a result, intra-cultural conversations tend to be more comfortable and routine. Even so, depending on the situation or context, we may experience conflict or **communication apprehension**. Speaking in front of a group, for example, can produce anxiety for many people. Conversing with strangers can bring on even more apprehension. This comes in large part from uncertainty. The less we know about the other person's background and intentions, the more uncertain and apprehensive we may be. We can combat these feelings through approaching encounters in a spirit of openness and discovery. That lessens the likelihood of misunderstanding and conflict.

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1.2: Cultures under study and in the media

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 IC 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 IC 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).

What it means to be a confident intercultural communicator differs depending on the disciplinary orientation. However, as an overall set of common denominators, we might break down the competencies in the following categories, following the rubric on *intercultural knowledge and competence* from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Rhodes, 2010):

Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes
Cultural self-awareness	Empathy	Curiosity
Knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks	Verbal and nonverbal communication	Openness

The more *knowledge* we have about other cultures the more likely it is that we will base initial judgments about representatives of those cultures on reliable information, rather than on stereotypes gleaned through popular culture or media reports. That knowledge may be in a variety of areas ranging from geography to religious beliefs. Having informed views of other cultures is likely to make

encounters more successful. In learning about other cultures we inevitably *learn about ourselves*, as we draw comparisons between the values and behaviors of the target culture and our own.

A primary enabler of insights into another culture is *verbal language*. Language enables us to understand and express phenomena we may have found unfamiliar and for which we may not have had the vocabulary. Learning a new language on the one hand, widens our worldview, and on the other, opens a window of familiarity into the worlds of others who may have seemed unfamiliar earlier, thereby affording an opportunity for both to connect with each other. Depending on the context, the ability to converse in another language can be of central importance, determining whether effective communication is possible. *Nonverbal* clues – smiling, nodding, bowing — can send important messages, but will only take a conversation so far. It's also the case that learning a second language provides deeper and more complete access to the other culture. Language takes you into the heart of a culture, offering an **emic** (from inside the group) perspective, rather than an **etic** view (from outside). The possibility of participation in the target culture, rather than just observation, is likely to lead to greater understanding and appreciation of its values and behaviors, resulting in greater **empathy**. That in turn is likely to lead to *curiosity* and a desire to learn more about that culture. For communication to be effective, both parties need to be motivated to communicate. If we go into an encounter with pre-formed negative views of the group we assume the other person represents, it's not likely that there will be a positive outcome. On the other hand, refraining from judgment and maintaining a spirit of openness create a positive atmosphere, making effective communication much more likely.

Some would argue that empathy, tolerance, and openness are helpful in personal encounters, but that a further aspect of intercultural competence beyond skills, knowledge, and attitudes, should be added: civic action. Given the widening socioeconomic inequities, the growth of nationalism, and the growing mistrust and mistreatment of minorities, collective action is needed beyond the individual. The concept of **global citizenship** points in that direction. This concept entails a call for action in the form of active civil engagement in society, starting with local action and service to the community (O'Dowd, 2019). Another framework in accord with this vision is **critical cosmopolitanism**, described as "a deep appreciation for difference, the willingness to engage with cultural Others and be transformed by such experiences, kindness towards strangers, and the labour of the imagination to envision a world that aspires towards peace, possibilities and intercultural respect for those near and far" (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013, p. 7). The concept of cosmopolitanism, originating in the field of sociology, has emerged as complementary to the concept of intercultural competence (Kennedy, Díaz, & Dasli, 2017).

Cultural taxonomies

In the academic study of intercultural communication, cultures are often characterized as belonging to particular categories, often referred to as taxonomies (i.e., a type of classification scheme). Many of the characteristics used go back to work done by Geert Hofstede in the 1970's, who studied the cultural dimensions of workers for IBM in a variety of countries (1980). The salient category often used to characterize and contrast cultures is **individualism** versus **collectivism**. Cultures labeled as individualistic (most often Western countries including those in North America and Northern Europe) are seen as emphasizing the rights of the individual to self-determination, with children being brought up to be assertive and distinctive. In contrast, 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. 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 1.2.1: Representatives of the Yi Minority in China

There are a number of other cultural dimensions often used in the field of intercultural communication, most of which derive from the work of Hall and Hofstede. The concept of **power distance** describes the importance attributed to hierarchies in a given culture, the extent to which individuals are grouped according to birth, status or position of power. This involves as well the perception within a culture regarding how easy one feels it is to communicate with or approach a person higher in hierarchy. The higher the power distance, the less more reluctant one may feel in approaching a person senior in hierarchy. Individualistic cultures are typically seen as having a small power distance, meaning that they strive for equality in society and within families. In contrast, in countries with a large power distance, inequality among people is seen as expected and desired.

Time orientation is another category often used. **Polychronic** ("P-time") cultures tend to be less concerned with being on time for events, and individuals deal comfortably with more than one task or person at a time. A **monochronic** orientation ("M-time"), on the other hand, shows a preference for being punctual and not having more than one task or person to focus on at a time. A third concept is **uncertainty avoidance**, the idea that some cultures are more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty than others. Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which members of a particular culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. Those with a strong uncertainty avoidance prefer predictability and tend to have clear rules of behavior.

The Danger of Cultural Taxonomies

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 polychronic), for example, an essentialist view would be to assume that person will be late for meetings all the time, 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 a "monochronic" society are often habitually late. Entrepreneurs (and others) in China (a "high 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.



Figure 1.2.2: Small cultures can arise from impromptu gatherings, as groups coalesce around common interests or values

Holliday advocates moving away from the traditional concept of "culture", identified with largely homogeneous nation-states to that of **small cultures**. He argues, as do others, that the commonly used characterizations of national cultures are a product of 19th century nationalism; as such, the concept is associated with colonialism and the devaluing of non-European cultures (see Jackson, 2010). Holliday also maintains that the "large culture" paradigm makes less sense in a world that is "becoming an increasingly cosmopolitan, multi-cultural place where cultures are less likely to appear as large coherent geographical entities" (1999, p. 244). Instead of the fixed and timeless concept of culture related to nation-states, small cultures are often formed on the fly, by organized or impromptu social groupings or work-related groups. They can easily cut across national borders.

In contrast to large cultures which are often presented as behavior-defining, small cultures represent only one aspect of an individual's identity. People align themselves to different cultures at different times (see sidebar). The small culture concept is similar to the idea of "community of interest" or "affinity spaces". It is clear that if we envision culture from the perspective of small cultures, the kind of broad-stroke comparison of differences among cultures, as often emphasized in undergraduate courses on intercultural communication, is problematic.

Small cultures form dynamically

Small culture is thus a dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and operate meaningfully within those circumstances. When a researcher looks at an unfamiliar social grouping, it can be said to have a small culture when there is a discernible set of behaviours and understandings connected with group cohesion. The dynamic aspect of small culture is central to its nature, having the capacity to exist, form and change as required.

Kullman, Holliday & Hyde (2004), p. 64

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.



Figure 1.2.3: Oakland (California) Occupy general strike in 2011

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.

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 1.2.4: 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 Hispanics 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.

Countering the media echo chamber

The popular image of the "the world is flat" (Friedman, 2005) is that modern communication and transportation are leveling opportunities and bringing people together, breaking down barriers, and creating what Marshall McLuhan called the "global village" (McLuhan, 1962). The reality can be quite different. We may think that on the net we are all equal, but the major Internet companies – *Facebook* and *Google*, for instance – don't just serve up information in a neutral way. Rather they use an **algorithm** – a procedure or formula – to filter information or links depending on what they know about us. What that can mean in practice is that we are served up information that the algorithm has determined we want to have, based on the personal profile the system has built. That derives from the **filter bubble** created by what the system thinks our likes and preferences are. This is built on links we tend to click on in searching with *Google*, the people we follow on *Twitter*, or the interests represented by the friends we have in *Facebook*. The assumption is that we want information only on our expressed interests and established friends. That means we may have less opportunity to have contact with people outside our circle of friends and family. If we want to be competent intercultural communicators, we need to step outside of that comfort zone.



Figure 1.2.5: Chimamanda Adichie

We all have a personal narrative, a way we put the puzzle pieces of our lives together to make a coherent story out of the sometimes disparate elements and events. That narrative is built from our interpretations of personal experiences including family dynamics, religious practices, interactions with friends, or major life events. When we encounter new ideas, new people, new situations, we try to fit them into that narrative. Chimamanda Adichie, the Nigerian novelist, talks about the [power of the single story](#). It's a natural human tendency to make order out of complexity by simplifying. We feel more comfortable if we can put people and ideas into already established categories.

In dealing with people, this can lead to stereotyping. We may not have enough knowledge of a person or of that person's culture to create an informed picture. In such cases we fall back on the little information we might have. If I've been to Africa or have learned about Africa, for example, I can distinguish between Nigerians, Ivoirians, Kenyans, South Africans, etc. But if I don't have that knowledge, I fall back on clichés and stereotypes. If I am a US citizen, I may make associations with Ebola, HIV, hunger, or refugees. Where do these impressions come from? It may be from our friends or family, or from school, but most likely it's from media reports. In most of the Western world, news is reported from Africa only if there are natural disasters, wars, epidemics, or other catastrophic events. This is why it is so important to be critical consumers of media, to find ways to enlarge not shrink our views. Traditional print media such as the *Economist*, the *New York Times*, or the *Guardian* (just to name a sampling of English-speaking media) often run substantial stories on international events, in contrast to most local television stations and newspapers. Many alternative new sources have become available online in recent years, such as [Global Voices](#) or [Vice News](#).

Online media can also be a great source of information, but it doesn't come easily or automatically. Hearing directly from Africans, for example, has the potential for exploding our stereotypes and providing varied perspectives. That can be invaluable in maintaining open and receptive attitudes. We can't become experts in all parts of the world, but we can take advantage of opportunities that may arrive to gather first-hand knowledge from natives. Online media can supply those contacts. But it takes a willingness to move outside our regular social circle, to remain open and curious, and to seek out opportunities to encounter people different from ourselves.

One of the developments in recent years which has changed the media landscape has been the growth of **citizen journalism**. Individuals around the world are taking advantage of the ease of posting stories and sharing media – photos and videos – to report on stories or issues important to them. These are not trained, professional journalists, but rather everyday citizens who use their cell

phones and social media to report on stories traditional media outlets have ignored. That may be due to the absence of media correspondents in that location or because events have occurred suddenly. Citizen journalists have been particularly important in reporting events from natural disorders, sites of political upheaval, and war zones. Examples of events for which citizen journalism through social media, especially *Twitter*, has been important in getting information spread widely include the Cedar Revolution in 2005 (Lebanon), the Tunisian uprisings in 2010-11, or the Arab Spring in 2011. As with all media consumption, it's important to view citizen journalism also from a critical perspective. Citizen reporters may have a political agenda in their news accounts, leading to slanted perspectives. There may as well be technical or linguistic issues which interfere with this kind of public reporting. In some cases that has involved those holding political power shutting down the online services used by citizen journalists.



Figure 1.2.6: Citizen journalist Ryan Boyette, interviewing a Nuban refugee in the Yida camp, South Sudan

In reporting and writing of all kinds, knowing something about the writer and the purpose or context for the text can be important in being able to evaluate trustworthiness and objectivity. That can be of particular importance for reports not associated with a trusted media source or news provider, especially relevant in reporting about contentious social or political issues. One approach which aims to supply an objective analysis of both a prominent social problem and an implemented response is **solutions journalism**. Central to this type of reporting is the use of credible evidence, backed by reliable data, to explain an issue and profile a response that is working — or one that been tried and has proven ineffective. The [Fixes column](#) of the *New York Times* provides an example of this approach. Having carefully fact-checked stories about concrete projects to solve important social issues (education, poverty, unemployment) provides renewed credibility to news media, while enabling investigative reporting to contribute to the public good.

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1.3: Technically speaking- Information literacy

One of the prerequisites for effective communication is information about our conversant. The knowledge we bring to a conversation about the other person's background and identity can be valuable in avoiding misplaced assumptions and false information, leading to possible miscommunication or potential conflict. Knowledge about the other's religious beliefs or worldviews may provide practical information about aspects of everyday life, such as greeting rituals, eating habits, or clothing choice. A Muslim woman, for example, may not choose to shake hands, may be skipping lunch because of Ramadan, and may be wearing a headscarf due to social and religious customs. Knowledge about important historical events, minority groups, social hierarchies, or the geo-political situation of the other person's home culture, all may be helpful in determining appropriate and inappropriate conversation topics.

We can't be knowledgeable about all cultures, but we can inform ourselves about particular cultures or groups in which we have a special interest or are likely to encounter. That might include countries in which the language spoken is one we are learning, or it might be cultures represented in one's living community, working environment, or university. Most people today are likely to search and find information on the Internet. That holds true as well for reading the news and keeping up with world affairs. As discussed in this chapter, online searches do not provide neutral, unbiased results. It's also not the case that all search results point to sites with accurate information. With the glut of information on the Internet today, it's more important than ever to be informed consumers of technology tools and services.

Being an informed consumer of Internet services

In assessing search results, there are a few important considerations. Typically, the sites linked first in a search (using *Google*) are "sponsored links", sites that have paid to have their links first in line. The next hits listed are those which *Google*'s algorithm has determined are the most popular related to the topic searched. These sites, however, may be linked higher not due to real popularity – or to the usefulness of their information – but because of the effectiveness of their **search engine optimization (SEO)**. SEO involves modifying a site's HTML code (Hypertext Markup Language – the underlying code of web pages) in order to include terms most likely to be used in particular searches. In some cases dummy websites are set up with back links to the main page to try to enhance the indexing process used by *Google* and other search engines. It's important for sites to be ranked high in search results, as online advertising income is based on the number of visitors to that site. So-called "clickbait" sites are set up to generate advertising revenue by relying on sensationalist headlines to attract click-throughs. Often, the destination site will have minimal information and will require additional click-throughs to try to find the information advertised.

In such an environment, it's important to be able to evaluate search results, to ascertain the likely reliability of the information provided. One indication is the nature of the website. Institutional sites associated with a university, research institute, professional organization, or institution of some kind (such as a museum) are likely to be more objective than personal sites or blogs. Most countries have government websites providing a wealth of information; sites for government agencies can be informative as well. Of particular trustworthiness are sites with resources which are curated, peer-reviewed, or annotated. [Merlot](#), for example, is a curated collection of free online learning and teaching materials. Crowd-sourced sites such as *Wikipedia* can be good starting points for information gathering, particularly as they point to further resources and authoritative sources. The same cautions recommended here for written resources hold as well for video sites such as *YouTube*.

Digital literacy also means becoming an informed user of other kinds of online tools and services. There are, for example, a great number of options available today for working in other languages. That includes a variety of dual-language dictionaries, thesauri, and spellcheckers. There are also a number of services which offer online machine translation. Most of those, such as *Google Translate*, rely principally on dual-language corpora – collections of translated texts. This means that they are most accurate when there is a large number of texts available, as there are between English and other major European languages. It's likely that there are far fewer texts for other language combinations, say Arabic to Estonian, forcing the translation engine to rely on built-in grammar/language models. It's always good practice to back-translate machine translations, particularly using a different translation service. Such tools are especially useful for deciphering websites or other texts but less so for writing, as they do not have the flexibility to adjust for language register (i.e., degree of formality) or tone.

Cultures-of-use

In participating in online discussions, it's important to be aware of **netiquette** practices – that is, the social conventions attached to the use of particular forms of electronic communication. One should, for example, avoid writing in all capital letters, as that is perceived as shouting. In writing text messages and other short form electronic messaging, the convention is to ignore spelling and

grammar rules, including capitalization and punctuation, while making rich use of abbreviations. The potential for miscommunication in written online communication is increased by the absence of facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language, constraining interpretation of communicative intent exclusively to the written language. Depending on the particular medium of communication, there may be as well a particular "**culture-of-use**", that is, a set of historically developed, socially accepted norms and behavior for participation. Steve Thorne discusses, as an example, French language learners participating in an Internet discussion forum for readers of the French newspaper *Le Monde* – see sidebar. Not being aware of localized cultures of use, such as exist in this case, can lead to miscommunication and frustration on all sides. Developing an awareness of the appropriate genres of language use and styles of communication can enable full engagement in multicultural online activities.

A practical lesson in cultures-of-use

In a recent study examining foreign language learning in open Internet environments, Hanna and de Nooy reported on the interactional and identity related activity of four students of French who participated in public Internet discussion fora associated with the Parisian newspaper *Le Monde*. Hanna and de Nooy's rationale for opting to use a public discussion forum was to move students entirely outside of the relative safety of explicitly educational interactions where participants occupy the institutionally bounded subject position of student or learner. *Le Monde* discussion fora, by contrast, exist to support argumentation and debate about mostly contemporary political and cultural issues. Hanna and de Nooy followed four students, two of whom opened with stand-alone messages that requested help to improve their French. They received a few cordial as well as abrupt replies, each of which suggested the need to take a position in the ongoing discussion. Neither did and both disappeared from the forum. In contrast, the other two students opened with a response to an existing message, directly entering the ongoing debates. One student primarily used English in his posts but still engaged members of the forum and garnered numerous responses to his contributions. With coaching and support from other participants, he was able to fully participate in the discussions, suggesting that "neither politeness nor linguistic accuracy is the measure of intercultural competence here" (Hanna and de Nooy 2003, p. 78). Rather, in the circumstances of this *Le Monde* discussion forum participation in the genre of debate was the minimum threshold for continued participation.

Thorne, 2013, pp. 200-201

Such conventions as illustrated here exist for most forms of Internet-based social activities such as multiplayer gaming. Many of these activities are likely to be global, with participation from users representing a variety of cultures and languages. New modes of online communication will inevitably develop new cultures-of-use. These will be learned informally, on the fly, through participating and observing. As in most areas of culture, here too we are socialized into acceptable norms and behaviors. Given the pace of development of services and activities on the Internet, this kind of socialization is not likely to take place in institutional settings, as John Seely Brown comments: "The unrelenting velocity of change means that many of our skills have a shorter shelf life, suggesting that much of our learning will need to take place outside of traditional school and university environments." (2008, p. xi). This translates into both a need for ongoing digital literacy and, as well, a high degree of learner autonomy, to be able to gain the necessary skills and knowledge in a self-directed environment.



For Discussion and Reflection...

1. Using the definition of culture presented in this unit, how would you describe your culture? Why are so many people afraid to communicate with people from cultures different from their own? Do you agree with the greater need for intercultural communication competence today? Why or why not?
2. To what extent have you experienced the media echo chamber and the filter bubble? What methods can help overcome the restrictions on connecting with others? How can greater digital literacy help?
3. After watching the [Chimamanda Adichie TED talk](#) ("The dangers of a single story"): What does she mean by a "single story"? What would be other ways to describe this phenomenon? Have you had personal experiences that parallel those of Adichie?
4. After watching the [Alisa Miller TED talk](#) ("How the news distorts our worldview"): Imagine a map which would represent the geographical areas that you read, hear,

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1.4: Broadening Horizons (Summary)

From theory to practice...

- *Strive to encounter others in an attitude of openness and a spirit of curiosity.* Seek to understand rather than to predict. To the extent possible, suspend judgment for as long as you can, forming an image of the other person gradually through conversing. **Active listening** helps, i.e., focusing intently on the words and body language of the other person.
- *Don't apply culturally differentiating labels to individuals.* Generalizations about norms of behavior are misplaced when we are dealing one-on-one with an individual. Because they are widespread, it's good to know about the categories (i.e. "individualism" vs. "collectivism") used to differentiate national cultures, but it's important to keep in mind that they represent broadstroke generalizations, which can in no way be applicable to every individual from that culture.
- *Beware of unexamined assumptions.* You are likely to have gleaned information about different cultures from local news sources or from friends or family or from what you may have learned in school. You should be cautious with such "received wisdom", which may rely on stereotypes and outdated information. It's important to learn what sources to trust – both in person and online. Equally important is a willingness to be open to different points of view.
- *Be alert to your personal filter bubble.* You should not assume that you are receiving neutral results from search requests or getting balanced views from online news providers. They may be feeding you what they assume you want, namely more of the same. Try using a different web browser or logging out of your Google or other accounts, to see if suggested links change.

Key Concepts

- **Active listening:** A communication technique that requires that the listener fully concentrate, understand, respond and then remember what is being said.
- **Algorithm:** A process or set of rules to be followed in calculations or other problem-solving operations, especially by a computer
- **Citizen journalism:** Ordinary citizens reporting through the Internet on events or issues of local importance, often using social media
- **Collectivism:** Cultural orientation where the group is the primary unit of culture; group goals take precedence over individual goals
- **Communication apprehension:** The fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or group of persons
- **Complexity theory:** Also known as complex dynamic systems; a framework for understanding phenomena that are composed of many variables and subsystems
- **Cosmopolitanism:** Moral view of the individual as having an allegiances and personal responsibility to the world
- **Critical intercultural communication:** Approach to the field that focuses on issues of power, context, socio-economic relations and historical/structural forces as they play out in culture and intercultural communication encounters, relationships, and contexts
- **Culture:** An accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol system (from Jim Neuliep)
- **Culture-of-use:** A set of historically developed, socially accepted norms and behavior for participation in speech communities such as online discussion forums (from Steve Thorne)
- **Decentered:** Shifting from an established center or focus; especially to disconnect from practical or theoretical assumptions of origin, priority, or essence
- **Digital divide:** Inequalities related to the access and use of information and communication technologies
- **Digital infinity:** The idea that all human languages follow a simple logical principle, according to which a limited set of elements are combined to produce an infinite range of potentially meaningful expressions.
- **Diaspora:** A scattered population whose origin lies in a smaller geographic area
- **Echo chamber:** In media, an echo chamber is a situation in which information, ideas, or beliefs are amplified or reinforced by transmission and repetition inside an 'enclosed' system, where different or competing views are censored, disallowed or otherwise underrepresented
- **Emic/Etic:** In anthropology and other social sciences, emic refers to characteristics derived from inside a social group (from the perspective of the subject) and etic from outside (from the perspective of the observer)
- **Empathy:** The imaginary participation in another person's experience, including emotional and intellectual dimensions, by imagining his or her perspective (James Bennett)

- **Essentialism:** A belief that things have a set of characteristics that make them what they are; in intercultural communication, characterizing cultures by a set of contrasting features, such as individualism versus collectivism
- **Filter bubble:** Describes a personalized search in which a website algorithm selectively guesses what information a user would like to see based on information about the user
- **Global citizenship:** the idea that all people have rights and civic responsibilities that come with being a member of the world
- **Globalization:** A process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations, a process driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology
- **Groupthink:** When group members try to minimize conflict and reach a consensus decision without critical evaluation of alternative viewpoints by actively suppressing dissenting viewpoints, and by isolating themselves from outside influences
- **Homophily:** i.e., "love of the same", is the tendency of individuals to associate and bond with similar others
- **Individualism:** Cultural orientation where the individual is unique and individual goals are emphasized over group goals
- **Intercultural communication:** Two persons from different cultures or co-cultures exchanging verbal and nonverbal messages
- **Netiquette:** A set of social conventions that facilitate interaction over networks
- **Other:** Identifying and excluding a person from a social group, placing him or her at the margins of society, where social norms do not apply
- **Othering:** Describes the reductive action of labeling a person as someone who belongs to a subordinate social category
- **Power distance:** The extent to which members of a culture expect and accept that power is unequally distributed
- **Reductionism:** The practice of analyzing and describing a complex phenomenon in terms of phenomena that are held to represent a simpler or more fundamental level; in intercultural communication, refers to reducing individual identities to perceived national characteristics
- **Search engine optimization:** The process of maximizing the number of visitors to a particular website by ensuring that the site appears high on the list of results returned by a search engine
- **Semantic:** Pertaining to meaning
- **Small cultures:** Small social groupings or activities wherever there are cohesive behavior patterns and practice (from Adrian Holliday)
- **Social justice:** The equitable distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society
- **Solutions journalism:** An approach to news reporting that focuses on the responses to social issues as well as the problems themselves
- **Symbol:** An arbitrarily selected and learned stimulus representing something else
- **Taxonomy:** The practice and science of classification of things or concepts
- **Uncertainty avoidance:** The degree to which members of a particular culture feel threatened by unpredictable, uncertain, or unknown situations
- **Worldview:** The cognitive and affective lens through which people construe their experiences and make sense of the world around them (AACU)
- **Xenophobia:** Intense or irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries

Recommended Resources

Books

- Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (1959), a classic, which many seen as the beginning of the field of intercultural communication
- Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (1991), standard in the field by one of the major scholars
- Adrian Holliday, *Intercultural communication & ideology* (2011), looks at intercultural communication against the backdrop of an unequal global politics in which ideology plays a major role
- Edward Said (1979). *Orientalism*. 1978. New York: Vintage, 1994.
- Kathryn Sorrells, *Intercultural Communication: Globalization and Social Justice* (2015)

ONLINE RESOURCES

Globalization

· [Why the World Is Flat](#)

Article from *Wired* about Thomas Friedman's well-known book on globalization

- [Pankaj Ghemawat: Actually, the world isn't flat](#)

Ghemawat offers counter-arguments to the conventional wisdom about globalization, the concept that, as Tom Friedman put it, the "world is flat". In particular he has interesting comments about Facebook.

TED description: "It may seem that we're living in a borderless world where ideas, goods and people flow freely from nation to nation. We're not even close, says Pankaj Ghemawat. With great data (and an eye-opening survey), he argues that there's a delta between perception and reality in a world that's maybe not so hyperconnected after all."

- [Global Policy Forum: Globalization](#)

From Global Policy Forum, with extensive links

Statistics on world demographics

- [World Demographics Profile](#)

From Index Mundi, includes demographic information on all countries

- [Hari Kondabolu - 2042 & the White Minority](#)

Humorous take on the demographic changes coming to the USA

Cultural dimensions and history of intercultural communication

- [Edward T. Hall and The History of Intercultural Communication: The United States and Japan](#)

Article tracing the role of anthropologist Edward T. Hall in founding the field of intercultural communication

- [Geert Hofstede cultural dimensions](#)

From Clearly Cultural

On broadening horizons and media

- [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story](#)

Nigerian novelist speaking about her experiences growing up in Nigeria and studying in the USA

TED description: "Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. Novelist Chimamanda Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice — and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding."

- [Leslie Dodson: Don't misrepresent Africa](#)

TED description: "Real narratives are complicated: Africa isn't a country, and it's not a disaster zone, says reporter and researcher Leslie Dodson. In her talk, she calls for journalists, researchers and NGOs to stop representing entire continents as one big tragedy."

- [Alisa Miller: How the news distorts our worldview](#)

World map dramatically illustrates the US media's reporting on world events (very limited)

TED description: "Alisa Miller, head of Public Radio International, talks about why — though we want to know more about the world than ever — the media is actually showing us less. Eye-opening stats and graphs."

Technology and the filter bubble

- Technology is creating a world without strangers

On the sharing economy

- How to Burst the "Filter Bubble" that Protects Us from Opposing Views

From the MIT Technology Review

- [Eli Pariser: Beware online "filter bubbles"](#)

Pariser's classic TED talk explains the concepts of echo chamber and filter bubble.

TED description: "As web companies strive to tailor their services (including news and search results) to our personal tastes, there's a dangerous unintended consequence: We get trapped in a 'filter bubble' and don't get exposed to information that could challenge or broaden our worldview. Eli Pariser argues powerfully that this will ultimately prove to be bad for us and bad for democracy."

- [Ethan Zuckerman: Listening to global voices](#)

Interesting comments on how to be more aware of what's happening in the rest of the world, such as "engineer serendipity" and "cultivate xenophiles". Discussion of Twitter from an international perspective.

TED description: "Sure, the web connects the globe, but most of us end up hearing mainly from people just like ourselves. Blogger

and technologist Ethan Zuckerman wants to help share the stories of the whole wide world. He talks about clever strategies to open up your Twitter world and read the news in languages you don't even know."

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Building Identities

Learning Objectives

Successful interaction with this and associated course content will enable students to...

- Discuss the dynamics of identity formation today
- Compare/contrast different kinds of groups and roles
- Define and discuss different kinds of stereotyping
- Be able to discuss ways to overcome prejudicial views and actions

[2.1: How Identities are Built](#)

[2.2: Judging and Treating Others Fairly](#)

[2.3: Technically Speaking - Online identities](#)

[2.4: How identities are Built \(Summary\)](#)

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2.1: How Identities are Built

The same factors that make intercultural communication competence today so relevant – increased human mobility and open, worldwide communication networks – also have led to the formation of personal identities that are more varied and dynamic than ever before. It is of course always been the case that as we grow, we evolve. From the narrow starting point of the family, we enter into ever wider social circles, as we attend school, make friends, start working, and find a partner. Added to this traditional model now is the increasing likelihood of exposure to individuals from different cultures. This modifies how we think, how we view the world, how we react to different situations, which, in turn, adds a variety of flavors to how others see us and how we see ourselves, i.e. our identity. Today, part of that process may well happen virtually, through online social networks and media. More exposure to different kinds of people does not necessarily mean acceptance of growing social diversity. Unfortunately, the result can be increased prejudice and intolerance. In this unit we will be looking at identity formation, the roles of ethnic and social groups, and issues surrounding stereotyping.

Laina Dawes: Identity assumptions sometimes go astray

Laina's identity comes from many different sources, growing up in a rural part of Canada where there were few if any other blacks, being adopted into a white family, and being a woman in love with heavy metal music. Her situation demonstrates that personal identity doesn't necessarily match expectations based on stereotypes, for example, that all black people prefer hip-hop.

[Audio](#) / [Transcript](#) of NPR story about Laina



Cultural identity

Our identities are formed in a variety of ways. As we grow, we develop characteristics and personality traits that set us apart as individuals. Some of those are biological, such as skin color, height, hair color, etc. We may be shy or outgoing, enjoy playing sports or prefer computer games. Each of us has a personal identity which develops and changes over time. Some of our individual characteristics we develop on our own, but many aspects of our personality and preferences develop through contact with others. The starting point is the family into which we are born. Our family typically supplies our initial **cultural identity** – the values, beliefs, and behaviors inherited from belonging to a particular culture or ethnic group. Cultural identities provide a default framework for how we interact with others. That doesn't mean that we continue to have this perspective throughout our lives.

Cultural identities are dynamic and can change with one's ongoing life experiences. This may be an individualized change or could reflect changes in views embraced by one of the cultural groups to which we belong. In the US, for example, a significant shift in attitudes towards Muslims occurred after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. Many US citizens developed a new, often negative opinion of anyone perceived to be Muslim or from an Arab country. Major shifts have occurred in recent years in many countries in regard to same-sex marriage. It is certainly not the case that all citizens of those countries have changed their attitudes; after all, individuals have free will and the ability to adopt differing views.

It may be also that one's views may differ from those of the cultural mainstream through the link one has to a particular subculture. This might be a traditionally identified minority group – based on ethnic, racial, or language characteristics – or might be a group we belong to out of personal interest or through other relationships such as employment. Minority groups – or **microcultures** – are traditionally characterized as being distinct in several different ways (Neuliep, 2012). There may be distinctive physical characteristics, such as skin color or dress. Sometimes, microcultures practice in-group marriage, known as **endogamy** (as opposed to **exogamy** – marrying outside your group). Often microcultures receive unequal treatment and face discrimination in a variety of areas, including housing and employment. The social status and rights of microcultures vary considerably depending on time and place. At one time in the US, Irish immigrants were discriminated against, but they (and other European immigrants) have long since become part of the mainstream white culture in the US.

To indicate that subgroups exist within and must interact with the majority cultures, some use the term **co-culture** (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). The term is frequently used in the context of the power discrepancy between co-cultures and the dominant culture, highlighting the marginalization and disenfranchisement of many minority groups. In using the terms majority and minority, we are referencing a group's relative influence and power within a society, rather than numerical superiority. In some societies, such as in colonized countries, the largest number of inhabitants may not hold the levers of power, which may be in the hands of a smaller, elite group. In apartheid South Africa (before 1994), for example, the overwhelming majority of inhabitants were black, but the government, economic institutions, and school systems were all under the control of the minority white South Africans. One could point as well to similar discrepancies between numerical superiority and access to political, social, and economic power in Saddam Hussain's Iraq (Sunni versus Shi'a) or the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria (Alawi versus Sunni).

Cultural identities tend to be constructed differently depending on whether an individual is a member of a co-culture or a representative of the mainstream. Often, those in the majority population lack the social consciousness that typically accompanies being part of a minority. Members of the dominant culture typically will be happy with the social status quo. They are likely never to have been led or forced to examine their position or role in society, seeing themselves as "normal" or "regular" citizens. In the documentary film, the [Color of Fear](#) (Wah, 1994), the white US Americans identify themselves as "Americans", while those representing minority groups use hyphenated terms such as African-American, Mexican-American, or Chinese-American; those men have much more to say than their white counterparts about their cultural backgrounds. This is typical of the mainstream in the US: "People who are white know that they are white, but this is often translated as being just American. They do not have any experience understanding race and how it shapes our lives. They typically don't think about their whiteness, nor do they think about the privilege bestowed on them because of their race" (Sisneros, Stakeman, Joyner & Schmitz, 2008, p. 29). In fact, white Americans may be reluctant to acknowledge that "white privilege" exists. Peggy McIntosh has put together a compelling list of examples of white privilege in the US (see sidebar). Unearned social and economic privilege is not unique to European-Americans; that phenomenon has parallels in many other countries, in which elite classes enjoy rights and advantages not available to all members of the society. Migrant workers in many countries are denied many of the benefits (education, housing, employment) afforded other sectors of society.

White Privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack

I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and time of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

[Note: the [full text](#) contains 50 items]

Members of a majority group may be unaware of the reality of life for minorities in their society. On the other hand, members of minority groups cannot ignore the dominant culture — they typically encounter aspects of that culture and its representatives on an everyday basis, as they go about their daily lives. The societal apparatus — education, housing, media, government, employment — is controlled by the mainstream population. Members of a minority are well aware of the situation and must adjust accordingly. It is likely, for instance, that in African-American families today, parents talk to their children (especially the boys) about how to interact with police officers. That is not likely to be a necessary conversation in white households. Members of a minority need to balance issues of adaptation and assimilation into the dominant culture with the need to retain identification with their own communities.

One of the issues with which microcultures often have to contend is language. The major institutions of a country — schools, government, industry — use predominantly or exclusively the language of the dominant culture. This means that members of a microculture who either speak a different language or use a dialectal variety of the standard language may be at a disadvantage. In fact, "**muted group theory**" suggests that those with less power in a society often have difficulty communicating effectively, as they must re-encode their thoughts to make them understood (Ardener, 1975). One response to this phenomenon is the creation of a

unique language. African American Vernacular English, or **Ebonics**, is an example of that (Perry & Delpit, 1998). **Spanglish** – **code-switching** between English and Spanish – is characteristic of many Latinos in the US (Stavans, 2004). In Germany *Kiezdeutsch* (also "kanaksprach") is a version of German that integrates Turkish terms (Freywald et al, 2011). Similar language hybrid phenomena can be observed in other cultures. We will be exploring issues around minority language use in chapter three.

Integration and Marginalization

To what extent microcultures remain separate or become integrated and eventually inseparable from the mainstream culture varies considerably. The metaphor popularly used for many years in the US was that of the melting pot, with the implication being that immigrant communities were to **assimilate**, or give up their cultural identities (and language) and adopt the mainstream European-American culture. In the US today there is increasing recognition of the right of minority groups to maintain aspects of their cultures of origin (Alba & Nee, 2009). This embrace of **pluralism** – with a more appropriate metaphor for the US being a garden salad or a mixed stew – is by no means universal. That is the case in other countries as well.

In the US, second and third generation immigrant families often have a quite different attitude toward their ethnic heritage than was the case for their parents or grandparents (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). They may express considerable interest and pride in that heritage, its customs, and language. The degree to which descendants of immigrant families or representatives of indigenous minorities are able to blend successfully their family/ethnic backgrounds into the dominant culture depends on the extent of social acceptance. Some groups have been systematically **marginalized**, that is, denied the same basic rights and privileges as granted to other populations. They may face discrimination in areas such as housing, access to education, or employment opportunities. Examples are the indigenous populations of North America or Australia, the Romani in Europe, the Palestinians in the Middle East, or the "Untouchables" (Lower Castes or *Dalit*) in India. There are as well counter-examples of societies, such as Canada, which have embraced multiculturalism, enabling newcomers to maintain their original cultural identities, as they adjust to the new Canadian environment (Peach, 2005).

Countries vary considerably in ethnic diversity. Japan and the Koreas, for example, are ethnically homogeneous, with small minority populations. That is characteristic as well of island nations, for understandable reasons. One of the main methodologies used to measure diversity is linguistic variation (Fearon, 2003). From that perspective, Papua New Guinea and South Africa rank particularly high in cultural diversity. That is the case as well for India, with 22 different languages and over 1500 officially recognized dialects. The cultural fabric of India (language, food habits, clothing, colors of houses, architecture, etc.) can vary tremendously from one region to another. The modern state of India, with its variety of cultures integrated into one political entity, is a byproduct of British colonialism. It was not uncommon for occupying colonial powers to construct arbitrary boundaries, determined by political and economic **hegemonic** interests rather than according to languages spoken or along traditional ethnic or tribal lines. This kind of forced political integration has led to conflict, as competing tribes or ethnic groups struggle for power, for example in Rwanda (1990-1994), Sudan (1955 to 1972), and Nigeria (1967-1970). Ethnic conflict is by no means limited to Africa. Tribal affiliations and religious differences have led to many conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere.



Figure 2.1.1: Women in Japan: a largely homogeneous country

Although European countries have tended to be largely homogeneous, there are exceptions such as Switzerland or Belgium. While the Swiss have managed to create a common national identity, which has largely shielded the country from strife among the linguistically and culturally diverse cantons, Belgium has not been so successful in national integration. The Flemish and French parts of the country have had considerable trouble cooperating politically and economically. Conflict has arisen as well in Latin America, with struggles of indigenous populations in Guatemala, Mexico, Columbia, and other countries for equal rights. In some

cases, ethnic strife has led to countries breaking apart into separate entities, such as happened in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s or in Sudan in 2011. Separatist movements have arisen in a number of countries, such as Catalonia in Spain or Scotland in the UK.

Just because a country is ethnically homogeneous, it does not mean that it will remain that way. Germany, for example, has traditionally been relatively homogeneous, but has seen several large waves of immigration which have made the population much more diverse. So-called "guest workers" (*Gastarbeiter*) were recruited in the 1950s and 1960s from Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Turkey to supply manpower for the growing post-war German economy (Herbert, 1990). Many of those workers and their families elected to resettle permanently in Germany. The large number of Turkish Germans has had a significant influence on German culture, with Germans of Turkish descent playing significant roles in politics, sports, entertainment and other areas. In 2015–2016, large numbers of refugees arrived in Germany, fleeing war, civil strife, and poverty in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Northern Africa. The substantial numbers of new arrivals placed stress on the ability of government agencies, churches, and citizen groups to provide sufficient services, such as housing and language training. As migrants are dispersed among different urban and rural areas in Germany, efforts to reach the different groups with information and training has been a challenge. One of the more successful methods that has been used is mobile technology (see sidebar). Not all Germans have welcomed the arrival of large numbers of refugees. Some refugee centers have been burned to the ground. Anti-immigrant movements such as PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamification of the West) have attracted popular support among some parts of the German population (Vorländer, Herold, & Schaller, 2015). As is the case in neighboring countries, that has also led to political changes, with a new anti-immigrant and anti-EU party, the Alternative for Germany (AFD), which in 2018 entered the German parliament. In France, the National Front has attracted large numbers of French voters unhappy with economic stagnation and with the perceived cultural changes in French society through the large numbers of immigrants from Northern Africa.

Smartphones and refugees

In Germany, the hoped-for destination of many refugees, a number of apps have been created targeting the immigrant population. The Goethe Institute, along with federal agencies dealing with immigration and employment, have created *Ankommen (Arrival)*, available in Arabic, English, Farsi, French, and German. As do other such apps, it is designed with minimal technical requirements, so as to be usable on older phones. It features three branched areas: German language study, German asylum procedures, and tips on living in Germany. Integreat offers a similar service for refugees in Germany. It is available in five languages and features information specific to one of the 80 German cities targeted. Daheim (*At Home*) offers a meeting platform for new arrivals and German natives, designed for language learning and intercultural exchange.

Godwin-Jones, 2017, p. 11

The extent to which members of microcultures integrate into the mainstream culture may depend on how that particular group arrived in the new country. This may have happened in a number of different ways: forced repatriation – as in the case of slavery –, voluntary immigration, for instance those seeking better job opportunities, or through refugee status, seeking protection from political persecution or dangerous living conditions. The integration process also depends on the nature of the group, and how similar or dissimilar its customs, language, and worldviews are to the mainstream culture. One of the central issues affecting the reception of recent migrants to Europe is that most are Muslims, while European countries are majority Christian. The difference in religion affects not only worship practices and religious doctrines but also social views, such as the role of women in society. Visibly different skin color or dress are likely to make integration, or even acceptance, into the mainstream culture potentially problematic. Diaspora communities tend to keep many customs and rituals from their places of origin. Indian families who migrated to Southern Africa, and from there to the UK, the USA, or Canada, may have never visited India, but still marry according to Indian customs. Yet, they also integrate Western customs, such as holding speeches at the wedding reception (A. Malik, personal communication, June 25, 2017).



Figure 2.1.2: PEGIDA demonstration in Dresden, Germany

The degree to which particular groups maintain cultural ties to their family places of origin differs significantly according to both the group and the nature of the destination culture. In the US, for example, many people of European ancestry have largely integrated culturally into the mainstream, and have lost most of their association with their ancestral homeland and may not even be aware of their family backgrounds. They may not know about the stigma which used to be attached to immigrants to the US from countries such as Ireland, Italy, or Germany. Some white US Americans may have a **symbolic ethnicity**, a largely voluntary affiliation with a particular ethnic group which only surfaces in particular contexts, as in the celebration of a holiday such as St. Patrick's Day or Oktoberfest. While many microcultures become segregated due to prejudicial treatment by the mainstream culture, as has historically been the case with African-Americans, some microcultures choose to remain apart. The Amish community in the US live apart from the non-Amish, with their religious beliefs leading them to reject many aspects of contemporary US culture. They dress differently, speak a German dialect, and shun modern technology. Because living in an Amish community isolates individuals so completely from mainstream US culture, young people are given an opportunity to experience the "English", i.e. non-Amish, world through a tradition called *rumspringa*.

Rumspringa: Amish youth exploring the world

In many communities, *Rumspringa* is a period when some Amish youth, boys more than girls, experience greater freedom. They are no longer under the control of their parents on weekends and, because they are not baptized, they are not yet under the authority of the church. During this time, many Amish youth adhere to traditional Amish behavior. Others experiment with "worldly" activities—buying a car, going to movies, wearing non-Amish clothes, buying a television.

Kraybill, 2016



Figure 2.1.3: Amish family in New York farming

Social Identity

While our national origin and ethnic background typically contribute substantially towards forming our individual identities, they alone do not play a determining role in shaping who we are. There are likely to be a variety of groups we belong to, constructing what is commonly called our **social identity**. Some of these are involuntary, such as age, race, or family. Others are groups we choose to join, such as a club, church, or political party. There may be groups we do not belong to but with which we identify in some way, for example, a professional group we hope to join one day (i.e., physicians, lawyers, astronauts) or political action groups with whose views we agree. These are known as **reference groups** (Shibutani, 1955). There may be as well any number of impromptu, ad-hoc groups with which we identify, forging a variety of shifting small cultures and affinity groups. At least some of

those are likely to be mostly or exclusively online, such as our *Facebook* friends or those we follow or who follow us on *Twitter* or through other social media.

How we communicate with others may be strongly influenced by our group memberships. Some groups distinguish sharply between who is in and who is out. Members of the **in-group** may feel prejudiced against those in **out-groups**. Extreme nationalists, for example, may discriminate against or even harass immigrant communities. One way in which groups tend to shape individual behavior is through a phenomenon known as **in-group bias**, in which we as members of an in-group automatically favor other members of our group (Brewer, 1979). This is in contrast to **out-group negativity** in which we attribute automatically negative characteristics to those outside our group (Sherif et al., 1961). The same observed behavior might be judged quite differently depending on whether the other person belongs to our group.

Interactions and communication among group members may also be influenced by individuals' roles within groups. In some groups, roles may be formal and well-defined, with a strict hierarchy in place. This is the case in many working environments. In such cases, how we communicate is determined by our place in the hierarchy, with those at the top accorded a high measure of respect and being addressed in deferential language. Different cultures may see group roles quite differently, even within similar groups or organizations. In most university communities in the US, for example, there is a fairly relaxed, relatively egalitarian relationship between students and professors, with the language used informal and colloquial. In other countries, such as South Korea, the relationship is likely to be more hierarchical, with an accompanying shift in the language to a much more formal register.

An increasingly prevalent approach to addressing the nature of social identity is the "**communication theory of identity**", developed originally by communication scholar Michael Hecht (1998). The theory provides a model for describing how groups create an identity through communication. The idea is that identity is negotiated in particular contexts, either between individuals of the same identity groups or individuals of different groups. In this view, social identities are constructed and fluid. We express our identities through such things as choice of language, nonverbals like clothing or body language, or the degree to which we emphasize our group membership. Depending on the situation, we may express our identity in different ways. The theory is helpful in breaking down into separate categories how our communication and behavior as members of a group affects our sense of identity in particular contexts. Identity components include the following:

- *Scope* (how many people hold the identity)
- *Salience* (how important the identity is to a person at a given point in time)
- *Centrality* (how important the identity is usually to a person's self-esteem)
- *Intensity* (how vocal or expressive one is about an identity)
- *Changeability* (some aspects of identities change and others do not)

How this works in practice is demonstrated in the example of women in the Sahara (see the sidebar).

In addition, the theory proposes that identities have both a *content component* – norms of behavior associated with an identity – and a *relationship component*, i.e., how we feel about an identity. The content may be actions, behaviors, or language expected or accepted in particular contexts such as using formal language when addressing a superior. The relationship component (sometimes referred to as "regard") refers to different views on particular behaviors or attitudes associated with an identity, which may be seen differently depending on the individual. Baldwin (2013) provides this example, "Two people might see themselves as 'geeks.' Both may agree what the identity means as far as characteristics (content), but one might embrace the identity (positive regard) and the other might dislike the identity (negative regard)". This approach treats identity as context-dependent and emergent, rather than static and fixed. This is in accord with views on identity formation current in the social sciences generally and has been of particular interest in applied linguistics and second language acquisition. In this view, we negotiate our identities on the fly, through our use of language and other identity markers such as body language or dress. The dynamics of that kind of identity assertion are dependent on the environment and on the background and behavior of those with whom we are communicating.

Women in the Sahara

If we think of the identity of gender in the Sahara, we can state that:

- **Scope:** Sex has a much broader scope than, say, Jewish people
- **Salience:** A woman might be a professional, a student, a researcher, or a Muslim. In some contexts, one identity will be more relevant or in the front of her mind than others.
- **Centrality:** Because of the emphasis on gender in the Sahara, this identity is probably "salient" all or most of the time—thus, it has more centrality.

- **Intensity:** Women may express their identity either more or less vocally. By wearing a head-covering, especially when such is optional, as it is in some countries, the women is expressing identity more explicitly. She is “out” about her religious identity.
- **Changeability:** Clearly, as expressed in the photo above, gender identity in parts of the Saharan region is changing—but likely in other ways staying the same.

Baldwin (2013)



Worldviews and Religions

One of the groups many belong to is a religious community. The religion to which we adhere may have a substantial impact on how we communicate with others:

Religious differences have tremendous implications for intercultural communication. Religion is a powerful force in marking cultural differences, which can lead to both intercultural conflict and intercultural cooperation. Even when not explicitly noted, religion may influence our attitudes about right and wrong and may influence our own behavior. (Nakayama & Martin, 2002, p. 21).

Religious beliefs often play a central role in a person's worldview, i.e., the set of values and beliefs about acceptable human behavior and about mankind's relationship to a supreme being and to the natural world. In some cases, religion and worldview are tightly connected. This is the case in what are deemed "sacred cultures", where there is a religious doctrine that plays a determining role in expected personal behavior, fundamental values, and appearance (Dodd, 1998). In some cultures, such as in Saudi Arabia, there may be a state religion which exerts this kind of controlling influence. In other cases, the connection between religion and worldview is not as clear-cut, as in the case of the Puritan influence in the US (see sidebar). Secular societies, such as the US, draw a sharp distinction between church and state. France has a long tradition of "*laïcité*" (secularity) which has been the expressed reason for controversial measures such as the banning of women wearing veils or headscarves in public schools (Caron, 2007). On the other hand, India, also a secular culture, has not banned religious symbols (Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr & Wegert, 2013).

Pervasive Puritanism

The influence of the Puritan settlers on US society can be seen in the fact that US Americans have rather conservative views about alcohol and nudity — something that many Europeans find rather prudish. This demonstrates the implicit influence of religion on worldview and perception — people in the United States who may not subscribe to Puritan or even Christian beliefs may still be influenced by that historical tradition and worldview.

Nakayama & Martin, 2002, p. 22

Cluckhohn & Strodtbeck (1961) developed a set of "value orientations" to distinguish worldviews. The values taxonomy indicates what instructions are implicitly provided by a culture as guidelines for living and interacting with others. They address the questions of man's place in the cosmos, namely:

- *Character of human nature* (basically good – a mixture of good and evil – basically evil)
- *Relation of humans to nature* (humans dominate–harmony of the two–nature dominates)

- *Time orientation* (future-oriented - present-oriented - past-oriented)
- *Activity orientation* ("doing"/action – "growing"/spiritual growth – "being"/who you are)
- *Relationships between people* (individual - group-oriented – collateral)

If applied to mainstream US culture, the human–nature orientation is that mankind is essentially good, with humans considered to be rational beings who have control of their own destinies (the much vaunted but elusive US "equality of opportunity"). The mutable nature of human character in the US view is demonstrated by the popularity of self-help groups, self-improvement seminars, and "life coaches". US culture sees mankind as empowered to rule over nature, with faith in science to solve problems. In terms of activity orientation, the US tends to value pragmatism and efficiency; that applies to time as well, which tends to be future-oriented. In their relationships with others, US Americans are seen as individualistic, with few binding group memberships. They are more likely to be willing to relocate to entirely new regions for education or employment.

India offers a dramatically different profile. In this life, humans must accept restraints and limitations, but need to work towards enlightenment and perfection, but that may occur over successive lives. The human-nature relationship is seen quite differently, with an emphasis on harmony, not control, and a concern for the "welfare of all things" taking precedence over human concerns (Roa & Thombre, 2015, p. 67). Spiritual growth is highly valued and that may occur over successive reincarnations, so that both the past and the future are important and are not seen as distinctly different entities. From an Indian perspective, time is not linear but circular. Indians are "highly collectivistic in their local group, but are individualistic in dealing with outsiders" (Rao & Thombre, 2015, p. 81). Starkly different regional characteristics in language and customs tend to lead Indians to feel most comfortable living in their home regions, and less likely than North Americans to accept moving far from home for education or employment (Rao & Thombre, 2015).

As is always the case with such generalizations, these value orientations need to be seen as just that — generalities which may be useful as default categories but do not hold for all members of a culture. In the case of the characteristics for US culture, for example, there are significant differences among different co-cultures, for instance in Native Americans' view of the relationship to nature or in the importance of family relations in the African-American household. A similar variety of values orientations are evident in India, as in many other countries. There are shifting views on man's relationship to nature, which derive in part from global warming and other natural phenomena. In India, for example, the concept of *dharma* (loosely, the right way of living) leads to environmentalism being built into Indian culture, while environmental pollution is viewed as an expression of *karma* (just retribution; Roa & Thombre, 2015). There are likely generational differences too, for example, in time orientation, with younger North Americans or Indians being more present-oriented, with greater interest in quality-of-life concerns. Looking at the value orientations of other cultures is likely to show similar results, that is, some common default values, with many discrepancies depending on group memberships.

The forces of globalization and mass immigration which have increasingly mixed cultures together have also brought together different worldviews and religions. This can lead to greater religious diversity. This phenomenon is seen by some as a weakening or dilution of religious beliefs. In response, fundamentalist religious movements have arisen in different parts of the world, which strive to set boundaries and adhere to a perceived "pure" version of a religion. Often, this is also a reaction against particular social changes, such as equality between men and women or equal rights for **LGBTQ** communities (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning). Religion is often deeply tied to people's cultural identity and a disregard or perceived disrespect for a person's religious beliefs or rituals is seen as a personal attack. In such cases, communication may be shut down completely.

Intercultural Communication and Ideology

When we talk about worldviews, another term that frequently comes into play is **ideology**. Ideology is similar to worldview in that it references our conception of the order of the world and humans' role in society, but it places additional emphasis on what in an ideal world human relationships and behavior should be. This often involves political and socio-economic considerations, with a central concern being the individual or groups who exercise power and control. From that perspective, the question arises as to who controls culture – that is where do our values and mores come from. Italian theorist, Antonio Gramsci (1971, originally 1935), uses the concept of **cultural hegemony** to describe how those in power manipulate the value system of a society so as to co-op and control beliefs and behaviors among the population at large. In this way, the ruling class worldview becomes the accepted cultural norm and establishes and justifies a social, political, and economic status quo.

Adrian Holliday (2010) sees the concept of culture itself as a form of ideology. Under the guise of culture, we (especially in the West) tend to establish and perpetuate static images of particular groups. Edward Said (1978) has shown, for example, how the West exoticized images of people from the East, creating a stereotype of "Orientals", which helped promote Western superiority

and hence justify colonialism and subjugation. Holliday has shown that the terms of cultural differentiation often used in intercultural communication such as collectivism and individualism often in subtle ways denigrate particular cultures or peoples. For Holliday, the concept of culture, as usually understood, leads "easily and sometimes innocently to the reduction of the foreign Other as culturally deficient" (Holliday, 2010, ix).



Figure 2.1.4: Snake Charmer, example of image in the West of "Orientals"

If, in fact, as Holliday states, the world is governed by "unequal global politics in which ideology plays a major role" (2010, ix), that holds consequences for intercultural interactions. It makes it important to recognize our own ideological framework, both as individuals and groups. That includes a consideration of how our gender, socioeconomic class, and ethnic background affect our views of the world and of others. This critical self-awareness can enable us to view others and their cultural values and behaviors with a clearer appreciation of how forces beyond an individual's control contribute to identity formation and particular worldviews. Developing a knowledge of the interaction between culture and political institutions can help in finding avenues for change that are feasible, given societal constraints. We may see injustices which, given our own backgrounds, seem to be evidence of "backwards" beliefs or of a corrupt political culture. Rather than judge harshly an individual engaged in what we see as negative behavior, it is better to understand the constraints at work. Individuals do not always have the freedom to change aspects of behavior that are controlled by institutional forces. It is also the case, that as outsiders, we are not likely to have a full understanding of what may be a quite complex interplay of factors which determine individual behavior.

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