

COMM 325: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION



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COMM 325: Intercultural Communication
(Williams)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

Learning Objectives

1: Self and Social Construction

- 1.1: Self-Understanding is Fundamental to Communication
- 1.2: Elements of Culture
- 1.3: Social Constructions of Reality
- 1.4: Social Categorization and Stereotyping

2: Intercultural Communication Competence

- 2.1: Foundations of Culture and Identity
- 2.2: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities
- 2.3: Cross-Cultural Teaching - Values
- 2.4: Intercultural Communication
- 2.5: Intercultural Communication Competence

3: Media and Culture

- 3.1: Co-Cultural Theory (Mark Orbe)
- 3.2: Media, Society, Culture and You
- 3.3: Digital Culture and Social Media

4: Culture and Gender

- 4.1: Culture
- 4.2: Gender

5: Workplace Diversity

- 5.1: Skills for Change - Diversity at Work
- 5.2: Managing a Diverse Workforce
- 5.3: Generational Diversity

6: Social Problems

- 6.1: What is a Social Problem?
- 6.2: Explaining Poverty
- 6.3: Prejudice
- 6.4: Ingroup Favoritism and Prejudice
- 6.5: Discrimination
- 6.6: Understanding Sex and Gender

Index

Glossary

Detailed Licensing

Licensing

A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in **Back Matter/Detailed Licensing**.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

SLO 1: DEFINE, IDENTIFY, EXPLAIN AND APPLY VARIOUS THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ASSOCIATED WITH THE STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

- Identify and describe cultural taxonomies that explain cultural variation (Ex. Hall, Hofstede, Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, etc.).
- Differentiate the communication behaviors associated with high and low context cultures.
- Define the importance of nonverbal communication in the overall communication process.
- Analyze, interpret and critique the nonverbal messages in intercultural encounters and recommend possible approaches for clarifying misunderstandings that might be present.
- Explain different theoretical perspectives on language and its relation to reality (Ex. Sapir Whorf hypothesis, Hiyakawa's abstraction ladder, Chomsky and "deep structures," etc.) and explain difficulties associated with the lack of equivalence in languages.

SLO 2: ASSESS INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN ONE'S ABILITY TO INFLUENCE ETHICAL, EFFECTIVE, AND APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION AMONG DIVERSE SETTINGS AND PEOPLE

- Profile recent demographic trends in the United States and its impact upon cultural institutions.
- Research and discuss the historical context for racism and prejudice in the United States.
- Recognize and explain why statements in the analysis of a communication event may have a marginalizing effect.
- Compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of living in a diverse society.

SLO 3: IDENTIFY AND DEMONSTRATE COMMUNICATION SKILLS ASSOCIATED WITH INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

- Explain how to determine the extent to which a communication event may be considered intercultural.
- Analyze and interpret a critical incident identifying areas of misunderstanding.
- Analyze an intercultural situation and apply learned content regarding appropriate strategies related to interaction management and conflict management.
- Define "culture shock" and describe strategies for reducing discomfort in culturally unfamiliar and/or ambiguous situations.

SLO 4: EXPRESS IDEAS CLEARLY IN EFFECTIVE, APPROPRIATE AND WELL-ORGANIZED WRITTEN MESSAGES

- Construct short answer essays that synthesize material from separate topic areas of the course.
- Summarize ethnographic and/or database research that explore(s) a culture in the United States different from one's own perspective

1: SELF AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

1.1: Self-Understanding is Fundamental to Communication

1.2: Elements of Culture

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

1.4: Social Categorization and Stereotyping

1.1: Self-Understanding is Fundamental to Communication

Learning Objectives

- Describe the factors that contribute to self-concept.
- Describe how the self-fulfilling prophecy works.

Your sense of self comes through in your oral and written presentations. Public communication starts with intrapersonal communication, or communication with yourself. You need to know what you want to say before you can say it to an audience.

Understanding your perspective can lend insight to your *awareness*, the ability to be conscious of events and stimuli. Awareness determines what you pay attention to, how you carry out your intentions, and what you remember of your activities and experiences each day. Awareness is a complicated and fascinating area of study. The way we take in information, give it order, and assign it meaning has long interested researchers from disciplines including sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

Your perspective is a major factor in this dynamic process. Whether you are aware of it or not, you bring to the act of reading this sentence a frame of mind formed from experiences and education across your lifetime. Imagine that you see a presentation about snorkeling in beautiful Hawaii as part of a travel campaign. If you have never been snorkeling but love to swim, how will your perspective lead you to pay attention to the presentation? If, however, you had a traumatic experience as a child in a pool and are now afraid of being underwater, how will your perspective influence your reaction?

Two scuba divers diving near a wall in the ocean

Figure 1.1.1: Peaceful or dangerous? Your perception influences your response. sandwich – [bryan and jason. diving a wall](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Learning to recognize how your perspective influences your thoughts is a key step in understanding yourself and preparing to communicate with others.

The communication process itself is the foundation for oral and written communication. Whether we express ourselves in terms of a live, face-to-face conversation or across a voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) chat via audio and visual channels, emoticons (:)), and abbreviations (IMHO [In My Humble Opinion]), the communication process remains the same. Imagine that you are at work and your Skype program makes the familiar noise indicating that someone wants to talk. Your caller ID tells you that it is a friend. You also know that you have the report right in front of you to get done before 5:00 p.m. Your friend is quite a talker, and for him everything tends to have a “gotta talk about it right now” sense of urgency. You know a little bit about your potential audience or conversational partner. Do you take the call? Perhaps you chat back “Busy, after 5,” only to have him call again. You interpret the ring as his insistent need for attention, but you have priorities. You can choose to close the Skype program, stop the ringing, and get on with your report, but do you? Communication occurs on many levels in several ways.

Self-Concept

When we communicate, we are full of expectations, doubts, fears, and hopes. Where we place emphasis, what we focus on, and how we view our potential has a direct impact on our communication interactions. You gather a sense of self as you grow, age, and experience others and the world. At various times in your life, you have probably been praised for some of your abilities and talents, and criticized for doing some things poorly. These compliments and criticisms probably had a deep impact on you. Much of what we know about ourselves we’ve learned through interaction with others. Not everyone has had positive influences in their lives, and not every critic knows what they are talking about, but criticism and praise still influence how and what we expect from ourselves.

Carol Dweck, a psychology researcher at Stanford University, states that “something that seems like a small intervention can have cascading effects on things we think of as stable or fixed, including extroversion, openness to new experience, and resilience.” (Begley, 2008) Your personality and expressions of it, like oral and written communication, were long thought to have a genetic component. But, says Dweck, “More and more research is suggesting that, far from being simply encoded in the genes, much of personality is a flexible and dynamic thing that changes over the life span and is shaped by experience.” (Begley, 2008) If you were told by someone that you were not a good speaker, know this: You can change. You can shape your performance through experience, and a business communication course, a mentor at work, or even reading effective business communication authors

can result in positive change.

Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

When you consider what makes you *you*, the answers multiply as do the questions. As a baby, you learned to recognize that the face in the mirror was your face. But as an adult, you begin to wonder what and who you are. While we could discuss the concept of self endlessly and philosophers have wrestled and will continue to wrestle with it, for our purposes, let's focus on *self*, which is defined as one's own sense of individuality, motivations, and personal characteristics (McLean, 2003). We also must keep in mind that this concept is not fixed or absolute; instead, it changes as we grow and change across our lifetimes.

One point of discussion useful for our study about ourselves as communicators is to examine our attitudes, beliefs, and values. These are all interrelated, and researchers have varying theories as to which comes first and which springs from another. We learn our values, beliefs, and attitudes through interaction with others. Table 1.1.1 "Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values" defines these terms and provides an example of each.

Table 1.1.1 Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

	Definition	Changeable?	Example
Attitudes	Learned predispositions to a concept or object	Subject to change	I enjoyed the writing exercise in class today.
Beliefs	Convictions or expressions of confidence	Can change over time	This course is important because I may use the communication skills I am learning in my career.
Values	Ideals that guide our behavior	Generally long-lasting	Effective communication is important.

An *attitude* is your immediate disposition toward a concept or an object. Attitudes can change easily and frequently. You may prefer vanilla while someone else prefers peppermint, but if someone tries to persuade you of how delicious peppermint is, you may be willing to try it and find that you like it better than vanilla.

Beliefs are ideas based on our previous experiences and convictions and may not necessarily be based on logic or fact. You no doubt have beliefs on political, economic, and religious issues. These beliefs may not have been formed through rigorous study, but you nevertheless hold them as important aspects of self. Beliefs often serve as a frame of reference through which we interpret our world. Although they can be changed, it often takes time or strong evidence to persuade someone to change a belief.

Values are core concepts and ideas of what we consider good or bad, right or wrong, or what is worth the sacrifice. Our values are central to our self-image, what makes us who we are. Like beliefs, our values may not be based on empirical research or rational thinking, but they are even more resistant to change than are beliefs. To undergo a change in values, a person may need to undergo a transformative life experience.

For example, suppose you highly value the freedom to make personal decisions, including the freedom to choose whether or not to wear a helmet while driving a motorcycle. This value of individual choice is central to your way of thinking and you are unlikely to change this value. However, if your brother was driving a motorcycle without a helmet and suffered an accident that fractured his skull and left him with permanent brain damage, you might reconsider this value. While you might still value freedom of choice in many areas of life, you might become an advocate for helmet laws—and perhaps also for other forms of highway safety, such as stiffer penalties for cell-phone talking and texting while driving.

Self-Image and Self-Esteem

Your self-concept is composed of two main elements: self-image and self-esteem.

Your *self-image* is how you see yourself, how you would describe yourself to others. It includes your *physical characteristics*—your eye color, hair length, height, and so forth. It also includes your knowledge, experience, interests, and relationships.

What is your image of yourself as a communicator? How do you feel about your ability to communicate? While the two responses may be similar, they indicate different things. Your *self-esteem* is how you feel about yourself; your feelings of self-worth, self-

acceptance, and self-respect. Healthy self-esteem can be particularly important when you experience a setback or a failure. Instead of blaming yourself or thinking, “I’m just no good,” high self-esteem will enable you to persevere and give yourself positive messages like “If I prepare well and try harder, I can do better next time.”

Putting your self-image and self-esteem together yields your *self-concept*: your central identity and set of beliefs about who you are and what you are capable of accomplishing. When it comes to communicating, your self-concept can play an important part. You may find that communicating is a struggle, or the thought of communicating may make you feel talented and successful. Either way, if you view yourself as someone capable of learning new skills and improving as you go, you will have an easier time learning to be an effective communicator. Whether positive or negative, your self-concept influences your performance and the expression of that essential ability: communication.

Looking-Glass Self

In addition to how we view ourselves and feel about ourselves, of course, we often take into consideration the opinions and behavior of others. Charles Cooley's *looking-glass self* reinforces how we look to others and how they view us, treat us, and interact with us to gain insight of our identity. We place an extra emphasis on parents, supervisors, and on those who have some degree of control over us when we look at others. Developing a sense of self as a communicator involves balance between constructive feedback from others and constructive self-affirmation. You judge yourself, as others do, and both views count.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Now, suppose that you are treated in an especially encouraging manner in one of your classes. Imagine that you have an instructor who continually “catches you doing something right” and praises you for your efforts and achievements. Would you be likely to do well in this class and perhaps go on to take more advanced courses in this subject?

In a psychology experiment that has become famous through repeated trials, several public school teachers were told that specific students in their classes were expected to do quite well because of their intelligence (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). These students were identified as having special potential that had not yet “bloomed.” What the teachers didn’t know was that these “special potential” students were randomly selected. That’s right: as a group, they had no more special potential than any other students.

Can you anticipate the outcome? As you may guess, the students lived up to their teachers’ level of expectation. Even though the teachers were supposed to give appropriate attention and encouragement to all students, in fact, they unconsciously communicated special encouragement verbally and nonverbally to the special potential students. And these students, who were actually no more gifted than their peers, showed significant improvement by the end of the school year. This phenomenon came to be called the “Pygmalion effect” after the myth of a Greek sculptor named Pygmalion, who carved a marble statue of a woman so lifelike that he fell in love with her—and in response to his love she did in fact come to life and marry him (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Insel & Jacobson, 1975).

In more recent studies, researchers have observed that the opposite effect can also happen: when students are seen as lacking potential, teachers tend to discourage them or, at a minimum, fail to give them adequate encouragement. As a result, the students do poorly (Schugurensky, 2009; Anyon, 1980; Oakes, 1985; Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

When people encourage you, it affects the way you see yourself and your potential. Seek encouragement for your writing and speaking. Actively choose positive reinforcement as you develop your communication skills. You will make mistakes, but the important thing is to learn from them. Keep in mind that criticism should be constructive, with specific points you can address, correct, and improve.

The concept of a *self-fulfilling prophecy*, in which someone’s behavior comes to match and mirror others’ expectations, is not new. Robert Rosenthal, a professor of social psychology at Harvard, has observed four principles while studying this interaction between expectations and performance:

1. We form certain expectations of people or events.
2. We communicate those expectations with various cues, verbal and nonverbal.
3. People tend to respond to these cues by adjusting their behavior to match the expectations.
4. The outcome is that the original expectation becomes true.

KEY TAKEAWAY

You can become a more effective communicator by understanding yourself and how others view you: your attitudes, beliefs, and values; your self-concept; and how the self-fulfilling prophecy may influence your decisions.

EXERCISES

1. How would you describe yourself as a public speaker? Now, five, and ten years ago? Is your description the same or does it change across time? This business communication text and course can make a difference in what you might write for the category “one year from today.”
2. How does your self-concept influence your writing? Write a one- to two-page essay on this topic and discuss it with a classmate.
3. Make a list of at least three of your strongly held beliefs. What are those beliefs based on? List some facts, respected authorities, or other evidence that support them. Share your results with your class.
4. What are some of the values held by people you know? Identify a target sample size (twenty is a good number) and ask members of your family, friends, and peers about their values. Compare your results with those of your classmates.
5. Make a list of traits you share with your family members. Interview them and see if anyone else in your family has shared them. Share and compare with your classmates.
6. What does the field of psychology offer concerning the self-fulfilling prophecy? Investigate the topic and share your findings.

1.2: Elements of Culture

Values and Beliefs

The first, and perhaps most crucial, elements of culture we will discuss are its values and beliefs. Values are a culture's standard for discerning what is good and just in society. Values are deeply embedded and critical for transmitting and teaching a culture's beliefs. Beliefs are the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true. Individuals in a society have specific beliefs, but they also share collective values. To illustrate the difference, Americans commonly believe in the American Dream—that anyone who works hard enough will be successful and wealthy. Underlying this belief is the American value that wealth is good and important.

Values help shape a society by suggesting what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, sought or avoided. Consider the value that the United States places upon youth. Children represent innocence and purity, while a youthful adult appearance signifies sexuality. Shaped by this value, individuals spend millions of dollars each year on cosmetic products and surgeries to look young and beautiful. The United States also has an individualistic culture, meaning people place a high value on individuality and independence. In contrast, many other cultures are collectivist, meaning the welfare of the group and group relationships are a primary value.

Living up to a culture's values can be difficult. It's easy to value good health, but it's hard to quit smoking. Marital monogamy is valued, but many spouses engage in infidelity. Cultural diversity and equal opportunities for all people are valued in the United States, yet the country's highest political offices have been dominated by white men.

Values often suggest how people should behave, but they don't accurately reflect how people do behave. Values portray an ideal culture, the standards society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal culture differs from real culture, the way society actually is, based on what occurs and exists. In an ideal culture, there would be no traffic accidents, murders, poverty, or racial tension. But in real culture, police officers, lawmakers, educators, and social workers constantly strive to prevent or repair those accidents, crimes, and injustices. American teenagers are encouraged to value celibacy. However, the number of unplanned pregnancies among teens reveals that not only is the ideal hard to live up to, but the value alone is not enough to spare teenagers the potential consequences of having sex.

One way societies strive to put values into action is through rewards, sanctions, and punishments. When people observe the norms of society and uphold its values, they are often rewarded. A boy who helps an elderly woman board a bus may receive a smile and a "thank you." A business manager who raises profit margins may receive a quarterly bonus. People sanction certain behaviors by giving their support, approval, or permission, or by instilling formal actions of disapproval and nonsupport. Sanctions are a form of social control, a way to encourage conformity to cultural norms. Sometimes people conform to norms in anticipation or expectation of positive sanctions: good grades, for instance, may mean praise from parents and teachers. From a criminal justice perspective, properly used social control is also inexpensive crime control. Utilizing social control approaches pushes most people to conform to societal rules, regardless of whether authority figures (such as law enforcement) are present.

When people go against a society's values, they are punished. A boy who shoves an elderly woman aside to board the bus first may receive frowns or even a scolding from other passengers. A business manager who drives away customers will likely be fired. Breaking norms and rejecting values can lead to cultural sanctions such as earning a negative label—lazy, no-good bum—or to legal sanctions, such as traffic tickets, fines, or imprisonment.

Values are not static; they vary across time and between groups as people evaluate, debate, and change collective societal beliefs. Values also vary from culture to culture. For example, cultures differ in their values about what kinds of physical closeness are appropriate in public. It's rare to see two male friends or coworkers holding hands in the United States where that behavior often symbolizes romantic feelings. But in many nations, masculine physical intimacy is considered natural in public. This difference in cultural values came to light when people reacted to photos of former president George W. Bush holding hands with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in 2005. A simple gesture, such as hand-holding, carries great symbolic differences across cultures.



Figure 1.2.1: In many parts of Africa and the Middle East, it is considered normal for men to hold hands in friendship. How would Americans react to these two soldiers? (Photo courtesy of Georgie Mott/Wikimedia Commons)

Norms

So far, the examples in this chapter have often described how people are expected to behave in certain situations—for example, when buying food or boarding a bus. These examples describe the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured, or what sociologists call norms. Norms define how to behave in accordance with what a society has defined as good, right, and important, and most members of the society adhere to them.

Formal norms are established, written rules. They are behaviors worked out and agreed upon in order to suit and serve the most people. Laws are formal norms, but so are employee manuals, college entrance exam requirements, and “no running” signs at swimming pools. Formal norms are the most specific and clearly stated of the various types of norms, and they are the most strictly enforced. But even formal norms are enforced to varying degrees and are reflected in cultural values.

For example, money is highly valued in the United States, so monetary crimes are punished. It’s against the law to rob a bank, and banks go to great lengths to prevent such crimes. People safeguard valuable possessions and install antitheft devices to protect homes and cars. A less strictly enforced social norm is driving while intoxicated. While it’s against the law to drive drunk, drinking is for the most part an acceptable social behavior. And though there are laws to punish drunk driving, there are few systems in place to prevent the crime. These examples show a range of enforcement in formal norms.

There are plenty of formal norms, but the list of informal norms—casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to—is longer. People learn informal norms by observation, imitation, and general socialization. Some informal norms are taught directly—“Kiss your Aunt Edna” or “Use your napkin”—while others are learned by observation, including observations of the consequences when someone else violates a norm. But although informal norms define personal interactions, they extend into other systems as well. In the United States, there are informal norms regarding behavior at fast-food restaurants. Customers line up to order their food and leave when they are done. They don’t sit down at a table with strangers, sing loudly as they prepare their condiments, or nap in a booth. Most people don’t commit even benign breaches of informal norms. Informal norms dictate appropriate behaviors without the need for written rules.

SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Breaching Experiments

Sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1917–2011) studied people’s customs in order to find out how societal rules and norms not only influenced behavior but also shaped social order. He believed that members of society together create a social order (Weber 2011). His resulting book, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, published in 1967, discusses people’s assumptions about the social makeup of their communities.

One of Garfinkel's research methods was known as a “breaching experiment,” in which the researcher behaves in a socially awkward manner in order to test the sociological concepts of social norms and conformity. The participants are not aware an experiment is in progress. If the breach is successful, however, these “innocent bystanders” will respond in some way. For example, if the experimenter is, say, a man in a business suit, and he skips down the sidewalk or hops on one foot, the passersby are likely to stare at him with surprised expressions on their faces. But the experimenter does not simply “act weird” in public. Rather, the point is to deviate from a specific social norm in a small way, to subtly break some form of social etiquette, and see what happens.

To conduct his ethnomethodology, Garfinkel deliberately imposed strange behaviors on unknowing people. Then he observed their responses. He suspected that odd behaviors would shatter conventional expectations, but he wasn't sure how. For example, he set up a simple game of tic-tac-toe. One player was asked beforehand to mark Xs and Os not in the boxes but on the lines dividing the spaces instead. The other player, in the dark about the study, was flabbergasted and did not know how to continue. The second player's reactions of outrage, anger, puzzlement, or other emotions illustrated the existence of cultural norms that constitute social life. These cultural norms play an important role. They let us know how to behave around each other and how to feel comfortable in our community.

There are many rules about speaking with strangers in public. It's OK to tell a woman you like her shoes. It's not OK to ask if you can try them on. It's OK to stand in line behind someone at the ATM. It's not OK to look over his shoulder as he makes his transaction. It's OK to sit beside someone on a crowded bus. It's weird to sit beside a stranger on a half-empty bus.

For some breaches, the researcher directly engages with innocent bystanders. An experimenter might strike up a conversation in a public bathroom, where it's common to respect each other's privacy so fiercely as to ignore other people's presence. In a grocery store, an experimenter might take a food item out of another person's grocery cart, saying, “That looks good! I think I'll try it.” An experimenter might sit down at a table with others in a fast-food restaurant or follow someone around a museum and study the same paintings. In those cases, the bystanders are pressured to respond, and their discomfort illustrates how much we depend on social norms. Breaching experiments uncover and explore the many unwritten social rules we live by.

Norms may be further classified as either mores or folkways. Mores (mor-ays) are norms that embody the moral views and principles of a group. Violating them can have serious consequences. The strongest mores are legally protected with laws or other formal norms. In the United States, for instance, murder is considered immoral, and it's punishable by law (a formal norm). But more often, mores are judged and guarded by public sentiment (an informal norm). People who violate mores are seen as shameful. They can even be shunned or banned from some groups. The mores of the U.S. school system require that a student's writing be in the student's own words or use special forms (such as quotation marks and a whole system of citation) for crediting other writers. Writing another person's words as if they are one's own has a name—plagiarism. The consequences of violating this norm are severe and usually result in expulsion.

Unlike mores, folkways are norms without any moral underpinnings. Rather, folkways direct appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture. They indicate whether to shake hands or kiss on the cheek when greeting another person. They specify whether to wear a tie and blazer or a T-shirt and sandals to an event. In Canada, women can smile and say hello to men on the street. In Egypt, that's not acceptable. In regions in the southern United States, bumping into an acquaintance means stopping to chat. It's considered rude not to, no matter how busy one is. In other regions, people guard their privacy and value time efficiency. A simple nod of the head is enough. Other accepted folkways in the United States may include holding the door open for a stranger or giving someone a gift on their birthday. The rules regarding these folkways may change from culture to culture.

Many folkways are actions we take for granted. People need to act without thinking in order to get seamlessly through daily routines; they can't stop and analyze every action (Sumner 1906). Those who experience culture shock may find that it subsides as they learn the new culture's folkways and are able to move through their daily routines more smoothly. Folkways might be small manners, learned by observation and imitated, but they are by no means trivial. Like mores and laws, these norms help people negotiate their daily lives within a given culture.

Symbols and Language

Humans, consciously and subconsciously, are always striving to make sense of their surrounding world. Symbols—such as gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words—help people understand that world. They provide clues to understanding experiences by conveying recognizable meanings that are shared by societies.

The world is filled with symbols. Sports uniforms, company logos, and traffic signs are symbols. In some cultures, a gold ring is a symbol of marriage. Some symbols are highly functional; stop signs, for instance, provide useful instruction. As physical objects, they belong to material culture, but because they function as symbols, they also convey nonmaterial cultural meanings. Some symbols are valuable only in what they represent. Trophies, blue ribbons, or gold medals, for example, serve no other purpose than to represent accomplishments. But many objects have both material and nonmaterial symbolic value.

A police officer's badge and uniform are symbols of authority and law enforcement. The sight of an officer in uniform or a squad car triggers reassurance in some citizens, and annoyance, fear, or anger in others.

It's easy to take symbols for granted. Few people challenge or even think about stick figure signs on the doors of public bathrooms. But those figures are more than just symbols that tell men and women which bathrooms to use. They also uphold the value, in the United States, that public restrooms should be gender exclusive. Even though stalls are relatively private, most places don't offer unisex bathrooms.



Figure 1.2.2: Some road signs are universal. But how would you interpret the signage on the right? (Photo (a) courtesy of Andrew Bain/flickr; Photo (b) courtesy of HonzaSoukup/flickr)

Symbols often get noticed when they are out of context. Used unconventionally, they convey strong messages. A stop sign on the door of a corporation makes a political statement, as does a camouflage military jacket worn in an antiwar protest. Together, the semaphore signals for “N” and “D” represent nuclear disarmament—and form the well-known peace sign (Westcott 2008). Today, some college students have taken to wearing pajamas and bedroom slippers to class, clothing that was formerly associated only with privacy and bedtime. Though students might deny it, the outfit defies traditional cultural norms and makes a statement.

Even the destruction of symbols is symbolic. Effigies representing public figures are burned to demonstrate anger at certain leaders. In 1989, crowds tore down the Berlin Wall, a decades-old symbol of the division between East and West Germany, communism, and capitalism.

While different cultures have varying systems of symbols, one symbol is common to all: language. Language is a symbolic system through which people communicate and through which culture is transmitted. Some languages contain a system of symbols used for written communication, while others rely on only spoken communication and nonverbal actions.

Societies often share a single language, and many languages contain the same basic elements. An alphabet is a written system made of symbolic shapes that refer to spoken sound. Taken together, these symbols convey specific meanings. The English alphabet uses a combination of twenty-six letters to create words; these twenty-six letters make up over 600,000 recognized English words (OED Online 2011).

Rules for speaking and writing vary even within cultures, most notably by region. Do you refer to a can of carbonated liquid as “soda,” “pop,” or “Coke”? Is a household entertainment room a “family room,” “rec room,” or “den”? When leaving a restaurant, do you ask your server for a “check,” the “ticket,” or your “bill”?

Language is constantly evolving as societies create new ideas. In this age of technology, people have adapted almost instantly to new nouns such as “e-mail” and “Internet,” and verbs such as “downloading,” “texting,” and “blogging.” Twenty years ago, the general public would have considered these nonsense words.

Even while it constantly evolves, language continues to shape our reality. This insight was established in the 1920s by two linguists, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf. They believed that reality is culturally determined, and that any interpretation of reality is based on a society’s language. To prove this point, the sociologists argued that every language has words or expressions specific to that language. In the United States, for example, the number thirteen is associated with bad luck. In Japan, however, the number four is considered unlucky, since it is pronounced similarly to the Japanese word for “death.”

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is based on the idea that people experience their world through their language, and that they therefore understand their world through the culture embedded in their language. The hypothesis, which has also been called linguistic relativity, states that language shapes thought (Swoyer 2003). Studies have shown, for instance, that unless people have access to the word “ambivalent,” they don’t recognize an experience of uncertainty from having conflicting positive and negative feelings about one issue. Essentially, the hypothesis argues, if a person can’t describe the experience, the person is not having the experience.

In addition to using language, people communicate without words. Nonverbal communication is symbolic, and, as in the case of language, much of it is learned through one’s culture. Some gestures are nearly universal: smiles often represent joy, and crying often represents sadness. Other nonverbal symbols vary across cultural contexts in their meaning. A thumbs-up, for example, indicates positive reinforcement in the United States, whereas in Russia and Australia, it is an offensive curse (Passero 2002). Other gestures vary in meaning depending on the situation and the person. A wave of the hand can mean many things, depending on how it’s done and for whom. It may mean “hello,” “goodbye,” “no thank you,” or “I’m royalty.” Winks convey a variety of messages, including “We have a secret,” “I’m only kidding,” or “I’m attracted to you.” From a distance, a person can understand the emotional gist of two people in conversation just by watching their body language and facial expressions. Furrowed brows and folded arms indicate a serious topic, possibly an argument. Smiles, with heads lifted and arms open, suggest a lighthearted, friendly chat.

SOCIAL POLICY AND DEBATE

Is the United States Bilingual?

In 1991, when she was six years old, Lucy Alvarez attended a school that allowed for the use of both English and Spanish. Lucy’s teacher was bilingual, the librarian offered bilingual books, and many of the school staff spoke both Spanish and English. Lucy and many of her classmates who spoke only Spanish at home were lucky. According to the U.S. Census, 13.8 percent of U.S. residents speak a non-English language at home. That’s a significant figure, but not enough to ensure that Lucy would be encouraged to use her native language in school (Mount 2010).

Lucy’s parents, who moved to Texas from Mexico, struggled under the pressure to speak English. Lucy might easily have gotten lost and left behind if she’d felt the same pressure in school. In 2008, researchers from Johns Hopkins University conducted a series of studies on the effects of bilingual education (Slavin et al. 2008). They found that students taught in both their native tongue and English make better progress than those taught only in English.

Technically, the United States has no official language. But many believe English to be the rightful language of the United States, and over thirty states have passed laws specifying English as the official tongue. Proponents of English-only laws suggest that a national ruling will save money on translation, printing, and human resource costs, including funding for bilingual teachers. They argue that setting English as the official language will encourage non-English speakers to learn English faster and adapt to the culture of the United States more easily (Mount 2010).

Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) oppose making English the official language and claim that it violates the rights of non-English speakers. English-only laws, they believe, deny the reality of our nation’s diversity and unfairly target Latinos and Asians. They point to the fact that much of the debate on this topic has risen since 1970, a time when the United States experienced new waves of immigration from Asia and Mexico.

Today, a lot of product information gets written in multiple languages. Enter a store like Home Depot and you’ll find signs in both English and Spanish. Buy a children’s product, and the safety warnings could be presented in multiple languages. While marketers are financially motivated to reach the largest number of consumers possible, this trend also may help people acclimate to a culture of bilingualism.

Studies show that most U.S. immigrants eventually abandon their native tongues and become fluent in English. Bilingual education helps with that transition. Today, Lucy Alvarez is an ambitious and high-achieving college student. Fluent in both English and Spanish, Lucy is studying law enforcement—a field that seeks bilingual employees. The same bilingualism that contributed to her success in grade school will help her thrive professionally as a law officer serving her community.



Figure 1.2.3: Nowadays, many signs—on streets and in stores—include both English and Spanish. What effect does this have on members of society? What effect does it have on our culture? (Photo courtesy of istoletv/flickr)

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

Two mimes are shown making faces and performing on a street.

Figure 1.3.1: Who are we? What role do we play in society? According to sociologists, we construct reality through our interactions with others. In a way, our day-to-day interactions are like those of actors on a stage. (Photo courtesy of Jan Lewandowski/flickr)

In 1966 sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann wrote a book called *The Social Construction of Reality*. In it, they argued that society is created by humans and human interaction, which they call habituation. Habituation describes how “any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be ... performed again in the future in the same manner and with the same economical effort” (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Not only do we construct our own society but we also accept it as it is because others have created it before us. Society is, in fact, “habit.”

For example, your school exists as a school and not just as a building because you and others agree that it is a school. If your school is older than you are, it was created by the agreement of others before you. In a sense, it exists by consensus, both prior and current. This is an example of the process of institutionalization, the act of implanting a convention or norm into society. Bear in mind that the institution, while socially constructed, is still quite real.

Another way of looking at this concept is through W.I. Thomas's notable Thomas theorem which states, “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas 1928). That is, people's behavior can be determined by their subjective construction of reality rather than by objective reality. For example, a teenager who is repeatedly given a label—overachiever, player, bum—might live up to the term even though it initially wasn't a part of his character.

Like Berger and Luckmann in their description of habituation, Thomas states that our moral codes and social norms are created by “successive definitions of the situation.” This concept is defined by sociologist Robert K. Merton as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Merton explains that with a self-fulfilling prophecy, even a false idea can become true if it is acted upon. One example he gives is of a “bank run.” Say for some reason, a number of people falsely fear that their bank is soon to be bankrupt. Because of this false notion, people run to their bank and demand all of their cash at once. As banks rarely, if ever, have that much money on hand, the bank does indeed run out of money, fulfilling the customers' prophecy. Here, reality is constructed by an idea.

Symbolic interactionists offer another lens through which to analyze the social construction of reality. With a theoretical perspective focused on the symbols (like language, gestures, and artifacts) that people use to interact, this approach is interested in how people interpret those symbols in daily interactions. For example, we might feel fright at seeing a person holding a gun, unless, of course, it turns out to be a police officer. Interactionists also recognize that language and body language reflect our values. One has only to learn a foreign tongue to know that not every English word can be easily translated into another language. The same is true for gestures. While Americans might recognize a “thumbs up” as meaning “great,” in Germany it would mean “one” and in Japan it would mean “five.” Thus, our construction of reality is influenced by our symbolic interactions.

Painting depicting Oedipus and three other ancient Greek figures.

Figure 1.3.2: The storyline of a self-fulfilling prophecy appears in many literary works, perhaps most famously in the story of Oedipus. Oedipus is told by an oracle that he will murder his father and marry his mother. In going out of his way to avoid his fate, Oedipus inadvertently fulfills it. Oedipus's story illustrates one way in which members of society contribute to the social construction of reality. (Photo courtesy of Jean-Antoine-Theodore Giroust/Wikimedia Commons)

Roles and Status

As you can imagine, people employ many types of behaviors in day-to-day life. Roles are patterns of behavior that we recognize in each other that are representative of a person's social status. Currently, while reading this text, you are playing the role of a student. However, you also play other roles in your life, such as “daughter,” “neighbor,” or “employee.” These various roles are each associated with a different status.

Sociologists use the term status to describe the responsibilities and benefits that a person experiences according to their rank and role in society. Some statuses are ascribed—those you do not select, such as son, elderly person, or female. Others, called achieved statuses, are obtained by choice, such as a high school dropout, self-made millionaire, or nurse. As a daughter or son, you occupy a different status than as a neighbor or employee. One person can be associated with a multitude of roles and statuses. Even a single status such as “student” has a complex role-set, or array of roles, attached to it (Merton 1957).

If too much is required of a single role, individuals can experience role strain. Consider the duties of a parent: cooking, cleaning, driving, problem-solving, acting as a source of moral guidance—the list goes on. Similarly, a person can experience role conflict when one or more roles are contradictory. A parent who also has a full-time career can experience role conflict on a daily basis. When there is a deadline at the office but a sick child needs to be picked up from school, which comes first? When you are working toward a promotion but your children want you to come to their school play, which do you choose? Being a college student can conflict with being an employee, being an athlete, or even being a friend. Our roles in life have a great effect on our decisions and who we become.

Presentation of Self

Of course, it is impossible to look inside a person's head and study what role they are playing. All we can observe is behavior, or role performance. Role performance is how a person expresses his or her role. Sociologist Erving Goffman presented the idea that a person is like an actor on a stage. Calling his theory dramaturgy, Goffman believed that we use “impression management” to present ourselves to others as we hope to be perceived. Each situation is a new scene, and individuals perform different roles depending on who is present (Goffman 1959). Think about the way you behave around your coworkers versus the way you behave around your grandparents versus the way you behave with a blind date. Even if you're not consciously trying to alter your personality, your grandparents, coworkers, and date probably see different sides of you.

As in a play, the setting matters as well. If you have a group of friends over to your house for dinner, you are playing the role of a host. It is agreed upon that you will provide food and seating and probably be stuck with a lot of the cleanup at the end of the night. Similarly, your friends are playing the roles of guests, and they are expected to respect your property and any rules you may set forth (“Don’t leave the door open or the cat will get out.”). In any scene, there needs to be a shared reality between players. In this case, if you view yourself as a guest and others view you as a host, there are likely to be problems.

Impression management is a critical component of symbolic interactionism. For example, a judge in a courtroom has many “props” to create an impression of fairness, gravity, and control—like her robe and gavel. Those entering the courtroom are expected to adhere to the scene being set. Just imagine the “impression” that can be made by how a person dresses. This is the reason that attorneys frequently select the hairstyle and apparel for witnesses and defendants in courtroom proceedings.

A photo of a statue of Janus

Figure 1.3.3: Janus, another possible “prop”, depicted with two heads, exemplifies war and peace. (Photo courtesy of Fubar Obfusco/Wikimedia Commons)

Goffman's dramaturgy ideas expand on the ideas of Charles Cooley and the looking-glass self. According to Cooley, we base our image on what we think other people see (Cooley 1902). We imagine how we must appear to others, then react to this speculation. We don certain clothes, prepare our hair in a particular manner, wear makeup, use cologne, and the like—all with the notion that our presentation of ourselves is going to affect how others perceive us. We expect a certain reaction, and, if lucky, we get the one we desire and feel good about it. But more than that, Cooley believed that our sense of self is based upon this idea: we imagine how we look to others, draw conclusions based upon their reactions to us, and then we develop our personal sense of self. In other words, people's reactions to us are like a mirror in which we are reflected.

1.4: Social Categorization and Stereotyping

Learning Objectives

- Describe the fundamental process of social categorization and its influence on thoughts, feelings, and behavior.
- Define *stereotypes* and describe the ways that stereotypes are measured.
- Review the ways that stereotypes influence our behavior.

Thinking about others in terms of their group memberships is known as **social categorization**—*the natural cognitive process by which we place individuals into social groups*. Social categorization occurs when we think of someone as a man (versus a woman), an old person (versus a young person), a Black person (versus an Asian or White person), and so on (Allport, 1954/1979). Just as we categorize objects into different types, so do we categorize people according to their social group memberships. Once we do so, we begin to respond to those people more as members of a social group than as individuals.

Imagine for a moment that two college students, Farhad and Sarah, are talking at a table in the student union at your college or university. At this point, we would probably not consider them to be acting as group members, but rather as two individuals. Farhad is expressing his opinions, and Sarah is expressing hers. Imagine, however, that as the conversation continues, Sarah brings up an assignment that she is completing for her women's studies class. It turns out that Farhad does not think there should be a women's studies program at the college, and he tells Sarah so. He argues that if there is a women's studies program, then there should be a men's studies program too. Furthermore, he argues that women are getting too many breaks in job hiring and that qualified men are the targets of discrimination. Sarah feels quite the contrary—arguing that women have been the targets of sexism for many, many years and even now do not have the same access to high-paying jobs that men do.

You can see that an interaction that began at individual level, as two individuals conversing, has now turned to the group level, in which Farhad has begun to consider himself as a man, and Sarah has begun to consider herself as a woman. In short, Sarah is now arguing her points not so much for herself as she is as a representative of one of her ingroups—namely, women—and Farhad is acting as a representative of one of his ingroups—namely, men. Sarah feels that her positions are correct, and she believes they are true not only for her but for women in general. And the same is true of Farhad. You can see that these social categorizations may create some potential for misperception, and perhaps even hostility. And Farhad and Sarah may even change their opinions about each other, forgetting that they really like each other as individuals, because they are now responding more as group members with opposing views.

Imagine now that while Farhad and Sarah are still talking, some students from another college, each wearing the hats and jackets of that school, show up in the student union. The presence of these outsiders might change the direction of social categorization entirely, leading both Farhad and Sarah to think of themselves as students at their own college. And this social categorization might lead them to become more aware of the positive characteristics of their college (the excellent rugby team, lovely campus, and intelligent students) in comparison with the characteristics of the other school. Now, rather than perceiving themselves as members of two different groups (men versus women), Farhad and Sarah might suddenly perceive themselves as members of the same social category (students at their college).

Perhaps this example will help you see the flexibility of social categorization. We sometimes think of our relationships with others at the individual level and sometimes at the group level. And which groups we use in social categorization can change over time and in different situations. You are more likely to categorize yourself as a member of your college or university when your rugby or football team has just won a really important game, or at your graduation ceremony, than you would on a normal evening out with your family. In these cases, your membership as a university student is simply more salient and important than it is every day, and you are more likely to categorize yourself accordingly.

Spontaneous Social Categorization

Social categorization occurs spontaneously, without much thought on our part (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007). Shelley Taylor and her colleagues (Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978) showed their research participants a slide and tape presentation of three male and three female college students who had supposedly participated in a discussion group. During the presentation, each member of the discussion group made a suggestion about how to advertise a college play. The statements were controlled so that across all the research participants, the statements made by the men and the women were of equal length and quality.

Furthermore, one half of the participants were told that when the presentation was over, they would be asked to remember which person had made which suggestion, whereas the other half of the participants were told merely to observe the interaction without attending to anything in particular.

After they had viewed all the statements made by the individuals in the discussion group, the research participants were given a memory test (this was entirely unexpected for the participants who had not been given memory instructions). The participants were shown the list of all the statements that had been made, along with the pictures of each of the discussion group members, and were asked to indicate who had made each of the statements. The research participants were not very good at this task, and yet when they made mistakes, these errors were very systematic.

As you can see in Table 1.4.1, “Name Confusions,” the mistakes were such that the statements that had actually been made by a man were more frequently wrongly attributed to another man in the group than to another woman, and the statements actually made by a woman were more frequently attributed to other women in the group than to a man. The participants evidently categorized the speakers by their gender, leading them to make more within-gender than across-gender confusions.

Interestingly, and suggesting that categorization is occurring all the time, the instructions that the participants had been given made absolutely no difference. There was just as much categorization for those who were not given any instructions as for those who were told to remember who said what. Other research using this technique has found that we spontaneously categorize each other on the basis of many other group memberships, including race, academic status (student versus teacher), social roles, and other social categories (Fiske, Haslam, & Fiske, 1991; Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992).

Table 1.4.1 Name Confusions

Instructions	Within race errors	Between race errors
Memory	5.78	4.29
No memory	6.57	4.36

Taylor, S. E., Fiske, S. T., Etcoff, N. L., & Ruderman, A. J. (1978). Categorical and contextual bases of person memory and stereotyping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36 (7), 778–793. demonstrated that people categorized others spontaneously. Even without any instructions to categorize, people nevertheless confused others by their sex.

The conclusion is simple, if perhaps obvious: Social categorization is occurring all around us all the time. Indeed, social categorization occurs so quickly that people may have difficulty *not* thinking about others in terms of their group memberships (see Figure 1.4.1).



Figure 1.4.1: If you are like most people, you will have a strong desire to categorize this person as either male or female. Source: Chillin by Sabrina C (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/cloud10/59798751/>) used under CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)

The Benefits of Social Categorization

The tendency to categorize others is often quite useful. In some cases, we categorize because doing so provides us with information about the characteristics of people who belong to certain social groups (Lee, Jussim, & McCauley, 1995). If you found yourself lost in a city, you might look for a police officer or a taxi driver to help you find your way. In this case, social categorization would probably be useful because a police officer or a taxi driver might be particularly likely to know the layout of the city streets. Of course, using social categories will only be informative to the extent that the stereotypes held by the individual about that category are accurate. If police officers were actually not that knowledgeable about the city layout, then using this categorization heuristic would not be informative.

The description of social categorization as a heuristic is also true in another sense: we sometimes categorize others not because it seems to provide more information about them but because we may not have the time (or the motivation) to do anything more thorough. Using our stereotypes to size up another person might simply make our life easier (Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994). According to this approach, thinking about other people in terms of their social category memberships is a functional way of dealing with the world—things are complicated, and we reduce complexity by relying on our stereotypes.

The Negative Outcomes of Social Categorization

Although thinking about others in terms of their social category memberships has some potential benefits for the person who does the categorizing, categorizing others, rather than treating them as unique individuals with their own unique characteristics, has a wide variety of negative, and often very unfair, outcomes for those who are categorized.

One problem is that social categorization distorts our perceptions such that we tend to exaggerate the differences between people from different social groups while at the same time perceiving members of groups (and particularly outgroups) as more similar to each other than they actually are. This overgeneralization makes it more likely that we will think about and treat all members of a group the same way. Tajfel and Wilkes (1963) performed a simple experiment that provided a picture of the potential outcomes of categorization. As you can see in Figure 1.4.2, “Perceptual Accentuation,” the experiment involved having research participants judge the length of six lines. In one of the experimental conditions, participants simply saw six lines, whereas in the other condition, the lines were systematically categorized into two groups—one comprising the three shorter lines and one comprising the three longer lines.

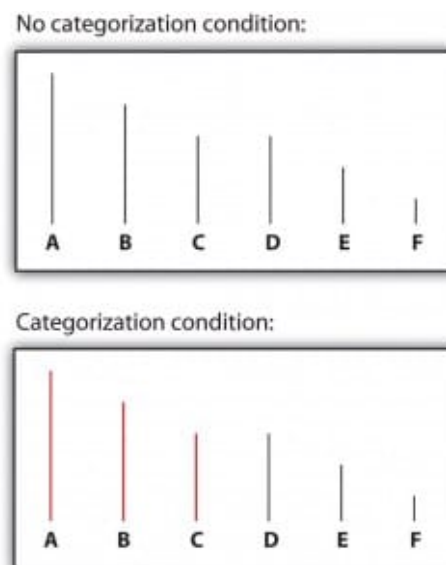


Figure 1.4.2: Perceptual Accentuation

Lines C and D were seen as the same length in the noncategorized condition, but line C was perceived as longer than line D when the lines were categorized into two groups. From Tajfel (1970).

Tajfel found that the lines were perceived differently when they were categorized, such that the differences between the groups and the similarities within the groups were emphasized. Specifically, he found that although lines C and D (which are actually the

same length) were perceived as equal in length when the lines were not categorized, line D was perceived as being significantly longer than line C in the condition in which the lines were categorized. In this case, categorization into two groups—the “short lines group” and the “long lines group”—produced a perceptual bias such that the two groups of lines were seen as more different than they really were.

Similar effects occur when we categorize other people. We tend to see people who belong to the same social group as more similar than they actually are, and we tend to judge people from different social groups as more different than they actually are. The tendency to see members of social groups as similar to each other is particularly strong for members of outgroups, resulting in **outgroup homogeneity**—the tendency to view members of outgroups as more similar to each other than we see members of ingroups (Linville, Salovey, & Fischer, 1986; Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992; Meissner & Brigham, 2001). Perhaps you have had this experience yourself when you found yourself thinking or saying, “Oh, them, they’re all the same!”

Patricia Linville and Edward Jones (1980) gave research participants a list of trait terms and asked them to think about either members of their own group (e.g., Blacks) or members of another group (e.g., Whites) and to place the trait terms into piles that represented different types of people in the group. The results of these studies, as well as other studies like them, were clear: people perceive outgroups as more homogeneous than their ingroup. Just as White people used fewer piles of traits to describe Blacks than Whites, young people used fewer piles of traits to describe elderly people than they did young people, and students used fewer piles for members of other universities than they did for members of their own university.

Outgroup homogeneity occurs in part because we don’t have as much contact with outgroup members as we do with ingroup members, and the quality of interaction with outgroup members is often more superficial. This prevents us from really learning about the outgroup members as individuals, and as a result, we tend to be unaware of the differences among the group members. In addition to learning less about them because we see and interact with them less, we routinely categorize outgroup members, thus making them appear more cognitively similar (Haslam, Oakes, & Turner, 1996).

Once we begin to see the members of outgroups as more similar to each other than they actually are, it then becomes very easy to apply our stereotypes to the members of the groups without having to consider whether the characteristic is actually true of the particular individual. If men think that women are all alike, then they may also think that they all have the same positive and negative characteristics (e.g., they’re nurturing, emotional). And women may have similarly simplified beliefs about men (e.g., they’re strong, unwilling to commit). The outcome is that the stereotypes become linked to the group itself in a set of mental representations (Figure 1.4.3). The stereotypes are “pictures in our heads” of the social groups (Lippman, 1922). These beliefs just seem right and natural, even though they are frequently distorted overgeneralizations (Hirschfeld, 1996; Yzerbyt, Schadron, Leyens, & Rocher, 1994).



Figure 1.4.3: Stereotypes. Stereotypes are the beliefs associated with social categories. The figure shows links between the social category of college professors and its stereotypes as a type of neural network or schema. The representation also includes one image (or exemplar) of a particular college professor whom the student knows. Image courtesy of Dan Gilbert.

Our stereotypes and prejudices are learned through many different processes. This multiplicity of causes is unfortunate because it makes stereotypes and prejudices even more likely to form and harder to change. For one, we learn our stereotypes in part through our communications with parents and peers (Aboud & Doyle, 1996) and from the behaviors we see portrayed in the media (Brown, 1995). Even five-year-old children have learned cultural norms about the appropriate activities and behaviors for boys and girls and also have developed stereotypes about age, race, and physical attractiveness (Bigler & Liben, 2006). And there is often good agreement about the stereotypes of social categories among the individuals within a given culture. In one study assessing stereotypes, Stephanie Madon and her colleagues (Madon et al., 2001) presented U.S. college students with a list of 84 trait terms and asked them to indicate for which groups each trait seemed appropriate (Figure 1.4.4, “Current Stereotypes Held by College

Students”). The participants tended to agree about what traits were true of which groups, and this was true even for groups of which the respondents were likely to never have met a single member (Arabs and Russians). Even today, there is good agreement about the stereotypes of members of many social groups, including men and women and a variety of ethnic groups.

Americans		Blacks		Italians	
	%		%		%
Materialistic	53.6	Musical	27.6	Loyal to family ties	62.7
Lazy	30.4	Pleasure loving	26	Tradition loving	47.5
Individualistic	28.6	Loud	20.7	Passionate	39
Pleasure loving	28	Aggressive	15.5	Religious	37.3
Industrious	23.2	Artistic	13.8	Quick tempered	35.6

Germans		Jews		Chinese	
	%		%		%
Intelligent	45.8	Very religious	52.5	Intelligent	60.3
Industrious	37.3	Intelligent	49.2	Loyal to family ties	41.4
Nationalistic	30.5	Tradition loving	32.2	Reserved	36.2
Scientifically minded	27.1	Shrewd	30.5	Industrious	32.8
Methodical	20.3	Loyal to family ties	26.8	Tradition loving	31

Figure 1.4.4: Current Stereotypes Held by College Students, from Madon et al. (2001).

Once they become established, stereotypes (like any other cognitive representation) tend to persevere. We begin to respond to members of stereotyped categories as if we already knew what they were like. Yaacov Trope and Eric Thompson (1997) found that individuals addressed fewer questions to members of categories about which they had strong stereotypes (as if they already knew what these people were like) and that the questions they did ask were likely to confirm the stereotypes they already had.

In other cases, stereotypes are maintained because information that confirms our stereotypes is better remembered than information that disconfirms them. When we see members of social groups perform behaviors, we tend to better remember information that confirms our stereotypes than we remember information that disconfirms our stereotypes (Fyock & Stangor, 1994). If we believe that women are bad drivers and we see a woman driving poorly, then we tend to remember it, but when we see a woman who drives particularly well, we tend to forget it. This illusory correlation is another example of the general principle of assimilation—we tend to perceive the world in ways that make it fit our existing beliefs more easily than we change our beliefs to fit the reality around us.

And stereotypes become difficult to change because they are so important to us—they become an integral and important part of our everyday lives in our culture. Stereotypes are frequently expressed on TV, in movies, and in social media, and we learn a lot of our beliefs from these sources. Our friends also tend to hold beliefs similar to ours, and we talk about these beliefs when we get together with them (Schaller & Conway, 1999). In short, stereotypes and prejudice are powerful largely because they are important social norms that are part of our culture (Guimond, 2000).

Because they are so highly cognitively accessible, and because they seem so “right,” our stereotypes easily influence our judgments of and responses to those we have categorized. The social psychologist John Bargh once described stereotypes as “cognitive monsters” because their activation was so powerful and because the activated beliefs had such insidious influences on social judgment (Bargh, 1999). Making things even more difficult, stereotypes are strongest for the people who are in most need of change—the people who are most prejudiced (Lepore & Brown, 1997).

Because stereotypes and prejudice often operate out of our awareness, and also because people are frequently unwilling to admit that they hold them, social psychologists have developed methods for assessing them indirectly. In the Research Focus box following, we will consider two of these approaches—the bogus pipeline procedure and the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

RESEARCH FOCUS

Measuring Stereotypes Indirectly

One difficulty in measuring stereotypes and prejudice is that people may not tell the truth about their beliefs. Most people do not want to admit—either to themselves or to others—that they hold stereotypes or that they are prejudiced toward some social groups. To get around this problem, social psychologists make use of a number of techniques that help them measure these beliefs more subtly and indirectly.

One indirect approach to assessing prejudice is called the **bogus pipeline procedure** (Jones & Sigall, 1971). *In this procedure, the experimenter first convinces the participants that he or she has access to their “true” beliefs, for instance, by getting access to a questionnaire that they completed at a prior experimental session.* Once the participants are convinced that the researcher is able to assess their “true” attitudes, it is expected that they will be more honest in answering the rest of the questions they are asked because they want to be sure that the researcher does not catch them lying. Interestingly, people express more prejudice when they are in the bogus pipeline than they do when they are asked the same questions more directly, which suggests that we may frequently mask our negative beliefs in public.

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

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

The most popular reaction-time implicit measure of prejudice—the **Implicit Association Test (IAT)**—is *frequently used to assess stereotypes and prejudice* (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2007). *In the IAT, participants are asked to classify stimuli that they view on a computer screen into one of two categories by pressing one of two computer keys, one with their left hand and one with their right hand.* Furthermore, the categories are arranged so that the responses to be answered with the left and right buttons either “fit with” (match) the stereotype or do not “fit with” (mismatch) the stereotype. For instance, in one version of the IAT, participants are shown pictures of men and women and are also shown words related to academic disciplines (e.g., *History, French, or Linguistics* for the Arts, or *Chemistry, Physics, or Math* for the Sciences). Then the participants categorize the photos (“Is this picture a picture of a man or a woman?”) and answer questions about the disciplines (“Is this discipline a *science*?”) by pressing either the Yes button or the No button using either their left hand or their right hand.

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

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

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

Do you hold implicit prejudices? Try the IAT yourself, here: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit>

Although in some cases the stereotypes that are used to make judgments might actually be true of the individual being judged,

in many other cases they are not. Stereotyping is problematic when the stereotypes we hold about a social group are inaccurate overall, and particularly when they do not apply to the individual who is being judged (Stangor, 1995). Stereotyping others is simply unfair. Even if many women are more emotional than are most men, not all are, and it is not right to judge any one woman as if she is.

In the end, stereotypes become self-fulfilling prophecies, such that our expectations about the group members make the stereotypes come true (Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). Once we believe that men make better leaders than women, we tend to behave toward men in ways that makes it easier for them to lead. And we behave toward women in ways that makes it more difficult for them to lead. The result? Men find it easier to excel in leadership positions, whereas women have to work hard to overcome the false beliefs about their lack of leadership abilities (Phelan & Rudman, 2010). This is likely why female lawyers with masculine names are more likely to become judges (Coffey & McLaughlin, 2009) and masculine-looking applicants are more likely to be hired as leaders than feminine-looking applicants (von Stockhausen, Koeser, & Sczesny, 2013).

These self-fulfilling prophecies are ubiquitous—even teachers' expectations about their students' academic abilities can influence the students' school performance (Jussim, Robustelli, & Cain, 2009).

Of course, you may think that you personally do not behave in these ways, and you may not. But research has found that stereotypes are often used out of our awareness, which makes it very difficult for us to correct for them. Even when we think we are being completely fair, we may nevertheless be using our stereotypes to condone discrimination (Chen & Bargh, 1999). And when we are distracted or under time pressure, these tendencies become even more powerful (Stangor & Duan, 1991).

Furthermore, attempting to prevent our stereotype from coloring our reactions to others takes effort. We experience more negative affect (particularly anxiety) when we are with members of other groups than we do when we are with people from our own groups, and we need to use more cognitive resources to control our behavior because of our anxiety about revealing our stereotypes or prejudices (Butz & Plant, 2006; Richeson & Shelton, 2003). When we know that we need to control our expectations so that we do not unintentionally stereotype the other person, we may try to do so—but doing so takes effort and may frequently fail (Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994).

Social Psychology in the Public Interest

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

One of the long-standing puzzles in the area of academic performance concerns why Black students in the United States perform more poorly on standardized tests, receive lower grades, and are less likely to remain in school in comparison with White students, even when other factors such as family income, parents' education, and other relevant variables are controlled. Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995) tested the hypothesis that these differences might be due to the activation of negative stereotypes. Because Black students are aware of the (inaccurate) stereotype that “Blacks are intellectually inferior to Whites,” this stereotype might create a negative expectation, which might interfere with their performance on intellectual tests through fear of confirming that stereotype.

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

Steele and Aronson argued that thinking about negative stereotypes that are relevant to a task that one is performing creates **stereotype threat**—*performance decrements that are caused by the knowledge of cultural stereotypes*. That is, they argued that the negative impact of race on standardized tests may be caused, at least in part, by the performance situation itself. Because the threat is “in the air,” Black students may be negatively influenced by it.

Research has found that the experience of stereotype threat can help explain a wide variety of performance decrements among those who are targeted by negative stereotypes. For instance, when a math task is described as diagnostic of intelligence, Latinos and particularly Latinas perform more poorly than do Whites (Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002). Similarly, when stereotypes are activated, children with low socioeconomic status perform more poorly in math than do those with high socioeconomic status, and psychology students perform more poorly than do natural science students (Brown, Croizet, Bohnner, Fournet, & Payne, 2003). Even groups who typically enjoy advantaged social status can be made to experience stereotype threat. White men performed more poorly on a math test when they were told that their performance would be compared with that of Asian men (Aronson, Lustina, Good, Keough, & Steele, 1999), and Whites performed more poorly than Blacks on a sport-related task when it was described to them as measuring their natural athletic ability (Stone, 2002).

Stereotype threat is created in situations that pose a significant threat to self-concern, such that our perceptions of ourselves as important, valuable, and capable individuals are threatened. In these situations, there is a discrepancy between our positive concept of our skills and abilities and the negative stereotypes suggesting poor performance. When our stereotypes lead us to believe that we are likely to perform poorly on a task, we experience a feeling of unease and status threat.

Research has found that stereotype threat is caused by both cognitive and affective factors. On the cognitive side, individuals who are experiencing stereotype threat show an impairment in cognitive processing that is caused by increased vigilance toward the environment and attempts to suppress their stereotypical thoughts. On the affective side, stereotype threat creates stress as well as a variety of affective responses including anxiety (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008).

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

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Beliefs about the characteristics of the groups and the members of those groups are known as stereotypes.
- Prejudice refers to an unjustifiable negative attitude toward an outgroup.
- Stereotypes and prejudice may create discrimination.
- Stereotyping and prejudice begin from social categorization—the natural cognitive process by which we place individuals into social groups.
- Social categorization influences our perceptions of groups—for instance, the perception of outgroup homogeneity.
- Once our stereotypes and prejudices become established, they are difficult to change and may lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, such that our expectations about the group members make the stereotypes come true.
- Stereotypes may influence our performance on important tasks through stereotype threat.

EXERCISES AND CRITICAL THINKING

1. Visit the website <http://www.understandingprejudice.org/drawline/> and take one of the two interviews listed on the page.
2. Think of a task that one of the social groups to which you belong is considered to be particularly good or poor at. Do you think the cultural stereotypes about your group have ever influenced your performance on a task?

2: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

- 2.1: Foundations of Culture and Identity
- 2.2: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities
- 2.3: Cross-Cultural Teaching - Values
- 2.4: Intercultural Communication
- 2.5: Intercultural Communication Competence

2.1: Foundations of Culture and Identity

Learning Objectives

- Define culture.
- Define personal, social, and cultural identities.
- Summarize nondominant and dominant identity development.
- Explain why difference matters in the study of culture and identity.

Culture is a complicated word to define, as there are at least six common ways that culture is used in the United States. For the purposes of exploring the communicative aspects of culture, we will define culture as the ongoing negotiation of learned and patterned beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors. Unpacking the definition, we can see that culture shouldn't be conceptualized as stable and unchanging. Culture is "negotiated," and as we will learn later in this chapter, culture is dynamic, and cultural changes can be traced and analyzed to better understand why our society is the way it is. The definition also points out that culture is learned, which accounts for the importance of socializing institutions like family, school, peers, and the media. Culture is patterned in that there are recognizable widespread similarities among people within a cultural group. There is also deviation from and resistance to those patterns by individuals and subgroups within a culture, which is why cultural patterns change over time. Last, the definition acknowledges that culture influences our beliefs about what is true and false, our attitudes including our likes and dislikes, our values regarding what is right and wrong, and our behaviors. It is from these cultural influences that our identities are formed.

Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

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

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



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

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

Table 2.1.1: *Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities*

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

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

Any of these identity types can be ascribed or avowed. Ascribed identities are personal, social, or cultural identities that are

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

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

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

Identity Development

There are multiple models for examining identity development. Given our focus on how difference matters, we will examine similarities and differences in nondominant and dominant identity formation. While the stages in this model help us understand how many people experience their identities, identity development is complex, and there may be variations. We must also remember that people have multiple identities that intersect with each other. So, as you read, think about how circumstances may be different for an individual with multiple nondominant and/or dominant identities.

Nondominant Identity Development

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

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

may try to “act straight.” In either case, some people move to the next stage, resistance and separation, when they realize that despite their efforts they are still perceived as different by and not included in the dominant group.

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



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

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

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

Dominant Identity Development

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

In the acceptance stage, a person with a dominant identity passively or actively accepts that some people are treated differently than others but doesn’t do anything internally or externally to address it. In the passive acceptance stage, we must be cautious not to blame individuals with dominant identities for internalizing racist, sexist, or heterosexist “norms.” The socializing institutions we discussed earlier (family, peers, media, religion, and education) often make oppression seem normal and natural. For example, I have had students who struggle to see that they are in this stage say things like “I know that racism exists, but my parents

taught me to be a good person and see everyone as equal.” While this is admirable, seeing everyone as equal doesn’t make it so. And people who insist that we are all equal may claim that minorities are exaggerating their circumstances or “whining” and just need to “work harder” or “get over it.” The person making these statements acknowledges difference but doesn’t see their privilege or the institutional perpetuation of various “-isms.” Although I’ve encountered many more people in the passive state of acceptance than the active state, some may progress to an active state where they acknowledge inequality and are proud to be in the “superior” group. In either case, many people never progress from this stage. If they do, it’s usually because of repeated encounters with individuals or situations that challenge their acceptance of the status quo, such as befriending someone from a nondominant group or taking a course related to culture.

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

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

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

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



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

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

Difference Matters

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

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

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

"GETTING REAL": DIVERSITY TRAINING

Businesses in the United States spend \$200 to \$300 million a year on diversity training, but is it effective? (Vedantam, 2008) If diversity training is conducted to advance a company's business goals and out of an understanding of the advantages that a diversity of background and thought offer a company, then the training is more likely to be successful. Many companies conduct mandatory diversity training based on a belief that they will be in a better position in court if a lawsuit is brought against them. However, research shows that training that is mandatory and undertaken only to educate people about the legal implications of diversity is ineffective and may even hurt diversity efforts. A commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace environment must include a multipronged approach. Experts recommend that a company put a staff person in charge of diversity efforts, and some businesses have gone as far as appointing a "chief diversity officer" (Cullen, 2007). The US Office of Personnel Management offers many good guidelines for conducting diversity training: create learning objectives related to the mission of the organization, use tested and appropriate training methods and materials, provide information about course content and expectations to employees ahead of training, provide the training in a supportive and noncoercive environment, use only experienced and qualified instructors, and monitor/evaluate training and revise as needed (US Office of Personnel Management, 2011). With these suggestions in mind, the increasingly common "real-world" event of diversity training is more likely to succeed.

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

We can now see that difference matters due to the inequalities that exist among cultural groups and due to changing

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

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

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Culture is an ongoing negotiation of learned patterns of beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors.
- Each of us has personal, social, and cultural identities.
 - Personal identities are components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connect to our individual interests and life experiences.
 - Social identities are components of self that are derived from our involvement in social groups to which we are interpersonally invested.
 - Cultural identities are components of self based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for our thoughts and behaviors.
- Nondominant identity formation may include a person moving from unawareness of the importance of their identities, to adopting the values of dominant society, to separating from dominant society, to integrating components of identities.
- Dominant identity formation may include a person moving from unawareness of their identities, to accepting the identity hierarchy, to separation from and guilt regarding the dominant group, to redefining and integrating components of identities.
- Difference matters because people are treated differently based on their identities and demographics and patterns of interaction are changing. Knowing why and how this came to be and how to navigate our increasingly diverse society can make us more competent communicators.

EXERCISES

1. List some of your personal, social, and cultural identities. Are there any that relate? If so, how? For your cultural identities, which ones are dominant and which ones are nondominant? What would a person who looked at this list be able to tell about you?
2. Describe a situation in which someone ascribed an identity to you that didn't match with your avowed identities. Why do you think the person ascribed the identity to you? Were there any stereotypes involved?
3. Getting integrated: Review the section that explains why difference matters. Discuss the ways in which difference may influence how you communicate in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, and personal.

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2.2: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

Learning Objectives

- Define the social constructionist view of culture and identity.
- Trace the historical development and construction of the four cultural identities discussed.
- Discuss how each of the four cultural identities discussed affects and/or relates to communication.

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

Race

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



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

Race didn't become a socially and culturally recognized marker until European colonial expansion in the 1500s. As Western Europeans traveled to parts of the world previously unknown to them and encountered people who were different from them, a hierarchy of races began to develop that placed lighter-skinned Europeans above darker-skinned people. At the time, newly developing fields in natural and biological sciences took interest in examining the new locales, including the plant and animal life, natural resources, and native populations. Over the next three hundred years, science that we would now undoubtedly recognize as flawed, biased, and racist legitimated notions that native populations were less evolved than white Europeans, often calling

them savages. In fact, there were scientific debates as to whether some of the native populations should be considered human or animal. Racial distinctions have been based largely on phenotypes, or physiological features such as skin color, hair texture, and body/facial features. Western “scientists” used these differences as “proof” that native populations were less evolved than the Europeans, which helped justify colonial expansion, enslavement, genocide, and exploitation on massive scales (Allen, 2011). Even though there is a consensus among experts that race is social rather than biological, we can’t deny that race still has meaning in our society and affects people as if it were “real.”

Given that race is one of the first things we notice about someone, it’s important to know how race and communication relate (Allen, 2011). Discussing race in the United States is difficult for many reasons. One is due to uncertainty about language use. People may be frustrated by their perception that labels change too often or be afraid of using an “improper” term and being viewed as racially insensitive. It is important, however, that we not let political correctness get in the way of meaningful dialogues and learning opportunities related to difference. Learning some of the communicative history of race can make us more competent communicators and open us up to more learning experiences.

Racial classifications used by the government and our regular communication about race in the United States have changed frequently, which further points to the social construction of race. Currently, the primary racial groups in the United States are African American, Asian American, European American, Latino/a, and Native American, but a brief look at changes in how the US Census Bureau has defined race clearly shows that this hasn’t always been the case (Table 2.2.1). In the 1900s alone, there were twenty-six different ways that race was categorized on census forms (Allen, 2011). The way we communicate about race in our regular interactions has also changed, and many people are still hesitant to discuss race for fear of using “the wrong” vocabulary.

Table 2.2.1: *Racial Classifications in the US Census*

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

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

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

History and personal preference also influence how we communicate about race. Culture and communication scholar Brenda Allen notes that when she was born in 1950, her birth certificate included an *N* for Negro. Later she referred to herself as *colored* because that’s what people in her community referred to themselves as. During and before this time, the term *black* had negative connotations and would likely have offended someone. There was a movement in the 1960s to reclaim the word *black*, and the slogan “black is beautiful” was commonly used. Brenda Allen acknowledges the newer label of *African American* but notes that she still prefers *black*. The terms *colored* and *Negro* are no longer considered appropriate because they were commonly used during a time when black people were blatantly discriminated against. Even though that history may seem far removed to some,

it is not to others. Currently, the terms *African American* and *black* are frequently used, and both are considered acceptable. The phrase *people of color* is acceptable for most and is used to be inclusive of other racial minorities. If you are unsure what to use, you could always observe how a person refers to himself or herself, or you could ask for his or her preference. In any case, a competent communicator defers to and respects the preference of the individual.

The label *Latin American* generally refers to people who live in Central American countries. Although Spain colonized much of what is now South and Central America and parts of the Caribbean, the inhabitants of these areas are now much more diverse. Depending on the region or country, some people primarily trace their lineage to the indigenous people who lived in these areas before colonization, or to a Spanish and indigenous lineage, or to other combinations that may include European, African, and/or indigenous heritage. *Latina* and *Latino* are labels that are preferable to *Hispanic* for many who live in the United States and trace their lineage to South and/or Central America and/or parts of the Caribbean. Scholars who study Latina/o identity often use the label *Latina/o* in their writing to acknowledge women who avow that identity label (Calafell, 2007). In verbal communication you might say “Latina” when referring to a particular female or “Latino” when referring to a particular male of Latin American heritage. When referring to the group as a whole, you could say “Latinas and Latinos” instead of just “Latinos,” which would be more gender-inclusive. While *Hispanic* is used by the US Census, it refers primarily to people of Spanish origin, which doesn’t account for the diversity of background of many Latinos/as. The term *Hispanic* also highlights the colonizer’s influence over the indigenous, which erases a history that is important to many. Additionally, there are people who claim Spanish origins and identify culturally as Hispanic but racially as white. Labels such as *Puerto Rican* or *Mexican American*, which further specify region or country of origin, may also be used. Just as with other cultural groups, if you are unsure of how to refer to someone, you can always ask for and honor someone’s preference.

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

Interracial Communication

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

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

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



Figure 2.2.2: The “English only” movement of recent years is largely a backlash targeted at immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries. [Wikimedia Commons](#) – public domain. Courtesy of www.CGPGrey.com.

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

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

Gender

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

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

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

There have been challenges to the construction of gender in recent decades. Since the 1960s, scholars and activists have challenged established notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. The women's rights movement in the United States dates back to the 1800s, when the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 (Wood, 2005). Although most women's rights movements have been led by white, middle-class women, there was overlap between those involved in the abolitionist movement to end slavery and the beginnings of the women's rights movement. Although some of the leaders of the early women's rights movement had class and education privilege, they were still taking a risk by organizing and protesting. Black women were even more at risk, and Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave, faced those risks often and gave a much noted extemporaneous speech at a women's rights gathering in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, which came to be called "Ain't I a Woman?" (Wood, 2005) Her speech highlighted the multiple layers of oppression faced by black women. You can watch actress Alfre Woodard deliver an interpretation of the speech in Video Clip 8.1.

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

[View this YouTube Video online](#)



Video 2.2.1: Alfre Woodard Interprets Sojourner Truth's Speech "Ain't I a Woman?" https://youtu.be/4vr_vKsk_h8

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

to make a more equitable society for everyone is at the root of feminism. She shares comments from a student that capture this disconnect: (Wood, 2005)

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

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

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

Sexuality

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

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

The most obvious way sexuality relates to identity is through sexual orientation. Sexual orientation refers to a person's primary physical and emotional sexual attraction and activity. The terms we most often use to categorize sexual orientation are *heterosexual*, *gay*, *lesbian*, and *bisexual*. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are sometimes referred to as sexual minorities. While the term *sexual preference* has been used previously, *sexual orientation* is more appropriate, since *preference* implies a simple choice. Although someone's preference for a restaurant or actor may change frequently, sexuality is not as simple. The term *homosexual* can be appropriate in some instances, but it carries with it a clinical and medicalized tone. As you will see in the

timeline that follows, the medical community has a recent history of “treating homosexuality” with means that most would view as inhumane today. So many people prefer a term like *gay*, which was chosen and embraced by gay people, rather than *homosexual*, which was imposed by a then discriminatory medical system.

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

As with other cultural identities, notions of sexuality have been socially constructed in different ways throughout human history. Sexual orientation didn’t come into being as an identity category until the late 1800s. Before that, sexuality was viewed in more physical or spiritual senses that were largely separate from a person’s identity. Table 2.2.2 traces some of the developments relevant to sexuality, identity, and communication that show how this cultural identity has been constructed over the past 3,000 years.

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

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

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

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

Ability

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

Ability, just as the other cultural identities discussed, has institutionalized privileges and disadvantages associated with it. Ableism is the system of beliefs and practices that produces a physical and mental standard that is projected as normal for a human being and labels deviations from it abnormal, resulting in unequal treatment and access to resources. Ability privilege refers to the unearned advantages that are provided for people who fit the cognitive and physical norms (Allen, 2011). I once attended a workshop about ability privilege led by a man who was visually impaired. He talked about how, unlike other cultural identities that are typically stable over a lifetime, ability fluctuates for most people. We have all experienced times when we are more or less able.

Perhaps you broke your leg and had to use crutches or a wheelchair for a while. Getting sick for a prolonged period of time also lessens our abilities, but we may fully recover from any of these examples and regain our ability privilege. Whether you've experienced a short-term disability or not, the majority of us will become less physically and cognitively able as we get older.

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



Figure 2.2.3: As recently disabled veterans integrate back into civilian life, they will be offered assistance and accommodations under Americans with Disabilities Act. [Wounded Warrior Regiment](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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

Table 8.4 Developments Related to Ability, Identity, and Communication

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

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

During the early part of the 1900s, the eugenics movement was the epitome of the move to rehabilitate or reject people with disabilities (Allen, 2005). This was a brand of social engineering that was indicative of a strong public support in the rationality of science to cure society’s problems (Allen, 2011). A sterilization law written in 1914 “proposed to authorize sterilization of the socially inadequate,” which included the “feeble-minded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf, deformed,

and dependent” (Lombardo, 2011). During the eugenics movement in the United States, more than sixty thousand people in thirty-three states were involuntarily sterilized (Allen, 2011). Although the eugenics movement as it was envisioned and enacted then is unthinkable today, some who have studied the eugenics movement of the early 1900s have issued warnings that a newly packaged version of eugenics could be upon us. As human genome mapping and DNA manipulation become more accessible, advanced genetic testing could enable parents to eliminate undesirable aspects or enhance desirable characteristics of their children before they are born, creating “designer children” (Spice, 2005).

Much has changed for people with disabilities in the United States in the past fifty years. The independent living movement (ILM) was a part of the disability rights movement that took shape along with other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The ILM calls for more individual and collective action toward social change by people with disabilities. Some of the goals of the ILM include reframing disability as a social and political rather than just a medical issue, a shift toward changing society rather than just rehabilitating people with disabilities, a view of accommodations as civil rights rather than charity, and more involvement by people with disabilities in the formulation and execution of policies relating to them (Longmore, 2003). As society better adapts to people with disabilities, there will be more instances of interability communication taking place.

Interability communication is communication between people with differing ability levels; for example, a hearing person communicating with someone who is hearing impaired or a person who doesn't use a wheelchair communicating with someone who uses a wheelchair. Since many people are unsure of how to communicate with a person with disabilities, following are the “Ten Commandments of Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities” to help you in communicating with persons with disabilities:^[1]

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

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The social constructionist view of culture and identity states that the self is formed through our interactions with others and in relation to social, cultural, and political contexts.
- Race, gender, sexuality, and ability are socially constructed cultural identities that developed over time in relation to historical, social, and political contexts.
- Race, gender, sexuality, and ability are cultural identities that affect our communication and our relationships.

EXERCISES

1. Do you ever have difficulty discussing different cultural identities due to terminology? If so, what are your uncertainties? What did you learn in this chapter that can help you overcome them?
2. What comes to mind when you hear the word *feminist*? How did you come to have the ideas you have about feminism?
3. How do you see sexuality connect to identity in the media? Why do you think the media portrays sexuality and identity the way it does?
4. Think of an instance in which you had an interaction with someone with a disability. Would knowing the “Ten Commandments for Communicating with People with Disabilities” have influenced how you communicated in this instance? Why or why not?

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2.3: Cross-Cultural Teaching - Values

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2.4: Intercultural Communication

Learning Objectives

1. Define intercultural communication.
2. List and summarize the six dialectics of intercultural communication.
3. Discuss how intercultural communication affects interpersonal relationships.

It is through intercultural communication that we come to create, understand, and transform culture and identity. Intercultural communication is communication between people with differing cultural identities. One reason we should study intercultural communication is to foster greater self-awareness (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Our thought process regarding culture is often “other-focused,” meaning that the culture of the other person or group is what stands out in our perception. However, the old adage “know thyself” is appropriate, as we become more aware of our own culture by better understanding other cultures and perspectives. Intercultural communication can allow us to step outside of our comfortable, usual frame of reference and see our culture through a different lens. Additionally, as we become more self-aware, we may also become more ethical communicators as we challenge our ethnocentrism, or our tendency to view our own culture as superior to other cultures.

As was noted earlier, difference matters, and studying intercultural communication can help us better negotiate our changing world. Changing economies and technologies intersect with culture in meaningful ways (Martin & Nakayama). As was noted earlier, technology has created for some a global village where vast distances are now much shorter due to new technology that make travel and communication more accessible and convenient (McLuhan, 1967). However, as the following “Getting Plugged In” box indicates, there is also a digital divide, which refers to the unequal access to technology and related skills that exists in much of the world. People in most fields will be more successful if they are prepared to work in a globalized world. Obviously, the global market sets up the need to have intercultural competence for employees who travel between locations of a multinational corporation. Perhaps less obvious may be the need for teachers to work with students who do not speak English as their first language and for police officers, lawyers, managers, and medical personnel to be able to work with people who have various cultural identities.

“GETTING PLUGGED IN”: THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

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

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

Intercultural Communication: A Dialectical Approach

Intercultural communication is complicated, messy, and at times contradictory. Therefore it is not always easy to conceptualize or study. Taking a dialectical approach allows us to capture the dynamism of intercultural communication. A dialectic is a relationship between two opposing concepts that constantly push and pull one another (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). To put it another way, thinking dialectically helps us realize that our experiences often occur in between two different phenomena. This perspective is especially useful for interpersonal and intercultural communication, because when we think dialectically, we think relationally. This means we look at the relationship between aspects of intercultural communication rather than viewing them in isolation. Intercultural communication occurs as a dynamic in-betweenness that, while connected to the individuals in an encounter, goes beyond the individuals, creating something unique. Holding a dialectical perspective may be challenging for some Westerners, as it asks us to hold two contradictory ideas simultaneously, which goes against much of what we are taught in our formal education. Thinking dialectically helps us see the complexity in culture and identity because it doesn't allow for dichotomies. Dichotomies are dualistic ways of thinking that highlight opposites, reducing the ability to see gradations that exist in between concepts. Dichotomies such as good/evil, wrong/right, objective/subjective, male/female, in-group/out-group, black/white, and so on form the basis of much of our thoughts on ethics, culture, and general philosophy, but this isn't the only way of thinking (Marin & Nakayama, 1999). Many Eastern cultures acknowledge that the world isn't dualistic. Rather, they accept as part of their reality that things that seem opposite are actually interdependent and complement each other. I argue that a dialectical approach is useful in studying intercultural communication because it gets us out of our comfortable and familiar ways of thinking. Since so much of understanding culture and identity is understanding ourselves, having an unfamiliar lens through which to view culture can offer us insights that our familiar lenses will not. Specifically, we can better understand intercultural communication by examining six dialectics (Figure 2.4.1) (Martin & Nakayama, 1999).

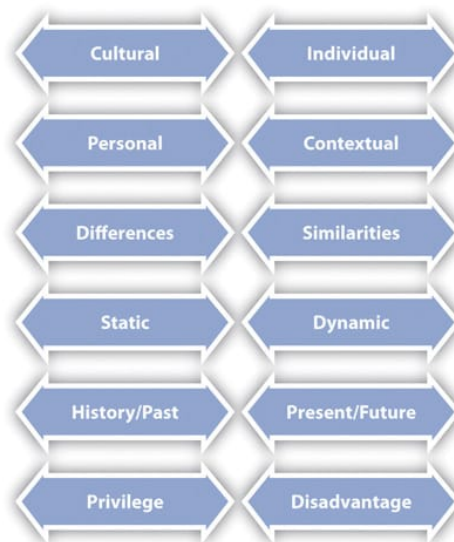


Figure 2.4.1: Dialectics of Intercultural Communication. Source: Adapted from Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, "Thinking Dialectically about Culture and Communication," *Communication Theory* 9, no. 1 (1999): 1-25.

The cultural-individual dialectic captures the interplay between patterned behaviors learned from a cultural group and individual behaviors that may be variations on or counter to those of the larger culture. This dialectic is useful because it helps us account for exceptions to cultural norms. For example, earlier we learned that the United States is said to be a low-context culture, which means that we value verbal communication as our primary, meaning-rich form of communication. Conversely, Japan is said to be a high-context culture, which means they often look for nonverbal clues like tone, silence, or what is not said for meaning. However, you can find people in the United States who intentionally put much meaning into *how* they say things, perhaps because they are not as comfortable speaking directly what's on their mind. We often do this in situations where we may hurt someone's feelings or damage a relationship. Does that mean we come from a high-context culture? Does the Japanese man who speaks more than is socially acceptable come from a low-context culture? The answer to both questions is no. Neither the behaviors of a small percentage of individuals nor occasional situational choices constitute a cultural pattern.

The personal-contextual dialectic highlights the connection between our personal patterns of and preferences for communicating and how various contexts influence the personal. In some cases, our communication patterns and preferences will stay the same across many contexts. In other cases, a context shift may lead us to alter our communication and adapt. For example, an American

businesswoman may prefer to communicate with her employees in an informal and laid-back manner. When she is promoted to manage a department in her company's office in Malaysia, she may again prefer to communicate with her new Malaysian employees the same way she did with those in the United States. In the United States, we know that there are some accepted norms that communication in work contexts is more formal than in personal contexts. However, we also know that individual managers often adapt these expectations to suit their own personal tastes. This type of managerial discretion would likely not go over as well in Malaysia where there is a greater emphasis put on power distance (Hofstede, 1991). So while the American manager may not know to adapt to the new context unless she has a high degree of intercultural communication competence, Malaysian managers would realize that this is an instance where the context likely influences communication more than personal preferences.

The differences-similarities dialectic allows us to examine how we are simultaneously similar to and different from others. As was noted earlier, it's easy to fall into a view of intercultural communication as "other-oriented" and set up dichotomies between "us" and "them." When we overfocus on differences, we can end up polarizing groups that actually have things in common. When we overfocus on similarities, we essentialize, or reduce/overlook important variations within a group. This tendency is evident in most of the popular, and some of the academic, conversations regarding "gender differences." The book *Men Are from Mars and Women Are from Venus* makes it seem like men and women aren't even species that hail from the same planet. The media is quick to include a blurb from a research study indicating again how men and women are "wired" to communicate differently. However, the overwhelming majority of current research on gender and communication finds that while there are differences between how men and women communicate, there are far more similarities (Allen, 2011). Even the language we use to describe the genders sets up dichotomies. That's why I suggest that my students use the term *other gender* instead of the commonly used *opposite sex*. I have a mom, a sister, and plenty of female friends, and I don't feel like any of them are the opposite of me. Perhaps a better title for a book would be *Women and Men Are Both from Earth*.

The static-dynamic dialectic suggests that culture and communication change over time yet often appear to be and are experienced as stable. Although it is true that our cultural beliefs and practices are rooted in the past, we have already discussed how cultural categories that most of us assume to be stable, like race and gender, have changed dramatically in just the past fifty years. Some cultural values remain relatively consistent over time, which allows us to make some generalizations about a culture. For example, cultures have different orientations to time. The Chinese have a longer-term orientation to time than do Europeans (Lustig & Koester, 2006). This is evidenced in something that dates back as far as astrology. The Chinese zodiac is done annually (The Year of the Monkey, etc.), while European astrology was organized by month (Taurus, etc.). While this cultural orientation to time has been around for generations, as China becomes more Westernized in terms of technology, business, and commerce, it could also adopt some views on time that are more short term.

The history/past-present/future dialectic reminds us to understand that while current cultural conditions are important and that our actions now will inevitably affect our future, those conditions are not without a history. We always view history through the lens of the present. Perhaps no example is more entrenched in our past and avoided in our present as the history of slavery in the United States. Where I grew up in the Southern United States, race was something that came up frequently. The high school I attended was 30 percent minorities (mostly African American) and also had a noticeable number of white teens (mostly male) who proudly displayed Confederate flags on their clothing or vehicles.

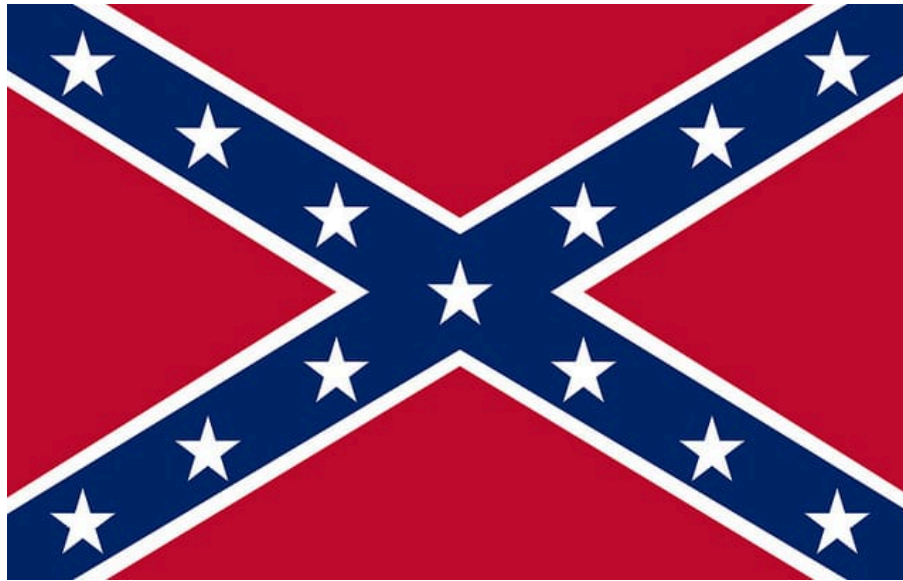


Figure 2.4.2: There has been controversy over whether the Confederate flag is a symbol of hatred or a historical symbol that acknowledges the time of the Civil War. Jim Surkamp – [Confederate Rebel Flag](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

I remember an instance in a history class where we were discussing slavery and the subject of repatriation, or compensation for descendants of slaves, came up. A white male student in the class proclaimed, “I’ve never owned slaves. Why should I have to care about this now?” While his statement about not owning slaves is valid, it doesn’t acknowledge that effects of slavery still linger today and that the repercussions of such a long and unjust period of our history don’t disappear over the course of a few generations.

The privileges-disadvantages dialectic captures the complex interrelation of unearned, systemic advantages and disadvantages that operate among our various identities. As was discussed earlier, our society consists of dominant and nondominant groups. Our cultures and identities have certain privileges and/or disadvantages. To understand this dialectic, we must view culture and identity through a lens of intersectionality, which asks us to acknowledge that we each have multiple cultures and identities that intersect with each other. Because our identities are complex, no one is completely privileged and no one is completely disadvantaged. For example, while we may think of a white, heterosexual male as being very privileged, he may also have a disability that leaves him without the able-bodied privilege that a Latina woman has. This is often a difficult dialectic for my students to understand, because they are quick to point out exceptions that they think challenge this notion. For example, many people like to point out Oprah Winfrey as a powerful African American woman. While she is definitely now quite privileged despite her disadvantaged identities, her trajectory isn’t the norm. When we view privilege and disadvantage at the cultural level, we cannot let individual exceptions distract from the systemic and institutionalized ways in which some people in our society are disadvantaged while others are privileged.

As these dialectics reiterate, culture and communication are complex systems that intersect with and diverge from many contexts. A better understanding of all these dialectics helps us be more critical thinkers and competent communicators in a changing world.

“GETTING CRITICAL”: IMMIGRATION, LAWS, AND RELIGION

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

verbally harassed by a woman on the street and then punched in the face by the woman's husband. Another Muslim woman named Kenza Drider, who can be seen in Video Clip 8.2, announced that she will run for the presidency of France in order to challenge the law. The bill that contained the law was broadly supported by politicians and the public in France, and similar laws are already in place in Belgium and are being proposed in Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, and Switzerland (Fraser, 2011).

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

YouTube Video

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

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Video 2.4.1: Veiled Woman Eyes French Presidency. <https://youtu.be/DXh5csMHSPY>

Intercultural Communication and Relationships

Intercultural relationships are formed between people with different cultural identities and include friends, romantic partners, family, and coworkers. Intercultural relationships have benefits and drawbacks. Some of the benefits include increasing cultural knowledge, challenging previously held stereotypes, and learning new skills (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). For example, I learned about the Vietnamese New Year celebration Tet from a friend I made in graduate school. This same friend also taught me how to make some delicious Vietnamese foods that I continue to cook today. I likely would not have gained this cultural knowledge or skill without the benefits of my intercultural friendship. Intercultural relationships also present challenges, however.

The dialectics discussed earlier affect our intercultural relationships. The similarities-differences dialectic in particular may present challenges to relationship formation (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). While differences between people's cultural identities may be obvious, it takes some effort to uncover commonalities that can form the basis of a relationship. Perceived differences in general also create anxiety and uncertainty that is not as present in intracultural relationships. Once some similarities are found, the tension within the dialectic begins to balance out and uncertainty and anxiety lessen. Negative stereotypes may also hinder progress toward relational development, especially if the individuals are not open to adjusting their preexisting beliefs. Intercultural relationships may also take more work to nurture and maintain. The benefit of increased cultural awareness is often achieved, because the relational partners explain their cultures to each other. This type of explaining requires time, effort, and patience and may be an extra burden that some are not willing to carry. Last, engaging in intercultural relationships can lead to questioning or even backlash from one's own group. I experienced this type of backlash from my white classmates in middle school who teased me for hanging out with the African American kids on my bus. While these challenges range from mild inconveniences to more serious repercussions, they are important to be aware of. As noted earlier, intercultural relationships can take many forms. The focus of this section is on friendships and romantic relationships, but much of the following discussion can be extended to other relationship types.

Intercultural Friendships

Even within the United States, views of friendship vary based on cultural identities. Research on friendship has shown that Latinos/as value relational support and positive feedback, Asian Americans emphasize exchanges of ideas like offering feedback or asking for guidance, African Americans value respect and mutual acceptance, and European Americans value recognition of each other as individuals (Coller, 1996). Despite the differences in emphasis, research also shows that the overall definition of a close friend is similar across cultures. A close friend is thought of as someone who is helpful and nonjudgmental, who you enjoy

spending time with but can also be independent, and who shares similar interests and personality traits (Lee, 2006).

Intercultural friendship formation may face challenges that other friendships do not. Prior intercultural experience and overcoming language barriers increase the likelihood of intercultural friendship formation (Sias et al., 2008). In some cases, previous intercultural experience, like studying abroad in college or living in a diverse place, may motivate someone to pursue intercultural friendships once they are no longer in that context. When friendships cross nationality, it may be necessary to invest more time in common understanding, due to language barriers. With sufficient motivation and language skills, communication exchanges through self-disclosure can then further relational formation. Research has shown that individuals from different countries in intercultural friendships differ in terms of the topics and depth of self-disclosure, but that as the friendship progresses, self-disclosure increases in depth and breadth (Chen & Nakazawa, 2009). Further, as people overcome initial challenges to initiating an intercultural friendship and move toward mutual self-disclosure, the relationship becomes more intimate, which helps friends work through and move beyond their cultural differences to focus on maintaining their relationship. In this sense, intercultural friendships can be just as strong and enduring as other friendships (Lee, 2006).

The potential for broadening one's perspective and learning more about cultural identities is not always balanced, however. In some instances, members of a dominant culture may be more interested in sharing their culture with their intercultural friend than they are in learning about their friend's culture, which illustrates how context and power influence friendships (Lee, 2006). A research study found a similar power dynamic, as European Americans in intercultural friendships stated they were open to exploring everyone's culture but also communicated that culture wasn't a big part of their intercultural friendships, as they just saw their friends as people. As the researcher states, "These types of responses may demonstrate that it is easiest for the group with the most socioeconomic and socio-cultural power to ignore the rules, assume they have the power as individuals to change the rules, or assume that no rules exist, since others are adapting to them rather than vice versa" (Collier, 1996). Again, intercultural friendships illustrate the complexity of culture and the importance of remaining mindful of your communication and the contexts in which it occurs.

Culture and Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships are influenced by society and culture, and still today some people face discrimination based on who they love. Specifically, sexual orientation and race affect societal views of romantic relationships. Although the United States, as a whole, is becoming more accepting of gay and lesbian relationships, there is still a climate of prejudice and discrimination that individuals in same-gender romantic relationships must face. Despite some physical and virtual meeting places for gay and lesbian people, there are challenges for meeting and starting romantic relationships that are not experienced for most heterosexual people (Peplau & Spalding, 2000).

As we've already discussed, romantic relationships are likely to begin due to merely being exposed to another person at work, through a friend, and so on. But some gay and lesbian people may feel pressured into or just feel more comfortable not disclosing or displaying their sexual orientation at work or perhaps even to some family and friends, which closes off important social networks through which most romantic relationships begin. This pressure to refrain from disclosing one's gay or lesbian sexual orientation in the workplace is not unfounded, as it is still legal in twenty-nine states (as of November 2012) to fire someone for being gay or lesbian (Human Rights Campaign, 2012). There are also some challenges faced by gay and lesbian partners regarding relationship termination. Gay and lesbian couples do not have the same legal and societal resources to manage their relationships as heterosexual couples; for example, gay and lesbian relationships are not legally recognized in most states, it is more difficult for a gay or lesbian couple to jointly own property or share custody of children than heterosexual couples, and there is little public funding for relationship counseling or couples therapy for gay and lesbian couples.

While this lack of barriers may make it easier for gay and lesbian partners to break out of an unhappy or unhealthy relationship, it could also lead couples to termination who may have been helped by the socio-legal support systems available to heterosexuals (Peplau & Spalding, 2000).

Despite these challenges, relationships between gay and lesbian people are similar in other ways to those between heterosexuals. Gay, lesbian, and heterosexual people seek similar qualities in a potential mate, and once relationships are established, all these groups experience similar degrees of relational satisfaction (Peplau & Spalding, 2000). Despite the myth that one person plays the man and one plays the woman in a relationship, gay and lesbian partners do not have set preferences in terms of gender role. In fact, research shows that while women in heterosexual relationships tend to do more of the housework, gay and lesbian couples were more likely to divide tasks so that each person has an equal share of responsibility (Peplau & Spalding, 2000). A gay or lesbian couple doesn't necessarily constitute an intercultural relationship, but as we have already discussed, sexuality is an important part of an individual's identity and connects to larger social and cultural systems. Keeping in mind that identity and culture are complex, we can see that gay and lesbian relationships can also be intercultural if the partners are of different racial

or ethnic backgrounds.

While interracial relationships have occurred throughout history, there have been more historical taboos in the United States regarding relationships between African Americans and white people than other racial groups. Antimiscegenation laws were common in states and made it illegal for people of different racial/ethnic groups to marry. It wasn't until 1967 that the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Loving versus Virginia*, declaring these laws to be unconstitutional (Pratt, 1995). It wasn't until 1998 and 2000, however, that South Carolina and Alabama removed such language from their state constitutions (Lovingday.org, 2011). The organization and website lovingday.org commemorates the landmark case and works to end racial prejudice through education.



Figure 2.4.3: The Supreme Court ruled in the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* case that states could not enforce laws banning interracial marriages. Bahai.us – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Even after these changes, there were more Asian-white and Latino/a-white relationships than there were African American-white relationships (Gaines Jr. & Brennan, 2011). Having already discussed the importance of similarity in attraction to mates, it's important to note that partners in an interracial relationship, although culturally different, tend to be similar in occupation and income. This can likely be explained by the situational influences on our relationship formation we discussed earlier—namely, that work tends to be a starting ground for many of our relationships, and we usually work with people who have similar backgrounds to us.

There has been much research on interracial couples that counters the popular notion that partners may be less satisfied in their relationships due to cultural differences. In fact, relational satisfaction isn't significantly different for interracial partners, although the challenges they may face in finding acceptance from other people could lead to stressors that are not as strong for intracultural partners (Gaines Jr. & Brennan, 2011). Although partners in interracial relationships certainly face challenges, there are positives. For example, some mention that they've experienced personal growth by learning about their partner's cultural background, which helps them gain alternative perspectives. Specifically, white people in interracial relationships have cited an awareness of and empathy for racism that still exists, which they may not have been aware of before (Gaines Jr. & Liu, 2000).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Studying intercultural communication, communication between people with differing cultural identities, can help us gain more self-awareness and be better able to communicate in a world with changing demographics and technologies.
- A dialectical approach to studying intercultural communication is useful because it allows us to think about culture and identity in complex ways, avoiding dichotomies and acknowledging the tensions that must be negotiated.
- Intercultural relationships face some challenges in negotiating the dialectic between similarities and differences but can also produce rewards in terms of fostering self- and other awareness.

EXERCISES

1. Why is the phrase “Know thyself” relevant to the study of intercultural communication?
2. Apply at least one of the six dialectics to a recent intercultural interaction that you had. How does this dialectic help you understand or analyze the situation?
3. Do some research on your state’s laws by answering the following questions: Did your state have antiscegenation laws? If so, when were they repealed? Does your state legally recognize gay and lesbian relationships? If so, how?

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2.5: Intercultural Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

1. Define intercultural communication competence.
2. Explain how motivation, self- and other-knowledge, and tolerance for uncertainty relate to intercultural communication competence.
3. Summarize the three ways to cultivate intercultural communication competence that are discussed.
4. Apply the concept of “thinking under the influence” as a reflective skill for building intercultural communication competence.

Throughout this textbook, we have been putting various tools in our communication toolbox to improve our communication competence. Many of these tools can be translated into intercultural contexts. While building any form of competence requires effort, building intercultural communication competence often requires us to take more risks. Some of these risks require us to leave our comfort zones and adapt to new and uncertain situations. In this section, we will learn some of the skills needed to be an interculturally competent communicator.

Components of Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. There are numerous components of ICC. Some key components include motivation, self- and other knowledge, and tolerance for uncertainty.

Initially, a person's motivation for communicating with people from other cultures must be considered. Motivation refers to the root of a person's desire to foster intercultural relationships and can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Put simply, if a person isn't motivated to communicate with people from different cultures, then the components of ICC discussed next don't really matter. If a person has a healthy curiosity that drives him or her toward intercultural encounters in order to learn more about self and others, then there is a foundation from which to build additional competence-relevant attitudes and skills. This intrinsic motivation makes intercultural communication a voluntary, rewarding, and lifelong learning process. Motivation can also be extrinsic, meaning that the desire for intercultural communication is driven by an outside reward like money, power, or recognition. While both types of motivation can contribute to ICC, context may further enhance or impede a person's motivation to communicate across cultures.

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

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

While intrinsic motivation captures an idealistic view of intercultural communication as rewarding in its own right, many contexts create extrinsic motivation. In either case, there is a risk that an individual's motivation can still lead to incompetent communication. For example, it would be exploitative for an extrinsically motivated person to pursue intercultural communication solely for an external reward and then abandon the intercultural relationship once the reward is attained. These situations highlight the relational aspect of ICC, meaning that the motivation of all parties should be considered. Motivation alone cannot

create ICC.

Knowledge supplements motivation and is an important part of building ICC. Knowledge includes self- and other-awareness, mindfulness, and cognitive flexibility. Building knowledge of our own cultures, identities, and communication patterns takes more than passive experience (Martin & Nakayama). As you'll recall from Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception", on perception, we learn who we are through our interactions with others. Developing cultural self-awareness often requires us to get out of our comfort zones. Listening to people who are different from us is a key component of developing self-knowledge. This may be uncomfortable, because we may realize that people think of our identities differently than we thought. For example, when I lived in Sweden, my Swedish roommates often discussed how they were wary of befriending students from the United States. They perceived US Americans to be shallow because they were friendly and exciting while they were in Sweden but didn't remain friends once they left. Although I was initially upset by their assessment, I came to see the truth in it. Swedes are generally more reserved than US Americans and take longer to form close friendships. The comparatively extroverted nature of the Americans led some of the Swedes to overestimate the depth of their relationship, which ultimately hurt them when the Americans didn't stay in touch. This made me more aware of how my communication was perceived, enhancing my self-knowledge. I also learned more about communication behaviors of the Swedes, which contributed to my other-knowledge.

The most effective way to develop other-knowledge is by direct and thoughtful encounters with other cultures. However, people may not readily have these opportunities for a variety of reasons. Despite the overall diversity in the United States, many people still only interact with people who are similar to them. Even in a racially diverse educational setting, for example, people often group off with people of their own race. While a heterosexual person may have a gay or lesbian friend or relative, they likely spend most of their time with other heterosexuals. Unless you interact with people with disabilities as part of your job or have a person with a disability in your friend or family group, you likely spend most of your time interacting with able-bodied people. Living in a rural area may limit your ability to interact with a range of cultures, and most people do not travel internationally regularly. Because of this, we may have to make a determined effort to interact with other cultures or rely on educational sources like college classes, books, or documentaries. Learning another language is also a good way to learn about a culture, because you can then read the news or watch movies in the native language, which can offer insights that are lost in translation. It is important to note though that we must evaluate the credibility of the source of our knowledge, whether it is a book, person, or other source. Also, knowledge of another language does not automatically equate to ICC.

Developing self- and other-knowledge is an ongoing process that will continue to adapt and grow as we encounter new experiences. Mindfulness and cognitive complexity will help as we continue to build our ICC (Pusch, 2009). Mindfulness is a state of self- and other-monitoring that informs later reflection on communication interactions. As mindful communicators we should ask questions that focus on the interactive process like "How is our communication going? What are my reactions? What are their reactions?" Being able to adapt our communication in the moment based on our answers to these questions is a skill that comes with a high level of ICC. Reflecting on the communication encounter later to see what can be learned is also a way to build ICC. We should then be able to incorporate what we learned into our communication frameworks, which requires cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility refers to the ability to continually supplement and revise existing knowledge to create new categories rather than forcing new knowledge into old categories. Cognitive flexibility helps prevent our knowledge from becoming stale and also prevents the formation of stereotypes and can help us avoid prejudging an encounter or jumping to conclusions. In summary, to be better intercultural communicators, we should know much about others and ourselves and be able to reflect on and adapt our knowledge as we gain new experiences.

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

Cultivating Intercultural Communication Competence

How can ICC be built and achieved? This is a key question we will address in this section. Two main ways to build ICC are through experiential learning and reflective practices (Bednarz, 2010). We must first realize that competence isn't any one thing. Part of

being competent means that you can assess new situations and adapt your existing knowledge to the new contexts. What it means to be competent will vary depending on your physical location, your role (personal, professional, etc.), and your life stage, among other things. Sometimes we will know or be able to figure out what is expected of us in a given situation, but sometimes we may need to act in unexpected ways to meet the needs of a situation. Competence enables us to better cope with the unexpected, adapt to the nonroutine, and connect to uncommon frameworks. I have always told my students that ICC is less about a list of rules and more about a box of tools.

Three ways to cultivate ICC are to foster attitudes that motivate us, discover knowledge that informs us, and develop skills that enable us (Bennett, 2009). To foster attitudes that motivate us, we must develop a sense of wonder about culture. This sense of wonder can lead to feeling overwhelmed, humbled, or awed (Opdal, 2001). This sense of wonder may correlate to a high tolerance for uncertainty, which can help us turn potentially frustrating experiences we have into teachable moments. I've had many such moments in my intercultural encounters at home and abroad. One such moment came the first time I tried to cook a frozen pizza in the oven in the shared kitchen of my apartment in Sweden. The information on the packaging was written in Swedish, but like many college students, I had a wealth of experience cooking frozen pizzas to draw from. As I went to set the oven dial to preheat, I noticed it was strange that the oven didn't go up to my usual 425–450 degrees. Not to be deterred, I cranked the dial up as far as it would go, waited a few minutes, put my pizza in, and walked down the hall to my room to wait for about fifteen minutes until the pizza was done. The smell of smoke drew me from my room before the fifteen minutes was up, and I walked into a corridor filled with smoke and the smell of burnt pizza. I pulled the pizza out and was puzzled for a few minutes while I tried to figure out why the pizza burned so quickly, when one of my corridor-mates gently pointed out that the oven temperatures in Sweden are listed in Celsius, not Fahrenheit! Despite almost burning the kitchen down, I learned a valuable lesson about assuming my map for temperatures and frozen pizzas was the same as everyone else's.

Discovering knowledge that informs us is another step that can build on our motivation. One tool involves learning more about our cognitive style, or how we learn. Our cognitive style consists of our preferred patterns for “gathering information, constructing meaning, and organizing and applying knowledge” (Bennett, 2009). As we explore cognitive styles, we discover that there are differences in how people attend to and perceive the world, explain events, organize the world, and use rules of logic (Nisbett, 2003). Some cultures have a cognitive style that focuses more on tasks, analytic and objective thinking, details and precision, inner direction, and independence, while others focus on relationships and people over tasks and things, concrete and metaphorical thinking, and a group consciousness and harmony.

Developing ICC is a complex learning process. At the basic level of learning, we accumulate knowledge and assimilate it into our existing frameworks. But accumulated knowledge doesn't necessarily help us in situations where we have to apply that knowledge. Transformative learning takes place at the highest levels and occurs when we encounter situations that challenge our accumulated knowledge and our ability to accommodate that knowledge to manage a real-world situation. The cognitive dissonance that results in these situations is often uncomfortable and can lead to a hesitance to repeat such an engagement. One tip for cultivating ICC that can help manage these challenges is to find a community of like-minded people who are also motivated to develop ICC. In my graduate program, I lived in the international dormitory in order to experience the cultural diversity that I had enjoyed so much studying abroad a few years earlier. I was surrounded by international students and US American students who were more or less interested in cultural diversity. This ended up being a tremendous learning experience, and I worked on research about identity and communication between international and American students.

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

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

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

"GETTING COMPETENT": THINKING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Communication and culture scholar Brenda Allen coined the phrase "thinking under the influence" (TUI) to highlight a reflective process that can help us hone our intercultural communication competence (Allen, 2011). As we discussed earlier, being mindful is an important part of building competence. Once we can become aware of our thought processes and behaviors, we can more effectively monitor and intervene in them. She asks us to monitor our thoughts and feelings about other people, both similar to and different from us. As we monitor, we should try to identify instances when we are guilty of TUI, such as uncritically accepting the dominant belief systems, relying on stereotypes, or prejudging someone based on their identities. She recounts seeing a picture on the front of the newspaper with three men who appeared Latino. She found herself wondering what they had done, and then found out from the caption that they were the relatives of people who died in a car crash. She identified that as a TUI moment and asked herself if she would have had the same thought if they had been black, white, Asian, or female. When we feel "surprised" by someone different, this often points to a preexisting negative assumption that we can unpack and learn from. Allen also found herself surprised when a panelist at a conference who used a wheelchair and was hearing impaired made witty comments. Upon reflection, she realized that she had an assumption that people with disabilities would have a gloomy outlook on life. While these examples focus on out-groups, she also notes that it's important for people, especially in nondominant groups, to monitor their thoughts about their own group, as they may have internalized negative attitudes about their group from the dominant culture. As a black woman, she notes that she has been critical of black people who "do not speak mainstream English" based on stereotypes she internalized about race, language, and intelligence. It is not automatically a bad thing to TUI. Even Brenda Allen, an accomplished and admirable scholar of culture and communication, catches herself doing it. When we notice that we TUI, it's important to reflect on that moment and try to adjust our thinking processes. This is an ongoing process, but it is an easy-to-remember way to cultivate your ICC. Keep a record of instances where you catch yourself "thinking under the influence" and answer the following questions:

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

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Getting integrated: Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. ICC also has the potential to benefit you in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
- A person with appropriate intrinsic or extrinsic motivation to engage in intercultural communication can develop self- and other-knowledge that will contribute to their ability to be mindful of their own communication and tolerate uncertain situations.
- We can cultivate ICC by fostering attitudes that motivate us, discovering knowledge that informs us, and developing skills that enable us.

EXERCISES

1. Identify an intercultural encounter in which you did not communicate as competently as you would have liked. What concept(s) from the chapter would have helped you in this situation and how?
2. Which of the following components of ICC—motivation, mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, and tolerance for uncertainty—do you think you are most competent at, and which one needs the most work? Identify how you became so competent in the first one and some ways that you can improve the second one.
3. Choose one of the three ways discussed to cultivate ICC and make a list of five steps you can take to enhance this part of your competence.

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3: MEDIA AND CULTURE

3.1: Co-Cultural Theory (Mark Orbe)

3.2: Media, Society, Culture and You

3.3: Digital Culture and Social Media

3.1: Co-Cultural Theory (Mark Orbe)

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3.2: Media, Society, Culture and You

"Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication." — John Dewey in *Democracy and Education*, 1916

The purpose of this chapter is to define media, society, and culture broadly. Additionally, the term "communication" is defined in its many forms.



Figure 3.2.1: Bronze bust of John Dewey sculpted by Jacob Epstein, 1927. Photo by user known as Cliff, CCBY. [Source: Flickr.](#)

The Role of Mass Media in Society

More than one hundred years ago, John Dewey wrote in *Democracy and Education* that society is not only supported by various forms of communication but also enveloped in communication. Dewey reiterated what philosophers and scholars had noted for centuries: small groups, larger communities and vast institutions — all the things that make up a **society** — function in relation to how communication flows within and between groups.

There are different forms of communication. At the broadest level, **communication** is an exchange of meaning between people using symbols. The most common symbols we use are verbal and written words, but there are also many forms of nonverbal communication such as American Sign Language. What sign language, verbal communication and written communication have in common is the use of abstract symbols to convey meaning. Whether you say "thank you" in face-to-face communication, send someone a card with the words "thank you" written on it, or [use nonverbal cues to express thanks](#), the meaning is the same.



Figure 3.2.2: A boy smiles as he stands next to a Christmas tree.

Interpersonal communication generally refers to the exchange of meaning between two or more people on a personal, often one-on-one, level. Interpersonal communication can be verbal or nonverbal. Most often, it happens in face-to-face settings. It differs from **mass communication**, which involves sharing meaning through symbolic messages to a wide audience from one source to many receivers. Sometimes, particularly in **computer-mediated communication**, messages conveyed using computers, it can be difficult to tell the difference between interpersonal communication and mass communication because individuals can send messages intended only for other individuals that might quickly reach large numbers of people. Social media platforms are often structured in ways that allow interpersonal messages to "go viral" and become mass messages whether the original sender intended to address a mass audience or not.

It is not the type of message that determines interpersonal or mass communication. It is the way the message is distributed and the relationships between sender and receiver(s). This text will continue to grapple with the overlap of interpersonal communication and mass communication structures on networked communication platforms, but first, another form of communication commonly studied in academic settings should be introduced.

Organizational communication is the symbolic exchange of messages carrying specific meaning for members belonging to formal organizations. In practical terms, it is the internal communication that helps governments, businesses, schools, and hospitals to run.

People working together in organizations get usually things done by communicating directly with one another or in small groups. Organizations cannot function without communication. Organizational communication effectiveness can influence the success or failure of businesses and other social institutions. Thus, communication does not merely happen within organizations; it is an essential part of the way they are structured. Organizational communication is a [separate field of study, introduced well in this YouTube video](#).

Successful communication, whether intended for personal use, for use within an organization, or for a wide audience, can help people to understand each other and to get things done.

If good organizational communication is necessary for groups to function with a formal purpose, mass communication is essential for societies to function. Societies are made up of formal organizations of various sizes. Usually, the larger the group, the more complex its communication structures.

Communication structure refers to a combination of information and communication technologies (ICTs), guidelines for using those technologies, and professional workers dedicated to managing information and messages. In the mass communication field, communication structures are more than computers and transmission networks. The guidelines for using networks to create and distribute messages for mass consumption are a matter of corporate policy as well as law.

It has been noted that a society is made up of small groups, larger communities, and vast institutions. A more complete definition of the term comes from the field of sociology. A **society** is a very large group of people organized into institutions held together over time through formalized relationships. Nations, for example, are made up of formal institutions organized by law. Governments of different size, economic institutions, educational institutions, and others all come together to form a society.

By comparison, **culture** — the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of groups large and small — is not necessarily formalized. Culture

is necessary for enjoying and making sense of the human experience, but there are few formalized rules governing culture.

Mass communication influences both society and culture. Different societies have different media systems, and the way they are set up by law influences how the society works. Different forms of communication, including messages in the mass media, give shape and structure to society. Additionally, mass media outlets can spread cultural knowledge and artistic works around the globe. People exercise cultural preferences when it comes to consuming media, but mass media corporations often decide which stories to tell and which to promote, particularly when it comes to forms of mass media that are costly to produce such as major motion pictures, major video game releases and global news products.

More than any other, the field of mass communication transmits culture. At the same time, it helps institutional society try to understand itself and whether its structures are working.

The Mass Media Dynamic

The mass media system is an institution itself. What sets it apart is its potential to influence the thinking of massive numbers of individuals. In fact, the ideas exchanged in organizational communication and interpersonal communication are often established, reinforced or negated by messages in the mass media. This is what it means for societies "to exist in transmission, in communication." Different types of communication influence each other.

But the mass media are also shaped and influenced by social groups and institutions. This is the nature of the mass media dynamic.

Individuals and groups in society influence what mass media organizations produce through their creativity on the input side and their consumption habits on the output side. It is not accurate to say that society exists within the mass media or under mass media "control." Social structures are too powerful for mass media to completely govern how they operate. But neither is it accurate to say that the mass media are contained within societies. Many mass media products transcend social structures to influence multiple societies, and even in societies that heavily censor their mass media the news of scandals and corruption can get out. The mass media and society are bound together and shape each other.

Almost everything you read, see, and hear is framed within a mass media context; however, mere familiarity is no guarantee of success. Products in the mass media that fail to resonate with audiences do not last long, even if they seem in tune with current tastes and trends.

The Mass Communication Origin Story

In his book, John notes how, in the early 20th century, the mass media were beginning to connect large institutions in new ways. The production of mass media messages accelerated with the development of the telegraph and the popular newspaper. The spread of telegraph technology that began in the mid-1800s continued through the early 1900s to network the globe with a nearly instantaneous information transmission system. Much of the growth of newspapers occurred as a result of improvements in telegraph technology.



Figure 3.2.3: The television station's webpage at KOMU, a local affiliate owned and operated by the University of Missouri-Columbia, is constantly on display in the newsroom.

Thus, a primary function of the global mass communication system is to save time. People have a need to understand what is going on in the world, and they desire entertainment. Global electronic telecommunication networks collapse space by transmitting messages in much less time than the older, physical delivery systems.

The dynamic between society and mass media that is so prevalent today developed throughout the 20th century. Starting near the end of the 1800s, communication flows began to move at electronic speeds. More people knew *about* more things than ever before, but scholars are quick to point out that communication is not synonymous with understanding.

Dewey wanted to focus on educating people so that they could live and work well in societies heavily shaped by global telecommunication networks. For him, education was the meaning of life and the global information and communication system needed to be molded into an educational tool. Many of us still hold out hope for Dewey's educational goals, but as ICTs have advanced over the past century or two, it has become clear that the mere existence of global mass communication networks does not ensure that societies will learn to coexist and thrive.

This can be difficult for people to acknowledge. Shortly after the widespread dissemination of the [telegraph](#), the [radio](#), broadcast [television](#), and [public internet](#) access, some form of communication utopia was imagined or even expected. The telegraph collapsed space. Radio enabled instantaneous mass communication. Television brought live images from one side of the globe to the other for even larger mass audiences, and internet access gave individuals the power to be information senders, not just receivers. At each step hope and imagination flourished, but social and cultural clashes persisted. Communication systems can be used as weapons. The evolution of mass communication tools is the story of increased capacity to do the same good and evil things people have always done in societies and between them.

Looking beyond technological utopianism — the idea that new technologies (particularly ICTs) will lead to greater social understanding and better conditions for the global population — we are left with a tedious but massively meaningful project. We must find ways to coexist with other societies even as we are constantly aware of our differences and of possible threats that may have existed before but now are much easier to see.

Perhaps if we are to make the best of our digital global communication network, it would help to track the evolution of different forms of mass communication. This text very briefly touched on the continuum from telegraph to widespread internet adoption, but the first mass medium was ink on paper.

The First Mass Medium

The first global medium, besides the spoken word, was neither the internet nor the telegraph. In fact, it was not a mass medium at all. It was paper. Via trade routes, messages in the form of letters moved around the world in a matter of weeks or months. It was global communication, but it was slow.

The development of a global telegraph network made it possible for messages to spread in minutes. When the telegraph was wed to mass-consumed newspapers, the world saw the rise of *fast, global, mass* communication that had the power to potentially influence large groups of people at once.

Books transmitted messages widely and inspired literacy, but they did not establish a channel for consistent, timely communication meant for mass audiences. After the Gutenberg printing press was developed around 1440, the Gutenberg Bible was slowly mass-produced and disseminated around the Western world. It opened up access to sacred texts that had been bound up for centuries by large institutions like the Roman Catholic Church, and its dissemination helped fuel the Protestant Reformation. Still, it was an outlier. Most other books, even those that were mass-produced from around the 1500s to the 1800s were not disseminated as widely as the Gutenberg Bible. They were simply too expensive.

Nevertheless, mass literacy slowly paved the way for mass newspaper readership to emerge in the 20th century. After the telegraph was invented and developed for wide-scale use and after the cost of printing newspapers dropped, publishers could share news from around the globe with mass audiences. The newspaper, specifically the penny press, was the first mass medium.



Figure 3.2.4: The front page of the Cincinnati Penny Paper from Monday, May 16, 1881. From: George Edward Stevens' article "From Penny Paper to Post and Times-Star: Mr. Scripps' First Link" in the *Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin* No. 27, 1969, public domain. [Source: Wikimedia Commons.](#)

What distinguished the **penny press** was affordability. These papers were published in tabloid format, which used small-sized pages and was cheaper to produce. Penny papers were written for and read by working-class audiences starting in about the 1830s. They covered all manner of current events. Soon, major institutions such as political parties and unions developed their own papers to cover the topics that suited their agendas and to promote the cultural values that they held dear.

Mass Media Growth and Consolidation

As mass production of all sorts of manufactured goods grew during the 20th century, so did advertising budgets and the concept of brands. Brand advertising became fuel for the mass media, and as profitability rose, newspapers were bought up and organized into chains throughout the 20th century. Many newspapers grew their audience as they merged.

Partisan papers gave way to a brand of news that strived for objectivity. The profit motive mostly drove the change. To attract a mass audience, newspapers had to represent various points of view. This pushed some of the most opinionated citizens, particularly strong advocates for workers, to the fringes of mass discourse. Some advocates developed alternative media offerings. Others went mostly unheard or plied their craft directly in politics.

At the same, throughout much of the 20th century, the journalism workforce became more professionalized. Professional **norms**, that is the written and unwritten rules guiding behavior decided on by people in a given field, evolved. Many full-time, paid professional journalists stressed and continue to stress the need to remain detached from the people they cover so that journalists can maintain the practice and appearance of objectivity. Journalists emphasized objectivity in order to remain autonomous and to be perceived as truthful. The norm of objective reporting still strongly influences news coverage in newspapers as well as on most mainstream radio and television news networks.

That being said, the practice of maintaining objectivity is being called into question in our current hyper-partisan political media environment. Other strategies for demonstrating truthfulness require journalists to be transparent about how they do their work,

about who owns their media outlets, and about what investments and personal views they may have.

At the heart of the ethical discussion for professional journalists is a sort of battle between the need to be autonomous to cover news accurately with minimal bias and the need to be socially responsible. **Social responsibility** in the study of journalism ethics is a specific concept referring to the need for media organizations to be responsible for the possible repercussions of the news they produce. The debate goes on even as more and more platforms for mass communication are developed.

Beyond advancements in ink-on-paper newspapers (including the development of color offset printing), technological developments have contributed to the diversification of mass media products. Photography evolved throughout the 20th century as did motion picture film, radio and television technology. Other mass media presented challenges and competition for newspapers. Still, newspapers were quite a profitable business. They grew to their greatest readership levels in the middle-to-late 20th century, and their value was at its high point around the turn of the 21st century. Then came the internet.

Stewing in our Own Juices

With the rise of global computer networks, particularly high-speed broadband and mobile communication technologies, individuals gained the ability to publish their own work and to comment on mass media messages more easily than ever before. If mass communication in the 20th century was best characterized as a one-to-many system where publishers and broadcasters reached waiting audiences, the mass media made possible by digital information networks in the twenty-first have taken on a many-to-many format.

For example, YouTube has millions of producers who themselves are also consumers. None of the social media giants such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Qzone and Weibo (in China), Twitter, Reddit, or Pinterest is primarily known for producing content. Instead, they provide platforms for users to submit their own content and to share what mass media news and entertainment companies produce. The result is that the process of deciding what people should be interested in is much more decentralized in the digital network mass media environment than it was in the days of an analog one-to-many mass media system.

The process of making meaning in society — that is, the process of telling many smaller stories that add up to a narrative shared by mass audiences — is now much more collaborative than it was in the 20th century because more people are consuming news on networked platforms than through the channels managed by **gatekeepers**. A mass media gatekeeper is someone, professional or not, who decides what information to share with mass audiences and what information to leave out.

Fiction or non-fiction, every story leaves something out, and the same is true for shows made up of several stories, such as news broadcasts and heavily edited reality television. Gatekeepers select what mass audiences see, and then edit or disregard the rest. The power of gatekeepers may be diminished in networks where people can decide for themselves what topics they care most about, but there is still an important gatekeeping function in the mass media since much of what is ultimately shared on social media platforms originates in the offices and studios of major media corporations.

On social media platforms, media consumers have the ability to add their input and criticism, and this is an important function for users. Not only do we have a say as audience members in the content we would like to see, read and hear, but we also have an important role to play in society as voting citizens holding their elected officials accountable.

If social media platforms were only filled with mass media content, individual user comments, and their own homegrown content, digitally networked communication would be complex enough, but there are other forces at work. Rogue individuals, hacker networks, and **botnets** — computers programmed to create false social media accounts, websites, and other digital properties — can contribute content alongside messages produced by professionals and legitimate online community members. False presences on social media channels can amplify hate and misinformation and can stoke animosity between groups in a hyper-partisan media age.

Around the world, societies have democratized mass communication, but in many ways, agreeing on a shared narrative or even a shared list of facts is more difficult than ever. Users create **filter bubbles** for themselves where they mostly hear the voices and information that they want to hear. This has the potential to create opposing worldviews where users with different viewpoints not only have differing opinions, but they also have in mind completely different sets of facts creating different images about what is happening in the world and how society should operate.

When users feel the need to defend their filtered worldviews, it is quite harmful to society.

De-massification

The infiltration of bots on common platforms is one issue challenging people working in good faith to produce accurate and entertaining content and to make meaning in the mass media. De-massification is another. Professionals working on mass-market media products now must fight to hold onto mass audiences. **De-massification** signifies the breakdown of mass media audiences. As the amount of information being produced and the number of channels on which news and other content can be disseminated grows exponentially, ready-made audiences are in decline.

In the future, it is anticipated that audiences, or fan bases, must be built rather than tapped into. One path to growing audiences in digital networks is to take an extreme point of view. Producers of news and entertainment information on the right and left of the political spectrum often rail against mainstream media as they promote points of view which are more or less biased. This kind of polarization along with the tendency of social media platforms to allow and even encourage people to organize along political lines likely contributes to de-massification as people organize into factions.

The future of some mass communication channels as regular providers of shared meaning for very large audiences is in question. That said, claims that any specific medium is "dead" are overblown. For example, newspaper readership, advertising revenue, and employment numbers have been declining for about 25 years, but as of 2018, there are still more than 30 million newspaper subscribers. Mass audiences are shrinking and shifting, but they can still be developed.

Convergence

As mass audiences are breaking up and voices from the fringe are garnering outsized influence, the various types of media (audio, video, text, animation and the industries they are tied to) have come together on global computer and mobile network platforms in a process called **convergence**.



Figure 3.2.5: A somewhat unappetizing stew. Photo by Jason Cartwright, CCBY. Source: Flickr.

It is as though all media content is being tossed into a huge stew, one that surrounds and composes societies and cultures, and within this stew of information, people are re-organizing themselves according to the cultural and social concerns they hold most dear.

According to one hypothesis, in a society dominated by digital communication networks, people gather around the information they recognize and want to believe because making sense of the vast amount of information now available is impossible.

This text covers several mass media channels including social media, film, radio, television, music recording and podcasting, digital gaming, news, advertising, public relations and propaganda because these are still viable industries even as the content they produce appears more and more often on converged media platforms.

What we see emerging in networked spaces is a single mass media channel with a spectrum of possible text, photo, audio, video, graphic and game elements; however, the sites of professional production still mostly identify as one particular industry (such as radio and recorded music, film, television, cable television, advertising, PR, digital advertising or social media). Some of these are "legacy" media that have existed as analog industries prior to convergence, while others originated in digital media environments.

For the foreseeable future, we should expect legacy media producers to continue to hold formidable power as elements of larger media conglomerates, which acquired many media companies as a result of industry deregulation. We should also expect audiences to continue to fragment and digital media start-ups trying to build audiences out of fragmented communities to be common even if they are difficult to sustain.

What this means for social structures and for cultural production is disruption, limited perhaps by legacy media traditions and corporate power.

Melding Theories

The world of mass media has witnessed the convergence of media content on digital platforms, the ability of individuals to engage in one-to-many communication as though they were major broadcasters, and the emergence of structures that allow for many-to-many communication. These developments force us to rethink how separate interpersonal, organizational and mass communication truly are.

From a theoretical standpoint, these are well-established approaches to thinking about communication, but in practice, certain messages might fit into multiple categories. For example, a YouTube video made for a few friends might reach millions if it goes viral. Is it interpersonal communication, mass communication or both? Viral videos and memes spread to vast numbers of people but might start out as in-jokes between internet friends or trolls. The message's original meaning is often lost in this process. In a networked society, it can be difficult to differentiate between interpersonal and mass communication. For our purposes, it will be helpful to consider the message creator's intent.

As a user, it is essential to realize the possibility that interpersonal messages may be shared widely. As professionals, it also helps to realize that you cannot force a message to go viral, although most social media platforms now engage in various kinds of paid promotion where brands and influential users can pay to have their content spread more widely more quickly.



Figure 3.2.6: Two women discuss a record album selection in a music shop in Amora, Portugal. Photo by Pedro Ribeiro Simões, CC BY. [Source: Flickr.](#)

We must also understand that advertisers treat digital communication platforms much the same way whether they appear to users to be interpersonal or mass media environments. Users can be targeted down to the individual on either type of platform, and advertisers (with the help of platform creators), can access mass audiences, even when users are intending only to participate on a platform for purposes of interpersonal communication.

Scholars are still working to define how these platforms mix aspects of interpersonal and mass communication. Here is one takeaway: If you are not paying to use a platform like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube (Google), Instagram, or Snapchat, *you* are the product. It is your attention that is being sold to advertisers.

The Big Picture

Society functions when the mass media work well, and we tend not to think about the technologies or the professionals who make it all possible. Interpersonal communication can function with or without a massive technological apparatus. It is more convenient, though, to be able to text each other. When interpersonal communication breaks down, we have problems in our relationships. When organizational communication breaks down, it creates problems for groups and companies. But when mass communication breaks down, society breaks down.

Cultural Production

There is another way of looking at the mass media that needs to be mentioned after looking in some depth at the structural changes going on in and around the field of mass communication. Mass media channels are also huge engines of cultural production. That is, they make the entertainment that helps us define who we are as large and small groups of people. To quote from *Dead Poets Society*: "We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race, and the human race is filled with passion. Medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for." If you replace "reading and writing poetry" with "creating culture," you get a sense of the importance of cultural production. We can define culture as a collection of our knowledge, beliefs and practices. In practice, culture is how we express ourselves and enjoy life's experiences.

In media, there are three main types of cultural works, those associated with "high" culture, popular culture, and folk culture. (Some scholars discuss "low" culture, but it is argued here that "low culture" is just another way of describing the low end of pop culture.)

High culture is arguably the best cultural material a society has to offer. Economic class often comes into play in defining what is "high culture" and what is not.

Pop culture is the vast array of cultural products that appeal to the masses.

Folk culture refers to cultural products borne out of everyday life identifiable because they usually have practical uses as well as artistic value. It is often associated with prehistoric cultures, but that is because the folk culture, pop culture and high culture of prehistoric peoples were often one and the same. Their best art may also have been an everyday object like a bowl or a basket or a doll or a mask. Don't confuse prehistoric art with modern folk art.

Modern folk art has the specific quality of trying to capture what is both beautiful *and useful* in everyday life.

Folk music tends to rely on "traditional" sounds and instruments. Typically, it focuses on the value of everyday existence. Folk music is often built around narratives that carry morals much the same way fairy tales do. Fairy tales are probably the best example of folk literature.

So much of the interpretation and the value of cultural production is culturally relative. This means that an object or work's value is determined by perceptions of people in different cultural groups.

In modern society, mass media often drive our perceptions. It is important to recognize that different cultures have different moral values and to acknowledge that some practices should be universally abhorred and stopped, even if they are partially or wholly accepted in other cultures.

The relationship between culture and mass media is complex; it is difficult to distinguish modern culture from how it appears in the various mass media. Culture in the developed world is spread through mass media channels. Just as society forms and is formed in part by messages in the mass media, so it goes with culture. Cultural products and their popularity can influence which media channels people prefer. Conversely, changes in media and ICTs can lead to changes in how we produce culture.

When we discuss digital culture in the next section, we will continue to break down different levels of culture and the relationship between cultural forms and mass communication in the networked communication age. To begin to understand the mass media, their role in society and how they shape culture and are shaped by cultural preferences, it helps to think about how the mass media may influence you.

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3.3: Digital Culture and Social Media

ORIGIN IN ANARCHY

"The Internet is the first thing that humanity has built that humanity doesn't understand, the largest experiment in anarchy that we have ever had."

— Eric Schmidt, former executive chairman of [Alphabet Inc.](#)

Until the end of 2017, Eric Schmidt was the executive chairman of Alphabet Inc. Alphabet emerged out of Google to become a large holding company that would manage Google and several related properties including YouTube and Calico (a biotech company). Schmidt has a Ph.D. in computer science from Berkeley. He serves on advisory boards for Khan Academy, an education company with strong ties to YouTube, and The Economist, a global news magazine with both digital and print products. Schmidt's resume suggests he is intellectually outstanding and that he cares about technology, education, and the mass media. If one of the biggest brains of our time, and the former leader of one of the few corporations with direct influence on the way the internet is shaped, describes the internet as "anarchy," it's a good indication that things are in flux in the digital world.



Figure 3.3.1: Lighted brushed-steel Google logo sign attached to a marble wall. Image by Google, public domain. [Source: Flickr.](#)

Of course, we should analyze critically any statements coming from someone whose primary purpose is to maximize profits for their company. At the time he made these statements, Schmidt was running Google. The loyalties of executive-level leaders presumably rest with the corporation that signs their checks and provides their stock options. Google has an interest in making you feel that the internet is a confusing place since their search engine is one solution to the confusion. (However, if you rely on autocomplete, Google's suggestions may not only be confusing; they may even be morally reprehensible.)

Still, Schmidt's characterization of the internet as a place of anarchy is accurate. And as we seek to define digital culture and to discuss the cultural relevance of social media in this chapter, we must recognize that there is no grand plan. The only constant in digital culture is change, which may sound cliché, but the underlying ICT structures shift so often that it can be difficult for cultural trends to take hold.

Earlier, we defined society and culture in the context of the field of mass communication. It covered the distinction between interpersonal communication, organizational communication, and mass communication, and then it delved deeper into concepts relating to mass communication. The purpose of the first chapter was to start a discussion about how evolving information and communication technologies (ICTs) can influence the mass media and contribute to social and cultural change in the process.

A Brief Overview

If you are anticipating a roadmap of neat, organized plans for how the evolution of culture on digital platforms will unfurl, you're going to have a bad time. Instead, this section offers a brief, lively discussion of how we define digital culture and what we might expect from it as it emerges in online spaces, mobile apps, and platforms.

Additionally, this chapter includes a breakdown of the roles social media platforms may play in influencing culture.

If you acknowledge that cultures have always been in flux, then perhaps the concept of a digital culture emerging online amidst anarchy will look less like disruption and more like evolution. However you classify it, the cultural impact of the merger of the mass media and digital networks is vast, and that is the topic of this chapter.

This chapter begins with a definition of “digital culture” that comes from the media studies portion of mass communication literature. **Media studies** refers to the broad category of academic inquiry analyzing and critiquing the mass media, its products, possible effects of messages and campaigns, and even media history. Chapter 2 then continues with a deeper discussion of identity in the digital age and covers privacy and surveillance as well as the praxis of digital culture as defined by scholars. The term “praxis” here refers to how a theory plays out in actual practice.

This chapter also identifies different levels of culture (a concept borrowed from anthropology) as they relate to cultural products reaching audiences through digital mass communication channels. In other words, we ultimately answer this question: If we take existing theory for describing the *levels* of culture and apply it to digital culture, what are some immediately recognizable traits?

Finally, social media are defined from a scholarly point of view with particular attention given to the cultural potential of digitally networked social platforms.

Digital Culture Defined

Scholars argue whether we can understand what the spread of digital networks will mean for relatively well-established cultures in the tangible world, or predict with any certainty how cultures will evolve on digital platforms. There are two basic schools of thought. The first argues that existing cultures might find themselves essentially recreated in digital form as more and more life experiences, from the exciting to the mundane, play out in digital spaces. The second school of thought posits that the dominant digital culture emerging now is a separate culture unto itself.

It seems likely that neither version of these imagined forms of digital culture will dominate; instead, we will likely see a combination of the two. Parts of existing culture will appear online as they do in the physical world and parts of digital culture will seem completely new, previously unfathomable because they could not or would not appear in the tangible world.



Figure 3.3.2: Commuters on the Washington DC Metro use their mobile phones beneath an ad stating, “It Begins with Bonjour.” Photo by Craig Moe, CCBY. [Source: Flickr.](#)

Before we delve in with prognostications about where digital culture is headed, let us first define our terms. **Digital culture** refers to the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of people interacting on digital networks that may recreate tangible-world cultures or create new strains of cultural thought and practice native to digital networks.

For example, an online fandom and a real-world fan club are both made up of people who are geographically separated but share a common interest. If a fan club were to “go online,” networked communication platforms might make the experience better than it was in the physical world. Before the advent of the internet, most fan clubs produced a newsletter, offered connections with pen pals, and provided early opportunities to buy tickets and merchandise. Online, fans can create deeper relationships with one another. They can connect and communicate on official channels or make their own unofficial groups where they need not communicate through a central authority or gatekeeper. Fan and star interactions can be direct, one-on-one interactions on multiple social media channels. There may be an official, organized fan group, but many other avenues can appear on relatively

open platforms with few rules.

The cultural product at the core of a fandom might still be a “legacy media” product. **Legacy media** are any media platforms that existed prior to the development of massive digital networks. Yes, there are people who are “Instagram famous” or “YouTube” famous, but the biggest stars in our cultural world still have many ties to legacy media. Musicians, film stars, and comic book heroes come to mind. What other types of “legacy media” stars have huge online fandoms?

Online fandoms may simultaneously expect less centralized authority over the fan experience and more direct access to their heroes. They often expect to see transparency during the creative process, such as Instagram or Twitter posts with “secret” messages for longtime followers or behind-the-scenes videos as albums and movies are made. Fandoms might demand to hear key information first or to have special access via social media.

Similar things could be said of fan clubs in the age of snail mail. Essential elements of the culture of fandom — gaining access to artists and finding friends in a community — have not changed as much in kind as they have in degree.

Is this an example of the transition of an existing cultural form (the fan club) to digital environments, or is online fandom something truly different from a snail mail fan club? This is a good question to debate in the classroom.

It is worth noting that there are also niche fandoms that probably would not exist without the aid of digital networks. With virtually unlimited communication space, there is room for incredibly rarified fan groups to form on platforms such as Tumblr, and they are not always socially positive communities. In many cases of hyper-specific fandoms, it is difficult to argue that these cultures existed in the physical world and simply “moved online.” Being digitally networked is what makes it possible to find people with particularly narrow shared interests, for better and for worse.

Digital Dynamic

Even with the presence of niche online groups, digital culture cannot currently be separated from the influence of physical-world cultures. We can say two things about the relationship between online and physical-world cultures at this time. First, the growth of interaction on digital networks influences “traditional” cultures. Second, longstanding cultural traditions are influencing digital culture as it takes shape. The ethics and norms established in the physical world shape our views about behavior and values in digital networks. The term **norm** refers to a behavioral standard. Mutual influences of what is considered “normal” in online behavior and well established physical world norms are emerging in a dynamic fashion. Sometimes they clash.

One example is online dating. Dating in real life (IRL) is changing as more and more people use dating apps and websites. Previously, dating was limited to the people you were likely to meet. You could meet friends of friends. You could meet people at school, at parties, at bars, or on blind dates. Your options were limited geographically and by how outgoing you were, how much time you wanted to spend looking, and who you trusted to set you up. The personal ads in newspapers were often considered sad places for losers. Using a mass medium to find your true love was often considered a risky last resort.



Figure 3.3.3: Lindsay Blackwell, My Super Pseudo-Scientific Online Dating Experiment™. Image by James Bastow, CCBY. [Source: Flickr.](#)

When online dating first became available, it was often compared to posting and perusing digital personal ads. This was a cultural perception based on previous experiences, behavior, and expectations from a pre-Internet culture.

Over the course of approximately ten years (1998-2008), what once was considered odd, creepy, or desperate in many parts of

the Western world came to be considered commonplace. Apps and sites like OkCupid, Tinder, Match.com, and eHarmony have millions of users. Culturally, many of us have accepted this new digital form of dating. It's not for everyone, but online dating does not carry the stigma it once did.

Even Tinder, which has a reputation as a “hook-up” app, maintains popularity and cultural significance as it is referenced often on other media platforms.

Whatever it may be in a given culture, sexual morality still exists, even if new technologies make hooking up easier and new capabilities challenge old norms of what dating should be.

This is the dynamic at the heart of this chapter. Digital technology can influence knowledge, beliefs, and especially practices around dating. This can, in turn, shape the way people think about dating in general, not just in digital environments. The “old” cultural norms and morals can still be applied to judge those who use digital apps for casual hookups, but the new culture can push back, so to speak, and change how people think about dating even if they never use dating apps themselves.

We have discussed how the digital culture and physical world culture dynamic functions, but we have not yet defined digital culture. For that, we must look to scholars who have spent years trying to pinpoint what emergent digital culture seems to be.

Individualization, Post-nationalism, and Globalization

We turn to Mark Deuze, a scholar from the University of Amsterdam, for a complete definition. He seeks to provide a preliminary definition of “digital culture” in his 2006 article, [“Participation, Remediation, Bricolage: Considering Principal Components of a Digital Culture.”](#)

In his analysis of academic literature, Deuze finds that scholars often make assumptions when trying to explain how digital culture works. The main he identifies is the idea that culture moves to digital networks more or less intact. There was, a decade ago, a lack of explanation about what happens to culture in digital environments.

How much might culture change when certain practices move online? How often can existing cultural beliefs and expectations be transferred intact? Deuze does not think digital culture is merely a recreation of physical world culture in online spaces, but he does not have a good answer for what has been emerging. He analyzes independent media sites, blogs, and radical online media outlets to see what these new forms of communication demonstrate about digital culture.

That these forms are not meant to represent all culture but rather a cultural vanguard. They are (or were) the tip of the spear of newly evolving digital cultures. These sites are often progressive politically, so this is not as much a prediction of what will happen with all digital culture as it is a discussion of what is possible. Deuze maintains that the real practice of digital culture is [“an expression of individualization, post-nationalism, and globalization.”](#)

Individualization

Deuze finds individualization in blogs most frequently written by one person and focused on a specific topic or small geographical region. **Individualism**, as it is used here, refers not only to an individual's ability to act as their own publisher online but also to a social condition in which individuals are free from government control. It means that even in authoritarian nations such as North Korea, Russia, China, and Iran that try to control the behavior of their citizens, individuals may seek freedom of expression on the internet, although it comes at a greater risk.

Beyond Deuze's observations, evidence of individualism online comes from partisan news sites such as The Drudge Report and HuffPost. Both are named for individual founders. They are digital mass media outlets that started largely as personal points of view.

The importance of individualized expression on social media is clear. We appear as individuals on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Tumblr. This increases our reach. Each of us can potentially connect with every other individual on a given social media platform, but these platforms also raise questions about surveillance and privacy.

Digital Individualism vs. Privacy

Eric Schmidt once said about online privacy and Google, “If you have something that you don't want anyone to know, maybe you

shouldn't be doing it in the first place." While this might make sense in a free society, there are many places in the world — North Korea for example — where government surveillance can utilize corporate invasions of privacy to crack down on dissent and severely limit freedom.

Suppose someone living in North Korea would like to use a social media channel such as Twitter to connect with like-minded people without government officials finding out. Should Twitter protect those users? What if a state threatens legal action or violence against Twitter employees? Would social media channels give up their users?

There is a difference between government surveillance (that is, state-sanctioned data gathering and analysis on massive scales) and corporate data aggregation for targeted marketing purposes. Usually, by accepting the Terms and Conditions of apps and web services, you opt-in to having your data stored, crunched, and analyzed by corporations. Legally, you are responsible for that decision. Technically, the data gathering platform is not supposed to identify you as an individual, but so-called "safe harbor" laws can be ineffectual.

Should Google protect your searches and refuse to divulge information about your habits to governments, even if they share that data with other companies for marketing purposes? Should Google give you a way to hide your online activity? Is there a way for the liberty-loving Southeast Asian to have his privacy protected while still enabling Western governments to watch out for terrorists? These questions relate to larger issues of freedom and individualism in digital culture.

Throughout its history, the United States of America has taken pride in its First Amendment and the rest of the Bill of Rights as guarantees of liberty. After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, many Americans accepted new levels of scrutiny, particularly in digital environments. Support for strong leaders increased until very recently. Concerns about the global rise of authoritarianism have people questioning government surveillance and corporate surveillance as they may limit our ability to engage as individuals in digital culture.

Eric Schmidt's statement implies that privacy in digital networks is limited. This sentiment is echoed by Mark Zuckerberg, who has suggested that privacy is dead. What this means is that physical world behavior is expected to adapt to the demands of digital culture because the capabilities of digital culture also carry with them unique risks that we are not necessarily adapted to deal with.

Our experience with the anarchy of online mass communication platforms is quite limited. As we learn what government surveillance and corporate invasions of privacy are capable of, it may continue to deeply affect our physical world behavior.

Many would agree with the sentiment, "If you do nothing wrong, you have nothing to worry about," but even advocates for a more open digital society want their privacy. Zuckerberg bought several properties around his house to keep his physical location secure. Eric Schmidt does not want people to know where he lives. He generally does not invite the public into his private life, and, one might assume, does not want people to examine why his former wife said she felt like a "piece of luggage" when married to him. Such information about Schmidt's personal life is easy to find online and could be used against him, but should we care? Does it matter in the broader cultural sense?

This text argues that privacy does matter. The vast majority of us are not using digital platforms to break laws or to interact in negative ways with others and yet we still have aspects of ourselves that we would like to remain private. Has a parent or guardian ever snooped on your Facebook account or followed your Instagram? We have incredible freedoms and amazing digital communication capabilities as individuals living our lives in the new digital culture. It comes with a price we have yet to grasp.

Terms and Conditions

The film *Terms and Conditions May Apply* details the ways our private information, such as our emails and texts, can easily be related to our public information on social networks. The filmmakers note that the knowledge and hardware needed to snoop on people are bought and sold all over the world and are often unregulated.

Are we becoming more open because of the ways social media function? Is there anything wrong with that? Are we surrendering our privacy in ways that cannot be undone?

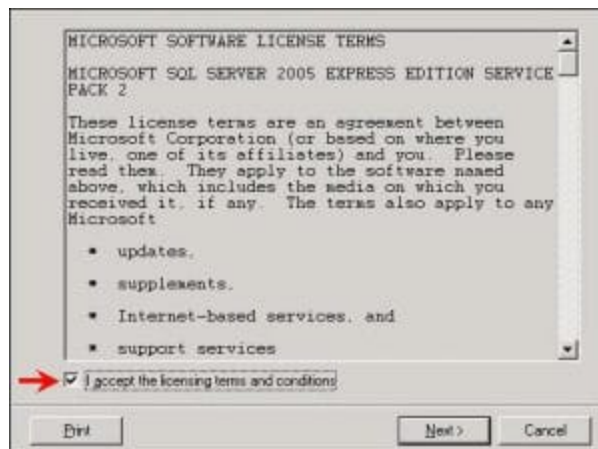


Figure 3.3.4: An old-school screen capture of Microsoft's Terms and Conditions by Klariti Template Shop, CCBY. Source: Flickr.

One of the major cultural challenges of the network society will be to deal with people in power who would like to use our information against us as a means of control. It has already happened in some of the countries where the Arab Spring revolutions took place (Egypt, for one).

You never know what you might need to protest in the future, but we're beginning to see tools deployed to pre-empt protest and other acts of dissent. What this means for our efforts to define digital culture is that digital culture can free us as individuals, but it can also imprison us.

We can use the internet and smartphones to help us to get questions answered and to draw attention to ourselves in good ways. We can coordinate with others for fundraisers and to have parties. Digital communication networks are amazingly sophisticated tools that can help us connect as individuals to form groups to celebrate all sorts of interests, political and otherwise.

On the other hand, if individuals believe they have no privacy, digital networks could become virtual wastelands where innovative collaboration is hindered and where corporate commercial speech and government surveillance dominate.

Capitalism depends on risk-taking, and if you kill risk-taking online, you have hindered the entrepreneurialism that the network society offers. We scholars will study for decades to come how individual behavior changes and how relationships morph in a digital culture that discourages behavior we want to keep private while simultaneously encouraging levels of sharing that border on exhibitionism. How can we maintain privacy and gain attention, which is so often the currency of the open Internet? This is an interesting dilemma that arises in an individualistic digital culture.

Post-nationalism

Post-nationalism is another aspect of digital culture that Deuze notes in his article. It may seem unrelated to our previous discussion of individualism and privacy in digital culture, but in fact, it is an analysis of the ways individuals represent themselves online.

Most simply, "**post-nationalism**" in digital culture means that one's country appears to matter less as an influence on behavior and values online than it does in the tangible world, perhaps because we can be free of our national identities when engaging in digital networks with people from around the globe.

This does not mean that we should expect to see an end to nationalism in the tangible world. Quite the opposite seems to be true: As post-nationalism appears in digital spaces, nationalism is on the rise in global politics. It might seem odd that people drop their nationalism online but demand it in physical spaces, but if you look at the way culture is expressed online, it is clear that for many people their nationality has little to do with their online identities.

For example, your country may be important to you, but it may not be one of the ways you define yourself in social media environments. You can love America without talking about it all of the time on Facebook or Twitter. Remember as well that national boundaries may be felt more readily in the daily lives of Africans, Asians, Europeans and others living in nations that are geographically smaller, more tightly packed, and culturally distinct. In digital spaces, these cultural differences can evaporate.

Although war and immigration are highly influential on the current cultural climate in the physical world, the perception of

evaporating culture in networked spaces may help drive the sense that physical world cultures are being threatened.

Recent political developments, however, make it somewhat more difficult to think of digital culture as post-nationalistic given the rise of online nationalism — particularly white nationalism in Europe and the United States. White nationalism is a brand of nationalism related to white supremacy, but it is an identity connected to the nation-state nonetheless. A nationalist's primary *modus operandi* in digital culture may not reflect what nation states ultimately become in the 21st century, but rather what they wish it were. Even so, there is evidence that some factions will use digital spaces to promote a return to nationalism.

Does this mean that post-nationalism in digital culture is a false notion conceived in the early 2000s that has no bearing on culture today? Perhaps, but it is more likely that we are seeing a backlash against the rise of a global post-nationalist space online.

Globalization

Digital culture, Deuze posits, reflects a globalized or globalizing world. Behaviors, interests, and relationships cross international boundaries. The economic structure of digital networks, including the mass media system, is global. For example, multinational conglomerate corporations tend to dominate the media industry, not just in the United States but around the world. Books, academic articles, and simple infographics show that most mass media companies fall under the ownership of large corporate firms. It is not accurate to say this represents *all* media or that “the media” are being controlled, but it is accurate to say a significant level of influence can be attributed to a handful of media corporations in most developed parts of the world.

Mass media consumers should be aware of the environment in which media products are produced, but this is not to say that the globalization of mass media is always a negative thing. When it comes to culture, globalization has its supporters. Here is a site [in English about K-pop music](#). The music comes from Korea, but the fanbase is spread worldwide, and the site can reach a global audience only because of the global nature of digital networks. It works only because computer servers are connected by wires all over the globe to make this bit of culture, like many others, available to the entire globe.

There exists a global point of view in both the physical world and in digital culture which is open to all kinds of cultural production as long as it is interesting, funny and shows great talent. There are videos that go viral globally, although it is not always clear why. (If we had the formula, we'd include it here.) All we can say at this time is that you can reach the world with any online message and, for whatever reason, some things are globally likable and “shareable.”

A Place Called Gangnam

Humanity's recently developed ability to develop a globalized point of view and to establish a common digital culture is the reason you have heard (and likely tired) of “Gangnam Style.” Ironically, PSY, who performs the song, is kind of an anti-pop star within Korea. The song makes fun of the country's higher class, a conspicuously wealthy subculture from a place called the Gangnam District. But PSY is a global success. He is popular, many argue, because he is quite funny and because he is *not* the prototypical K-pop hero. He comes from a particular national cultural tradition, but he also transcends it by being absurd. Thus, as a distinctly individual performer, he personifies a type of post-nationalism and the globalization of digital culture.

Individualism, post-nationalism, and globalization go a long way toward defining the emergent “digital culture.” For more information, consult [Deuze's original article](#).

Digital Culture in Practice

Deuze makes one more observation not about *what digital culture is* but rather *how it works*. Deuze argues that the production of digital culture will be carried out through participation, remediation, and bricolage.

Participation means that every individual will have the ability to contribute to online media. Professionals and amateurs will work together much more often than they did on “legacy media” products and projects.

Because people do not want to work for free, they will not flock to an online platform simply because it has been opened up for contributions. If anyone could build a Facebook, there would be hundreds or even thousands of competing platforms. As it stands, there are perhaps ten major social media platforms worldwide, if “major” means they are home to more than 200 million members.

It is also clear from social networking sites, Reddit, and similar social news sharing sites that people will contribute to a platform even if it is not necessarily well-policed or easy to use. In digital culture, it helps to be the first to be big. Success breeds success in an economy based on attention, and what dominates tends to be emotional issues, as [satirized here](#).

Consistency also seems to help, but what matters most is the ability to consistently draw an audience. Think of a person trying to become a YouTube influencer. They must publish interesting content regularly for months or even years before they develop a following that they might be able to sell to advertisers. Once the YouTube star does begin to peddle products, they run the risk of alienating a portion of their audience.

Participation is an essential part of digital culture. It can be easy and fun to do it for free. If you want to make a career out of it, it takes professional-level commitment, and the resulting content often favors what is popular and emotionally gripping rather than what is informative or socially beneficial.

Remediation means that old media are made new again in digital spaces. Television becomes YouTube. Radio becomes podcasting, Spotify, and Pandora. Newspapers become... online newspapers! The new media take elements of the old media and repurpose them, while “legacy” media firms copycat digital media trends, buy out media startups, or try to forge new paths at significant expense.

In the practice of digital culture, media are remade in digital environments in a process that combines the appealing parts of existing forms of media with additional functionalities made possible by new ICTs and digital networking capabilities. The author’s own research argues that attempts by legacy media organizations to create new businesses online face many institutional hurdles. Remediation is constantly happening, but that does not mean existing media companies can determine how to monetize the practice in a sustainable way. We should expect considerable remediation innovation to come from startup companies and individual tech entrepreneurs with few ties to legacy media.

A good example of remediation is taking classic movies or video games and showing them to young people to record their reactions for YouTube. Reaction videos of all kinds take media products people are familiar with and show them to the unfamiliar so that viewers can judge their reactions. This new media product repurposes old content with an added element designed to pique our interest; however, remediation does not always add much value.

Bricolage is a French term not easy to translate literally to English. A translation offering deep context might be: Do it yourself by combining elements found elsewhere. Much of digital culture is an amalgamation of existing content and new cultural work being done at home by people with amateur skills and affordable but capable tools, such as smartphones and tablet computers. Even basic tools are quite powerful. Smartphones come with front- and back-facing cameras as well as HD-quality video. The computing power of a smartphone is more powerful than a mainframe computer was 70 years ago. Independent producers have video and audio editing software options and can create professional-looking, popular media products on their own with little formal training.

Professionalism

What is formal training for, then? It prepares you to transition from making professional looking and sounding media products once in a while to consistently making professional quality media. Formal training prepares you to think strategically about where industries are going so that you know not only how to make mass media products but where to place them and how to use and possibly develop your own communication platforms.

Formal training includes an education in history and ethics. Amateur producers are skilled at chasing trends and gaining popularity, but they often ride cultural waves that last from a few months to a couple of years. Planning for multiple media shifts and seeing digital cultural trends as or before they emerge requires an education in more than the tools and tricks of the trade.

Deuze in Sum

Deuze’s analysis suggests that barriers between professionals and amateurs are breaking down. Old media are made new again in digital culture, through a process of making digital media collages, so to speak. (The word “bricolage” is related to “collage.”)

Thus, in practice, digital culture is democratizing (though not fully democratic, of course). Amateurs can create media products that challenge the popularity of cultural production made by corporate conglomerates valued at hundreds of billions of dollars. What emerges in terms of popularity, though, is not necessarily high in quality or accuracy. Quality and accuracy are the hallmarks of professional communication (although not all professionals behave as they should).

Levels of Culture in Digital Media

Let's take a step back and look at the definition of culture again. In the first chapter, this text defined **culture** as being made up of the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of a group of people. We need to tweak that definition a little. It is more accurate to say that the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of a massive group of people at a certain time and place defines **common culture**.

Three levels of culture exist in anthropology literature, and they apply to the ways culture is expressed in the mass media. The three levels of culture are personal culture, group culture, and common culture (similar to pop culture).

Any kind of culture, whether it is personal, group, or common culture, relies on shared knowledge. There must be shared experiences and shared stories about those experiences for us to have a common culture. If we did not have shared experiences, cultural references would not make sense. Thus common culture can be arrived at when individuals and groups tell the same stories, or when mass media reach mass audiences with the same messages at the same (or about the same) time.

The more people who know about a song, film, work of art, or event with cultural significance, and the more information that they know about it, the more likely it is that event will become part of the common culture. The mass media influence common culture, although it is not correct to say that they directly shape it. There are many other institutional influences on common culture such as governments, churches, families, and educational systems.

In fact, messages in the mass media may not be as influential now as they were in the mid-20th century when millions of people watched the same TV shows each week at the same time and read the same major metropolitan daily newspapers and national magazines. Demassification has affected the ways common culture is established and fed.

The mass media influence may have less power to influence common culture directly, but it is still relevant. Think about any major global news event of the past few months. When an event is big enough that it is shared across all media platforms, especially cable television, broadcast television, and social media channels, it can form a piece of common culture. If several events occur or if an event has a broad enough global impact, it can enter the global **collective memory**, the shared cultural memory of a group of people.

Group culture is what we used to refer to as a “subculture.” It is the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of a subset of people considered to be part of a larger culture. Group culture is distinct in some ways from the shared, broader common culture. Group culture might center on religious beliefs and practices, ethnic norms and interests, or food, music, and other forms of material production. Groups can be as large as all Chinese-Americans and as small as the remaining St. Louis NFL fan culture.

You have a say in defining your **personal culture** — the knowledge, beliefs, and practices held most dear to the individual. You may find yourself identifying with many group cultures or taking most of your interests from the dominant common culture. Do you take your cultural cues about what to think about and talk about from television, social media or small group cultures with which you identify? This much is your prerogative. You can choose your personal culture. It is based both on what you believe in and what cultural products you consume.

America, ‘Merica, Los Estados Unidos, Etc.

There is a common culture in America, but there is no single, dominant, common culture across global digital networks. There may be a tendency for people to believe that the group cultures they interact with most often online constitute the “real” digital culture, but as yet there is no clear consensus about what our shared digital culture is or even if we will develop one.

Algorithms in search engines and social media platforms determine much of what we find when we search the internet and what we see when we look at news and information feeds from our friends. Do algorithms constitute common culture? They may shape it, and they may be influenced by user preferences, but they are not always designed for truth, accuracy, or information literacy. They are most often designed to give consumers whatever makes them consume more of what the platform wants them to consume. Google usually wants you to spend money with its advertisers. Facebook wants your time and your data so it can sell your information to third-party advertisers.

What shapes digital culture is often in a “black box”: It is the proprietary information of very large corporations, and the public may or may not have access to the code. Even if we did have it, it would be difficult to explain exactly how algorithms work. There are times when the corporations that deploy algorithms seem surprised by how they function in the hands of massive numbers of users.

Major events that cut across algorithms and show up on almost everyone's news feed and in almost everyone's search results are still likely to have an impact on common culture. Major events are likely to shape personal, group, and common culture if they are significant enough. What kind of cultural impact does a given event have? It depends.

The impact of a school shooting near Miami might be felt differently in Florida than in California because of proximity and because the gun laws in each state are quite different. In other words, something can enter the common culture but still be perceived quite differently by individual members of the public.

Norms

By now you should understand that the cultural impact of messages in the mass media at each level—personal, group, and common culture—is related to the shared knowledge that existed before the event.

Events are often going to be perceived differently by people identifying with different small group cultures within a larger common culture. Events will usually be interpreted differently by individuals within a small group culture, depending on an individual's beliefs about and personal experiences with the issue at hand.



Figure 3.3.5: Graffiti explaining the role of women in Egypt's revolution. Image by Gigi Ibrahim, CCBY. [Source: Flickr.](#)

A person's response to current events as they appear in the mass media is also related to the existence and strength of shared beliefs about the way they think things *ought* to be. We call those beliefs **cultural norms**.

There is no single, agreed-upon set of norms that everyone in a given group culture adheres to. If you have lived your whole life as part of the dominant culture, and you do not recognize the existence and struggle of various cultural groups, it can be difficult to recognize reactions in digital media spaces that do not relate much to what you see in your physical world. Conversely, if you have grown up being oppressed as part of a small group, you may find it hard to understand how others identifying with the dominant portion of a common culture can miss the cruelty present in some cultural norms they don't think twice about.

Exposure to other groups' cultures in a network society can bring about both greater understanding and greater anxiety. This is something that will be worked out, for better or for worse, over the next several decades as digital culture evolves. Figuring out how groups with different cultural interests, norms, and values can get along while being constantly exposed to one another's views in the free-for-all of network society is the challenge of emergent digital culture.

One response is to run to echo chambers, to partisan spaces that feel safe for certain group cultures and for our personal cultural beliefs and priorities, but this practice can only deepen the divide between cultural groups.

In the early years of working to establish a common culture in the network society, we have managed to inundate ourselves with information from all manner of cultural groups and to isolate ourselves from views that contradict our own group cultural norms. This is anarchy. This is culture without a strong social structure to hold it together.

The question facing mass communication scholars that members of our common culture also face is whether the institutions of the physical world can or should try to control how digital culture is shaped. You have the power to decide if digital culture should be regulated and how. This may be the most important civic responsibility you have, but it is also a matter of cultural power.

Social Media and Social Capital

What do you think it means for society that networked communication platforms can make anybody a mass communicator? One answer is that there is great potential for social change because society, as Dewey said in Chapter 1, is not just transmitted by communication, it exists in it.

That means every individual with a computer or a smartphone has the potential to disseminate messages that influence broader society. Think of the Arab Spring revolutions of 2010-2012. Think of #Ferguson protests in the summer and fall of 2014. Think of the way candidate Donald Trump bypassed mass media outlets to reach voters and to set a separate news agenda in 2015 and 2016. Individuals and small groups are now able to coordinate and to lead social movements using networked communication technologies.



Figure 3.3.6: Facebook's Facebook Page by "Christopher," CCBY. Source: Flickr.

You have probably heard the term "social movement." In a sense, a social movement is a change in society brought on by communication. What is different about the world of networked communication is how interpersonal messages and message campaigns can shift in an instant to being mass messages or massive campaigns. This makes digital networks battlegrounds because networked public communication platforms are centers of power now more than ever.

Just as they can influence and even disrupt social structures, individuals and small groups can shape culture using social media channels. This makes our communication system as ripe for abuse by outside forces as it is for use by legitimate citizens. Governments, corporations, and rogue dictators all have an interest in learning our secrets, and they could potentially hold them against us.

We cannot underestimate how important this is will be in the mass communication field. Individual, group, and broader social secrets—including consumer behavior, political behavior, and even personal thoughts and interests—are easier to discern and possibly manipulate than ever before because of the vast amounts of data collected about us from our social media and other internet habits. This can have a profound effect on our behavior and on our society, and we are not prepared as a society to defend ourselves against attacks.

Before you get discouraged about digital culture and privacy, and before you get inundated with all of the possibilities and implications of digital culture, consider [Clay Shirky's Ted talk, "How social media can make history."](#)

Shirky outlines the power of social connectivity and applies the concept of **social capital**. The basic definition of social capital is the potential to get help, not just financial assistance, from the people around you when needed. Social media platforms can be great places to build social capital. Thus, they have the potential to be constructive or disruptive. It depends on how you use them. Watch the video for a complete definition.

Interpersonal communication, organizational communication, and mass communication are separate areas of academic interest, as stated in the first chapter, but our ability as consumers and as producers to alternate from one to the other is as powerful as it has ever been. Being connected to each other almost at all times by digital networks creates the capacity for relatively quick mass social action. People are beginning to use this power to pull society in different directions. Large numbers of people can be organized and we could see social shifts and rifts develop more quickly than they can be put back together. It will be up to individual users and groups of users to decide how to respond to such social and cultural changes.

Participatory Media

A major shaper of culture and society is the news media. There will be separate sections on the evolution of news in later chapters, but in the context of digital culture, it bears noting that the role of news media within broader media landscapes is also shifting.

Apart from the ability of social movements and cultural movements to arise and take shape on social media platforms, there is also the potential for public opinion to be influenced quickly and deeply when mass media outlets operated in the same digital networks as influential individuals and groups.



Figure 3.3.7: New York tabloid newspapers cover the killing of Eric Garner by police during an arrest. Photo by Mike Mozart, CCBY. Source: Flickr.

You may contribute to news information by volunteering. One of the biggest stories to gain national attention in 2014 that was filmed and posted by a **citizen journalist** was the story of **Eric Garner**, who was seen being put into a chokehold by NYPD Officer Daniel Pantaleo. Reports said that Garner had asthma and that he died of a heart attack. Here the term “citizen journalist” refers to a person who is not a paid professional but who delivers news to audiences nonetheless.

It is doubtful that the story would have received national attention had it not been for the video bystander Taisha Allen took with her mobile phone. When she shared that video, and it went viral on social media channels, she made the mass media story possible.

Allen probably had several reasons for sharing the video of Garner, and she was probably aware of the potential social and cultural impact of the video. You do not have to be a media literacy expert to know that such a video would receive broad attention and generate controversy. Allen chose to share the video because she thought people needed to see what had happened.

Further solidifying the cultural significance of the video, within days of the story breaking, Spike Lee had re-cut a scene from his groundbreaking film *Do the Right Thing* where the character Radio Raheem is choked to death by an NYPD officer. He interspersed his original film clip with bystander video of Eric Garner's death. This almost instant connection between a post made by a citizen using social media and a bit of modern classic film speaks to the rising power and cultural influence of amateur media. Individuals can affect major producers in a mutual effort to shape social norms and structures as well as cultural influences.

We should expect more and more professionals to make these kinds of connections with amateurs and bystanders in the future. Mashups of professionally made mass media messages and citizen-generated messages are likely to proliferate. Can you think of video footage from individuals present during major news events that shaped the news and public opinion?

The events in Ferguson, Missouri followed a similar path as the Eric Garner story: Social media accounts of the killing of Michael Brown were shared virally almost immediately after the incident. Social media activity on YouTube, Twitter, and other channels helped shape the way events unfolded. This drove the way the story was covered in the national media in the early reporting, but backlash inevitably followed.

Much of the work done by citizen journalists will be controversial. Media professionals working in news and other fields will have to use discernment in deciding which views to share because in a sense sharing is promoting, even if one disagrees with the sentiment of the tweet, video, or post.

No piece of media that is meaningful on a cultural level is going to be captured and disseminated with universal agreement about its importance or its meaning, but for society to function and for culture to serve its purposes we need to agree in a general sense on what's real and what is not. The real danger in the rise of the power of individuals and small groups in digital culture is that

they can pull larger groups away from looking for fact-based discourse.

4: CULTURE AND GENDER

4.1: Culture

4.2: Gender

4.1: Culture

Learning Objectives

After completing this section, students should be able to:

- Describe what it means to be a provisional communicator.
- Define culture and co-culture.
- Explain how culture may impact communication choices.
- Apply Hofstede's dimensions of culture to oneself and a group.
- Show how Hall's cultural variations apply to oneself and a group.
- Identify barriers to intercultural competence.

Humans are naturally *egocentric*. Since we can exist only within our own heads, it is perfectly natural for us to assume everyone else thinks, perceives, and communicates as we do. The only world we can experience is the world as we see it, and it can be very challenging to understand that varied perceptions, values, and beliefs exist which are equally valid.

Being a **provisional** communicator can be challenging. **Provisionalism** is "the ability to accept the diversity of perceptions and beliefs, and to operate in a manner sensitive to that diversity." Being provisional does not mean we abandon our own beliefs and values, nor does it mean we have to accept all beliefs and values as correct. Instead, provisionalism leads us to seek to understand variations in human behaviors, and to understand the field of experience out of which the other person operates. This adds an extra step to the interpretation process:

- We interpret the world within our own life experiences, *but then*
- We stop and consider, "How was the message intended?" or "What other factors may be motivating this behavior?"

For example, in the dominant U.S. culture, we are taught it is rude to stare at people, especially those markedly different from ourselves. We consider such extended gazes unsettling, and we question why the person is doing it. This is not true, however, in all cultures. When Keith was in China several years ago (Figure 4.1.1), he had to acclimate to this cultural difference. Since he stood out as markedly different; lighter-skinned, bald, taller, and larger than the average Chinese, he would regularly catch people staring at him, and many were doing so quite openly and obviously. If he had simply used an egocentric interpretation, interpreting them according to his own culture, he would have drawn the conclusion they were very rude. Since Keith knew from various travel books of this cultural difference, he was able to be provisional and understand their behavior was perfectly appropriate within the context of their culture. If he had not learned about the culture, he might have experienced even greater **culture shock**. This term refers to the discomfort felt when interacting in a new environment with few familiar cues to guide our communication behaviors (Martin & Nakayama, 2018).

MIIS1: Culture

Figure 4.1.1: Keith in China

In addition to cultural differences, we also experience variations in communication behaviors between men and women. For example, Keith's wife and her sister can talk for hours about all sorts of relational issues with co-workers, with family members, and with friends while he finds such extensive conversations exhausting. Since female communication is far more focused on relationship development and maintenance, such conversations are consistent with the feminine communication style. The masculine style is far more focused on action and the bare details of events, who did what to whom, and not as focused on the nuances of relational dynamics. As someone who uses the masculine style, once Keith gets the basic details, he thinks he is informed and does not feel a need to dissect the smaller details of the event. Note that the masculine and feminine communication styles are not based on biology; men can use a feminine style and women can use a masculine style. In the next section, "Gender", you will learn more about these styles and how we move between them depending on the situation.

Culture and gender impact communication. As with all human behavior, when we address such variations, we always speak of tendencies, not absolutes: men *tend* to communicate one way, and women *tend* to communicate somewhat differently. Imagine if a visitor from another culture was to ask you, "What are Americans like?" Chances are you could identify a few characteristics but would also qualify your statements with, "But not everyone...."

Culture and Communication

Each of us exists within a dominant **culture** and is a member of several co-cultures. Our culture "is the broad set of shared beliefs and values that form a collective vision of ourselves and others". Culture is learned, and it can be so ingrained it becomes a challenge to identify how it influences our thoughts and behaviors. For example, in U.S. culture, we place a high value on self-determination: we have a fundamental right to make choices we deem best for us. As long as our actions do not harm others or inhibit their choices, we feel free to follow the life path of our choosing. If others attempt to force us to act or think in certain ways, we tend to rebel. Other cultures are more collectivist, and the emphasis is placed on doing what is best for the group. In such cultures, engaging in individual behaviors that reflect poorly on the group is a powerful social taboo. For example, in some Asian cultures, if a student performs poorly academically, it is seen as a reflection on the entire family, bringing shame to all. The pressures to succeed are based not on personal achievement but on maintaining the honor of the entire family. Contrast that to dominant U.S. culture in which students are generally seen as failing, or succeeding, on their own merit.

Cultures do not have static sets of beliefs and values; instead, they will evolve over time. In the U.S. we have seen large cultural shifts in the past 50 years. Sexual mores have changed quite dramatically, as have our attitudes about individual rights. While in the past women were restricted to a narrow range of careers, today we assume men and women are equally able to pursue the career of their choice. We continue to evolve attitudes toward minorities and immigrants. During the past 10 years, the changes in attitudes toward homosexuality and the civil rights of same-sex couples are quite striking.

Paid Family & Medical Leave Program Overview

Figure 4.1.2

It is also important to note a broad culture, like the U.S., will also have a number of cultural groups within it, sometimes called **co-cultures**. This refers to "an identifiable group with their own unique traits operating within the larger culture", such as Native Americans, African Americans, Latinos, and similar groups with their own distinct cultures. In addition to culture and co-culture, others terms are used to refer to this aspect of cultures, such as majority and minority cultures or dominant and nondominant cultures or macro- and micro-cultures. These terms attempt to reflect the importance of culture in the broader sense and the reality of the greater power that some cultures have within a society. Some groups within a larger culture relate to the social identities of those involved. These may be based on regions (the old South, the East Coast, urban, rural), religion or beliefs: (Catholics, Southern Baptists, Lutherans, Buddhists, Muslims, atheists), or affiliation (street gangs, NASCAR fans, college students). Such groups are not cultures per se but groups of people who share concerns and who might perceive similarities due to common interests or characteristics (Lustig & Koester, 2010).

Within each of the social groups, communication is influenced. Consider:

- The use of specific gestures, colors, and styles of dress in inner-city gangs;
- The classic Southern Accent;
- The use of regional sayings, such as "you betcha," or "whatever" in rural Minnesota;
- The more quiet nature of Native Americans who may prefer to listen and observe.

These cultural groups and social identities operate within the larger culture while maintaining the traits that make these smaller groups unique. These variations in lifestyle, communication behaviors, values, beliefs, art, food, and such provide a rich quilt of human experience, and for the provisional communicator, one who can accept and appreciate these differences, it can be an invigorating experience to move among them.

Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture

Individualism and Collectivism

According to Hofstede,

The left side of this dimension, called **Individualism**, can be defined as *a preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families only*. Its opposite, **Collectivism**, represents *a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty*. A society's position on this dimension is reflected in whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we" (Hofstede, 2012a).

In a highly individualistic culture, members are able to make choices based on personal preference with little regard for others, except for close family or significant relationships. They can pursue their own wants and needs free from concerns about meeting social expectations. The United States is a highly individualistic culture. While we value the role of certain aspects of collectivism such as government, social organizations, or other forms of collective action, at our core we strongly believe it is up to each person to find and follow their path in life.

In a highly collectivistic culture, just the opposite is true. It is the role of individuals to fulfill their place in the overall social order. Personal wants and needs are secondary to the needs of the society at large. There is immense pressure to adhere to social norms, and those who fail to conform risk social isolation, disconnection from family, and perhaps some form of banishment. China is typically considered a highly collectivistic culture. In China, multigenerational homes are common, and tradition calls for the oldest son to care for his parents as they age.

High Power-Distance and Low Power-Distance

Power is a normal feature of any relationship or society. How power is perceived, however, varies among cultures:

The power distance dimension of culture expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect power to be distributed unequally. The fundamental issue is how a society handles inequalities among people. People in societies exhibiting a **large degree of power distance** *accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification*. In societies with **low power distance**, *people strive to equalize the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power* (Hofstede, 2012a).

In high power-distance cultures, the members accept some having more power and some having less power, and that this power distribution is natural and normal. Those with power are assumed to deserve it, and likewise those without power are assumed to be in their proper place. In such a culture, there will be a rigid adherence to the use of titles, “Sir,” “Ma’am,” “Officer,” “Reverend,” and so on. The directives of those with higher power are to be obeyed, with little question.

In low power-distance cultures, the distribution of power is considered far more arbitrary and viewed as a result of luck, money, heritage, or other external variables. For a person to be seen as having power, something must justify their power. A wealthy person is typically seen as more powerful in western cultures. Elected officials, like United States Senators, will be seen as powerful since they had to win their office by receiving majority support. In these cultures, individuals who attempt to assert power are often faced with those who stand up to them, question them, ignore them, or otherwise refuse to acknowledge their power. While some titles may be used, they will be used far less than in a high power-distance culture. For example, in colleges and universities in the U.S., it is far more common for students to address their instructors on a first-name basis, and engage in casual conversation on personal topics. In contrast, in a high power-distance culture like Japan, the students rise and bow as the teacher enters the room, address them formally at all times, and rarely engage in any personal conversation.

High Uncertainty Avoidance and Low Uncertainty Avoidance

Humans do not like uncertainty, and the drive to lower uncertainty to increase predictability and comfort is quite strong. How cultures handle uncertainty varies:

The uncertainty avoidance dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. The fundamental issue here is how a society deals with the fact the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? Countries exhibiting **strong [uncertainty avoidance]** *maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas*. **Weak [uncertainty avoidance]** *societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles* (Hofstede, 2012a).

Consider how one avoids uncertainty: by limiting change, adhering to tradition, and sticking to past practice. High uncertainty avoidance cultures place a very high value on history, doing things as they have been done in the past, and honoring stable cultural norms. Even though the U.S. is generally low in uncertainty avoidance, we can see some evidence of a degree of higher uncertainty avoidance related to certain social issues. As society changes, there are many who will decry the changes as they are “forgetting the past,” “dishonoring our forebears,” or “abandoning sacred traditions.” In the controversy over same-sex marriage, the phrase “traditional marriage” is used to refer to a two-person, heterosexual marriage, suggesting same-sex marriage is a violation of tradition. Changing social norms creates uncertainty, and for many change is very unsettling.

In a low uncertainty avoidance culture, change is seen as inevitable, normal, and even preferable to stasis. In such a culture innovation in all areas is valued, whether it be in technology, business, social norms, or human relationship. Businesses in the

U.S. that can change rapidly, innovate quickly, and respond immediately to market and social pressures are seen as far more successful. While Microsoft™ has long dominated the world market in computer operating systems, they are regularly criticized for being slow to change and to respond to changing consumer demands, which suggests a high uncertainty avoidance culture within that business. Apple™, on the other hand, has been praised for its innovation and ability to respond more quickly to market demands, suggesting a low uncertainty avoidance culture.

Long-Term Orientation and Short-Term Orientation

People and cultures view time in different ways. For some, the “here and now” is paramount, and for others, “saving for a rainy day” is the dominant view.

The **long-term orientation** dimension can be interpreted as *dealing with society's search for virtue*. Societies with a **short-term orientation** generally *have a strong concern with establishing the absolute Truth*. They are normative in their thinking. They exhibit great respect for traditions, a relatively small propensity to save for the future, and a focus on achieving quick results. In societies with a long-term orientation, people believe that truth depends very much on situation, context and time. They show an ability to adapt traditions to changed conditions, a strong propensity to save and invest, thriftiness, and perseverance in achieving results (Hofstede, 2012a).

In a long-term culture, significant emphasis is placed on planning for the future. For example, the savings rates in France and Germany are 2-4 times greater than in the U.S., suggesting cultures with more of a “plan ahead” mentality (Pasquali & Aridas, 2012). These long-term cultures see change and social evolution are normal, integral parts of the human condition.

In a short-term culture, emphasis is placed far more on the “here and now.” Immediate needs and desires are paramount, with longer-term issues left for another day. The U.S. falls more into this type. Legislation tends to be passed to handle immediate problems, and it can be challenging for lawmakers to convince voters of the need to look at issues from a long-term perspective. With the fairly easy access to credit, consumers are encouraged to buy now versus waiting. We see evidence of the need to establish “absolute Truth” in our political arena on issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion, and gun control. Our culture does not tend to favor middle grounds in which truth is not clear-cut.

Masculine and Feminine

Expectations for gender roles are a core component of any culture. All cultures have some sense of what it means to be a “man” or a “woman.” **Masculine cultures** are *traditionally seen as more aggressive and domineering*, while **feminine cultures** are *traditionally seen as more nurturing and caring*. Hofstede (2012a) states:

The masculinity side of this dimension represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material reward for success. Society at large is more competitive. Its opposite, femininity, stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society at large is more consensus-oriented.

In a masculine culture, such as the U.S., winning is highly valued. We respect and honor those who demonstrate power and high degrees of competence. Consider the role of competitive sports such as football, basketball, or baseball, and how the rituals of identifying the best are significant events. The 2017 Super Bowl had 111 million viewers, (Huddleston, 2017) and the World Series regularly receives high ratings, with the final game in 2016 ending at the highest rating in ten years (Perez, 2016).

More feminine societies, such as those in the Scandinavian countries, will certainly have their sporting moments. However, the culture is far more structured to provide aid and support to citizens, focusing their energies on providing a reasonable quality of life for all (Hofstede, 2012b).

Indulgence and Restraint

A more recent addition to Hofstede's dimensions of culture, the indulgence/restraint continuum addresses the degree of rigidity of social norms of behavior. He states:

Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. **Restraint** stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms (Hofstede, 2012a).

Indulgent cultures are comfortable with individuals acting on their more basic human drives. Sexual mores are less restrictive, and one can act more spontaneously than in cultures of restraint. Those in indulgent cultures will tend to communicate fewer

messages of judgment and evaluation. Every spring thousands of U.S. college students flock to places like Cancun, Mexico, to engage in a week of fairly indulgent behavior. Feeling free from the social expectations of home, many will engage in some intense partying, sexual activity, and fairly limitless behaviors.

Cultures of restraint, such as many Islamic countries, have rigid social expectations of behavior that can be quite narrow. Guidelines on dress, food, drink, and behaviors are rigid and may even be formalized in law. In the U.S., a generally indulgent culture, there are sub-cultures that are more restraint focused. The Amish are highly restrained by social norms, but so too can be inner-city gangs. Areas of the country, like Utah with its large Mormon culture, or the Deep South with its large evangelical Christian culture, are more restrained than areas such as San Francisco or New York City. Rural areas often have more rigid social norms than do urban areas. Those in more restraint-oriented cultures will identify those not adhering to these norms, placing pressure on them, either openly or subtly, to conform to social expectations.

Hall's Cultural Variations

In addition to these 6 dimensions from Hofstede, anthropologist Edward T. Hall identified two more significant cultural variations (Raimo, 2008).

Monochronic and Polychronic

Another aspect of **variations in time orientation** is the difference between monochronic and polychronic cultures. This refers to how people perceive and value time.

In a **monochronic culture**, like the U.S., "time is viewed as linear, as a sequential set of finite time units." These units are a commodity, much like money, to be managed and used wisely; once the time is gone, it is gone and cannot be retrieved. Consider the language we use to refer to time: *spending* time; *saving* time; *budgeting* time; *making* time. These are the same terms and concepts we apply to money; time is a resource to be managed thoughtfully. Since we value time so highly, that means:

- Punctuality is valued. Since "time is money," if a person runs late, they are wasting the resource.
- Scheduling is valued. Since time is finite, only so much is available, we need to plan how to allocate the resource. Monochronic cultures tend to let the schedule drive activity, much like money dictates what we can and cannot afford to do,
- Handling one task at a time is valued. Since time is finite and seen as a resource, monochronic cultures value fulfilling the time budget by doing what was scheduled. Compare this to a financial budget: funds are allocated for different needs, and we assume those funds should be spent on the item budgeted. In a monochronic culture, since time and money are virtually equivalent, adhering to the "time budget" is valued.
- Being busy is valued. Since time is a resource, we tend to view those who are busy as "making the most of their time;" they are seen as using their resources wisely.

In a **polychronic culture**, like Spain, "time is far, far more fluid." Schedules are more like rough outlines to be followed, altered, or ignored as events warrant. Relationship development is more important, and schedules do not drive activity. Multi-tasking is far more acceptable, as one can move between various tasks as demands change. In polychronic cultures, people make appointments, but there is more latitude for when they are expected to arrive. David's appointment may be at 10:15, but as long as he arrives sometime within the 10 o'clock hour, he is on time.

Consider a monochronic person attempting to do business in a polychronic culture. The monochronic person may expect meetings to start promptly on time, stay focused, and for work to be completed in a regimented manner to meet an established deadline. Yet those in a polychronic culture will not bring those same expectations to the encounter, sowing the seeds for some significant intercultural conflict.

High Context and Low Context

The last variation in culture to consider is whether the culture is high context or low context. To establish a little background, consider how we communicate. When we communicate we use a **communication package**, consisting of all of our verbal and nonverbal communication. Our **verbal communication** refers to **our use of language**, and our **nonverbal communication** refers to "all other communication variables: body language, vocal traits, and dress."

In **low-context cultures**, "verbal communication is given primary attention." The assumption is that people will say what they mean relatively directly and clearly. Little will be left for the receiver to interpret or imply. In the U.S. if someone does not want something, we expect them to say, "No." While we certainly use nonverbal communication variables to get a richer sense of the

meaning of the person's message, we consider what they say to be the core, primary message. Those in a high-context culture find the directness of low-context cultures quite disconcerting, to the point of rudeness.

In **high-context cultures**, "nonverbal communication is as important, if not more important, than verbal communication." How something is said is a significant variable in interpreting what is meant. Messages are often implied and delivered quite subtly. Japan is well known for the reluctance of people to use blunt messages, so they have far more subtle ways to indicate disagreement than a low-context culture. Those in low context cultures find these subtle, implied messages frustrating.

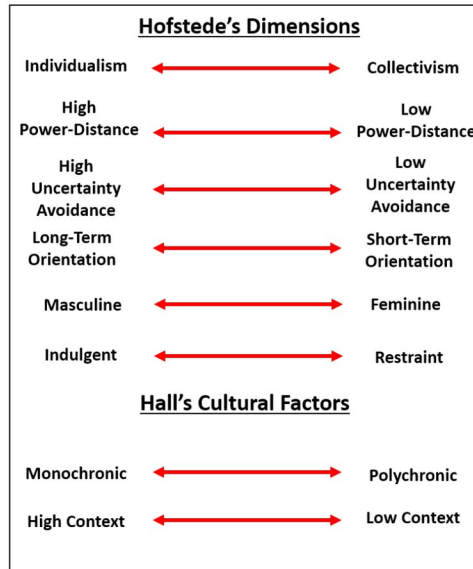


Figure 4.1.3

In summary, Hofstede's Dimensions and Hall's Cultural Variations give us some tools to use to identify, categorize, and discuss diversity in communication. As we learn to see these differences, we are better equipped to manage inter-cultural encounters, communicate more provisionally, and adapt to cultural variations.

While intended to show only broad cultural differences, these eight variables also can be useful tools to identify variations among individuals within a given culture. We can use them to identify sources of conflict or tension within a given relationship. For example, Keith tends to be a short-term oriented, indulgent, monochronic person, while his wife tends to be long-term oriented, restrained, and more polychronic. Needless to say, they frequently experience their own personal "culture clashes."

In our effort to become better communicators, understanding a few additional concepts is helpful. One of those is the distinction between race and ethnicity. Both of these terms are used in varied ways; neither is distinctly defined. **Race** is seen as "a social construct that developed based on biological traits." Current findings in genetic studies show those traits are not as distinct as once thought. However, many communities and co-cultures have been based on race, and some of them developed distinct communication patterns in response to interactions with the dominant culture. People in those communities rely on **codeswitching** to "alter their language use and behavior as they interact within their co-culture or within the dominant culture." **Ethnicity** is generally used to refer to "traits associated with country of birth" which may encompass language, religion, customs, or geographic location. Some people identify closely with their ethnic heritage, especially if their immigrant experience is more recent. Other aspects of cultural identity that play an important role in understanding intercultural communication are gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, social class, and generation. Students interested in learning more about those components may begin by identifying the values of their own cultures (both dominant and co-cultures).

Intercultural Competence

Before looking at how to be more competent in intercultural interactions, it is important to identify some of the **barriers**. Verderber and MacGeorge (2016) give six:

- **Anxiety:** While an intercultural situation will not necessarily result in culture shock, it is not unusual to experience some level of discomfort in such situations. The apprehension we feel can make the interaction awkward or can lead us to avoiding situations that we deem too unfamiliar.

- **Assumed similarity or difference:** If we expect that restaurants will be the same in Asia as they are in the U.S., we are likely to be disappointed. Likewise, if we think no one in another country will understand us, we might miss the opportunity to connect with others who share similar interests.
- **Ethnocentrism:** Assuming our culture is superior to or more important than all others will make it difficult to successfully engage with people from other cultures.
- **Stereotyping:** We can create stereotypes of people within our culture or of people from other cultures. Either way it stops us from seeing people as individuals, and we instead see them as a certain age, race, gender, ability, or whatever. Stereotyping is a process of judging that we all need to work to avoid.
- **Incompatible communication code:** Even within our own language, we may have trouble understanding the messages of others. When the languages are different, it may be more difficult. Nonverbal communication also varies between cultures, so it is not always a good substitute for verbal communication.
- **Incompatible norms and values:** People of one culture may be offended by the norms or values of another culture. For example, less-significant differences in values, such as which foods are most desired, may be offensive. For example, in India, cows are considered sacred, yet in the U.S., beef is widely consumed. However, different cultural values about business practices or expansion of territory can lead to international conflict.

Moving beyond those barriers and toward **ethnorelativism** is at the core of becoming a more competent intercultural communicator. Ethnorelativism is the knowledge that "cultures can only be understood relative to one another, and that particular behavior can only be understood within a cultural context" (Bennett, 1993, p. 46). The image below shows the Bennett Model that begins on the left with denial, meaning the person is unaware the cultural differences exist or is avoiding contact with other cultures or worldviews (Bennett, 2011). As they progress to the right, individuals may move through phases of actually belittling other cultures (defense), indifference to cultural differences (minimization), accepting cultural differences without judging them, and adapting thinking and behaviors to operate successfully in a new culture before reaching integration in which one is comfortable interacting in a variety of cultures.

While few people truly reach the integration stage, anyone can strive to increase their intercultural communication competence. It takes time and effort, beginning with having an attitude of openness, respect, and curiosity. That leads to a desire to learn more about culture in general and about specific cultures, as well as an interest in learning new communication skills. Different cultures have different expectations for language use, nonverbals, and relationships. These can be learned through observation, language study, formal cultural study, or cultural immersion. The ultimate goals are to embrace a point of view that encourages you to see the value in other cultures, a provisional or ethnorelative view, and to be able to communicate effectively and appropriately in a new culture (Deardorff, 2006). To achieve this, it is key to value other cultures and respect people from all cultures.

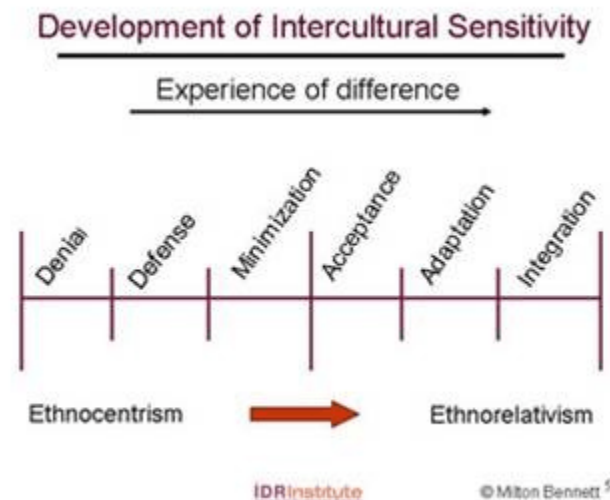


Figure 4.1.4: The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity Summary by Milton J. Bennett, Ph.D. (Revised 2011)

KEY CONCEPTS

The terms and concepts students should be familiar with from this section include:

Culture and Communication

- Provisionalism
- Culture shock

Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture

- Individualism and Collectivism
- Power Distance
- Uncertainty Avoidance
- Time Orientation
- Masculine and Feminine
- Indulgence and Restraint

Hall's Cultural Dimensions

- Monochronic and Polychronic
- High-Context and Low-Context

Race

Codeswitching

Ethnicity

Barriers to Intercultural Competence

- Anxiety
- Assumed similarity or difference
- Ethnocentrism
- Stereotyping
- Incompatible communication code
- Incompatible norms and values

4.2: Gender

Learning Objectives

After completing this section, students should be able to:

- Distinguish between the concepts of "sex" and "gender."
- Explain how gender may impact communication choices.
- Identify traits of the masculine communication style and of the feminine communication style.
- Illustrate the difference between report talk and rapport talk.

Throughout our lives, there is one "intercultural" experience we have virtually every day; interaction with the opposite sex. Stereotypically, men complain about women talking too much, and women complain about men not talking enough. While there are many stereotypes and assumptions about how men and women communicate differently, there is growing acknowledgment that there are communication styles that are more feminine and communication styles that are more masculine.

“Sex” Versus “Gender”

It is important to clarify that **sex** and **gender** are not synonymous. **Sex** is biological; it is the set of physical parts you have that identify you as male or female. The vast majority of us are born with clearly defined sexual organs, yet according to Brown University researcher Anne Fausto-Sterling, about 4% of babies are born with some form of indefinite sex identification (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). These children, known as intersex, may be born with genitalia that, because of the small size at birth, cannot be clearly differentiated between a clitoris and a penis. Intersex persons face special challenges, especially if the parents and/or doctors decide to artificially determine the baby's sex surgically instead of waiting to see how the child develops naturally. As puberty hits, these children will hormonally develop as they are genetically determined, and if the surgical choice was incorrect, enormous personal difficulties can result.

Gender, on the other hand, is a social construct. Genetics determines sex; cultures determine gender. What it means to be male or female within a given society is developed within that society. Boys are taught what it means to be a man; and girls are taught what it means to be a woman. We teach children how to act, think, and live within these social constructs. We give little girls nurturing toys, such as dolls, and we give little boys aggressive toys, such as guns. Girls are rewarded for cooperating and getting along, while boys are rewarded for competing and winning.

Consider the range of sources that influence and reinforce these gender constructs. Family, friends, media, school, religion, and other such cultural institutions all communicate messages of male and female roles, often contradictory to each other. While a family may encourage a little boy to pursue his interests regardless of traditional male roles, his friends may pressure him in other directions.

Gender is not static; it can change over time. In the last 50 years in the U.S., gender has changed quite dramatically, from the highly traditional, rigid expectations of the 1950s and 1960s to the more equitable and fluid present-day expectations. A young woman maturing in the 1950s would have been expected to marry, usually right out of high school, and be a stay-at-home mother, tending to the children, home, and her husband. If she was to work outside the home, it would typically have been in a limited number of “caring” professions such as teaching and nursing, or in low-paying service roles, such as housekeeping.

Today, while a woman can certainly choose to be a stay-at-home mother, she is also free to choose virtually any other path she desires. Likewise, the rigid expectations of men as the sole family provider, expected to earn more than his wife, have eased significantly. The social constructs of gender will evolve as the culture evolves.

We also need to consider sexual orientation. Sexual orientation simply refers to what attracts a person sexually. **Heterosexual** means to be attracted to the opposite sex, and **homosexual** means to be attracted to the same sex. There are **bisexuals**, who are attracted to both men and women, as well as **asexuals**, who do not really experience a sexual drive. According to the American Psychological Association, sexual orientation is a complex issue:

There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual,

gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation. (APA, 2008)

Gender and Communication

First, when discussing gender and communication, it is overly simplistic to say, “Men talk like...” or “Women talk like....” A far more accurate way to categorize these differences is as a **masculine communication style** and a **feminine communication style**. These terms address patterns of communication behaviors. Who uses which style to what degree is secondary to understanding the implications of which style they use.

Second, it is also very tempting to assume this discussion suggests *all* men communicate using a masculine communication style and *all* women communicate using a feminine communication style. This is simply inaccurate. Most of us are **androgynous**, “having some traits from both communication styles,” even if one is more dominant than the other. Depending on the setting and the other person, we tend to shift between the styles, using whichever is more comfortable and appropriate at the time.

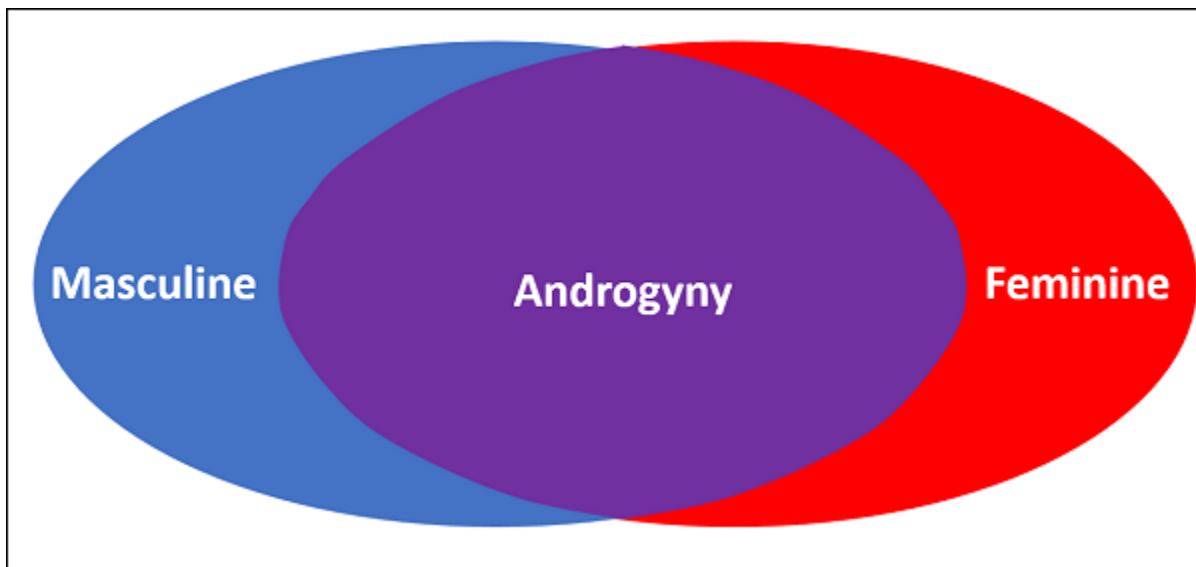


Figure 4.2.1

For example, communication instructors might hear from female students that their boyfriends/husbands will act so differently around his male friends than when with her. When in a mainly male environment, he will tend to move further into a typical masculine communication style, yet with her, he will take on more feminine communication traits. He moves between the communication styles to best fit the dynamics of the situation. Male students might make a similar statement about their girlfriends/wives.

Third, it is also tempting to connect communication style and sexual orientation. There is no connection. Current research suggests communication style is a blend of nature (your genetic makeup) and nurture (how you learn to communicate). Environment plays an enormous role in developing your communication style. We model those around us, especially significant caregivers and those in our reference groups (see Tannen, 1990; Brizendine, 2006; Brizendine, 2010).

Fourth, there has been some suggestion the feminine style is better than the masculine style. This is also an erroneous assumption. These are simply different communication styles, each with strengths and weaknesses, and we need to be aware of those differences in order to adapt and improve our ability to work within this range of styles. There are times a highly masculine style fits the situation best, and times a highly feminine style works better.

The Communication Styles

Perception and Emphasis

The masculine style and feminine styles focus on the world differently. Within our American culture, the masculine focuses on independence and autonomy, and the feminine focuses on interdependence and relationships. American males learn the ability to succeed and prevail by oneself is a powerful goal. Boys are more often encouraged to play competitively, placing a clear emphasis on winning and losing (Tannen, 1990). Women often joke about men not being willing to ask for directions, but consider what this masculine style suggests. When he stops to ask for directions, he is admitting a degree of failure. He has not been able to solve the problem. He has, in effect, lost. Something breaks around the house, and he may immediately dive in, regardless of his actual knowledge and ability level, reluctant to call a repairperson, working hard to solve the problem himself. The masculine style values self-reliance and the ability to fix things so highly that to violate the standard may be extremely difficult for many.

As a result of this drive for independence and autonomy, and since the masculine style puts a lower value on seeking assistance, those using the masculine style tend to not want to talk about issues and problems until *after* they have been processed and solved. John Gray (1992), author of *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, describes how a man will retreat into his mental cave to ruminate and process the problem, and once the solution is determined, he emerges to share it. Deborah Tannen (1990), author of *You Just Don't Understand*, describes this form of communication as **report talk**:

For most men, talk is primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. This is done by exhibiting knowledge and skill, and by holding center stage through verbal performance such as storytelling, joking, or imparting information. From childhood, men learn to use talking as a way to get and keep attention (p. 77).

The feminine, on the other hand, places a high value on creating and maintaining connections among individuals. Problem-solving is accomplished by interaction and conversation, not by retreating and ruminating. While the masculine values individual problem solving, the feminine values collective problem-solving. While he goes to the “cave,” she goes to the “coffee shop,” seeking companionship and support as she works through life’s issues. Tannen refers to this form of communication as **rapport talk**:

[A] way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships. Emphasis is placed on displaying similarities and matching experiences. From childhood, girls criticize peers who try to stand out or appear better than others (Tannen, 1990, p. 77).

For the feminine style, conversation can by itself be the solution. The reaffirmation of relationships is of high value and a worthy goal in its own right.

Since interdependence and connection is paramount for the feminine, decision-making is a collective process. While the masculine style favors quick, immediate decisions, the feminine style favors decisions that are processed among the affected individuals, finding the best solution for all parties involved. Maintaining the relationship is quite important for the feminine communication style, while for the masculine the effectiveness of the solution is paramount, regardless of its impact on relationships.

Differences in Masculine and Feminine Communication

As you review the chart below, keep in mind most of us are androgynous, and we use a blend of masculine and feminine communication styles, adjusting our communication behaviors to fit the situation.

Masculine Style of Communication	Feminine Style of Communication
Direct, unqualified messages Greater use of messages that are blatant and direct, reporting on what he wants. • “Let’s go see a movie.” • “I don’t like that.” • “Do it this way.”	Indirect, use of qualifiers and hedges Greater use of words and phrases to indicate potential uncertainty, minimize direct confrontation, and leave room for compromise and negotiation. • “Why don’t we go see a movie?” • “I think I would prefer something different.” • “How should we do this?”
Emphasis on verbal • High value on verbalizing thoughts in a direct, concise manner. • Very low-context form of communication. • Nonverbal communication is secondary and is not considered a primary part of the communication package. The masculine style favors “just say what you mean.” • Pays far less attention to nonverbal details including picking up on subtle nonverbal clues.	Emphasis on nonverbal • High value on verbal communication • Very high-context form of communication. • Places a much higher value on nonverbal communication than the masculine style. How something is said, facial expression, body language, and other such variables are considered equally important message components. • Will take into account all aspects of the communication package when interpreting messages.
Minimal detail • Emphasis on “report talk,” the masculine focuses on key details, leaving out specifics. • Unless something quite striking happens, when she asks, “How was your day?” most likely he will say something like, “Fine,” or “Okay” with little elaboration. The details are unimportant.	Value of detail • Emphasis on detail as a way to more fully share experience and build rapport. • By relating specifics, she is entrusting the other with part of her life experience, building connection. When he ventures, “How was your day?” she will probably share, in some detail, the dynamics that occurred, conversations that happened, and emotions experienced. She does this to build and enhance the relationship.
Emotion is extraneous • Acknowledges the emotional aspect of life; however, far greater value is placed on reason and rational thinking. • Emotional expression is challenging and receiving emotion can be intimidating. • Men seek to solve, yet with emotion, such “fixing” is rarely the appropriate response.	Emotion is important • Values reason and emotion, recognizing a place for both. • While reasoning and decision making are important, how one responds emotionally to such issues is equally valid and should be considered in the decision-making process. • Emotions need to be processed versus ignored.

The end over the means - Places such an emphasis on problem-solving, the solution, or the end result, is more important than how the solution was reached. - The measure of success is results, not process.	The means over the end - Places greater emphasis on protecting individual feelings and relationships. - How a decision is reached, and how that process affects the people involved, is very important. While solutions are worthy goals, equally worthy is process and protecting interdependence and connection.
It's all about status/power Uses communication to establish power hierarchies and to negotiate status. The dirtiest joke, the biggest fish story, the most logical argument can be tools to work out who has the most power in a given situation.	It's all about equality/sharing Uses communication to build connections and relationships. Communication is a way to demonstrate connection and equality, minimizing status and power difference.

Clearly, the masculine and feminine styles are different. However, in the overall picture of human communication, our similarities far outweigh our differences. As effective communicators, our goal is to recognize, respect, and adapt to differences. Instead of letting differences interfere with clear communication, we acknowledge them and adapt to them. When Keith's wife comes home from work, he knows sharing her day with him is her way to decompress from work and to reconnect with him. Likewise, when she asks about his day, sharing some level of detail reciprocates the desire to connect. At times, however, she knows to leave him alone and then, once he has processed the issue confronting him, he will share the results. The harder she pushes him to talk, the more he retreats to his cave; she has learned to be patient and wait until he voluntarily re-emerges. When he comes out, he is ready to share the solution he has reached.

Communication is complex enough, but as we factor in issues related to gender, the complexity increases. While our similarities in communication behaviors outweigh these differences, they nonetheless exist and have to be considered for increasing our communication effectiveness. Neither style is inherently better; both have their strengths and weaknesses.

KEY CONCEPTS

The terms and concepts students should be familiar with from this section include:

Gender versus Sex

Masculine Communication Style

Feminine Communication Style

Androgyny

Report Talk

Rapport Talk

Differences in Masculine and Feminine Communication

- Direct vs. indirect
- Emphasis on verbal and nonverbal
- Use of detail
- Emotional expression
- The ends and means
- Status vs. connection

5: WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

5.1: Skills for Change - Diversity at Work

5.2: Managing a Diverse Workforce

5.3: Generational Diversity

5.1: Skills for Change - Diversity at Work

Introduction

In today's day and age, a diverse workforce is an increasingly essential requirement for competing globally and achieving long-term sustainability. Any company with plans for achieving global success must have a borderless worldview and embrace all types of diversity in its day-to-day business conduct. Company leaders must be willing to address the complex issues associated with race, gender, disabilities, religion, sexual preferences, and multi-culturalism. Diversity should no longer be limited to a box on an application form or a side topic given minimal consideration. To remain competitive, diversity must be interwoven into every facet of the business—from employee practices to supplier partnerships, diversity will be the glue that helps to form and maintain business relationships. Employees must be well equipped and willing to adapt to shifting business priorities.

While many organizations have adopted one or two practices in support of diversity and change, very few companies have truly integrated all elements of the diversity spectrum into every aspect of their business. The next section provides five key examples of companies that have successfully woven diversity into their business. Their efforts have earned them recognition as champions of diversity.

CIBC (Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce)

CIBC, a Canadian banking institution, employs more than 40,000 people. In 2012, CIBC was recognized as one of Canada's most diverse employers. The company created a national diversity and equity council comprised of diversity champions from all global operations and recruitment teams. CIBC holds an annual public meeting for all stakeholders to present the company's yearly equity and diversity plan along with current diversity statistics and results. The company promotes women in the workforce by developing a women's network that offers coaching and mentoring career services to female employees. Over 66% of the workforce is made up of women. CIBC offers an affinity-mentoring program across different networks to support employees from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In addition, CIBC supports career events for community organizations promoting diversity, including Skills for Change, Inclusion Works, People in Motion, and the Neil Squire Society.

Ernst & Young

Ernst & Young provides assurance, tax, transaction, and advisory services to companies across the globe. They employ over 150,000 people. In 2012, Ernst & Young was ranked number 6 on "DiversityInc's Top 50 Companies for Diversity" list. Over 84% of the company's workforce consists of employees who work outside of the US. Ernst & Young shows leadership in understanding and developing a culturally competent workforce by supporting resource groups for women, LGBT (the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community), and black employees. The company promotes leadership in these diverse population groups by offering leadership development training classes. Numerous coaching and mentoring services are available to newly appointed managers with culturally diverse backgrounds. Ernst & Young is a strong supporter of youth scholarships, internships, and mentorship programs aimed at helping disadvantaged or under-represented groups.

Western Union

Western Union offers money transferring and payment services to consumers worldwide. The company's multicultural and diverse workforce consists of more than 8,000 people working in 55 countries and speaking 75 different languages and dialects. With a diverse client base, Western Union believes a diverse workforce enables the company to more effectively understand and respond to its clients' needs. Employees are encouraged to volunteer in local organizations, sponsoring one paid volunteer day per year. Domestic partnership benefits are offered to all Western Union employees. Western Union keeps employees connected and cultivates a feeling of community throughout their workforce.

Merck

Employing more than 34,000 individuals, Merck is a pharmaceutical company that serves clients located all over the world. Merck

made the 2012 “Working Mother 100 Best Companies” list and consistently is ranked in the top tier of “DiversityInc’s Top 50 Companies for Diversity” annual list. Executives at Merck believe that a diverse, inclusive workforce enables the company to be more agile and innovative. Diversity is integrated throughout all aspects of the business, including hiring strategies, training programs, accountability measurements, reporting metrics, and supply chain partnerships. Merck actively works to develop and maintain a diverse population of suppliers, focusing on minority, women, and veteran-owned small businesses.

IBM

With over 420,000 employees globally, IBM offers business consulting services and technology products to international clients. Known for its strong moral values and pioneering diversity efforts, IBM supports under-represented groups throughout the organization. IBM has won numerous awards through the years for its diversity efforts. Some of the company’s recent awards include the 2011 Supplier Diversity Corporation of the Year, admittance into the Women Business Enterprise Hall of Fame, and the Champion of Veterans Enterprise award. IBM places a strong emphasis on mentoring programs to develop talent and leadership among women, LGBT, and minority groups. Within IBM, more than 230 diversity network groups exist to coach, mentor, and support different constituency groups.

Summary

- Workforce diversity is an essential requirement for today’s businesses, which allows them to compete globally and achieve long-term sustainability.
- Complex issues associated with race, gender, disabilities, religion, sexual preferences, and multi-culturalism all play a role in the implementation of diversity.
- Diversity must be integrated into every aspect of the business, including hiring, employee practices, supply chain management, problem-solving, decision making, and advancement opportunities.
- Many organizations have adopted limited diversity practices, but very few companies have fully incorporated diversity into all aspects of their business.
- Five companies recognized for their diversity leadership efforts include CIBC, Ernst & Young, Western Union, Merck, and IBM.

5.2: Managing a Diverse Workforce

Learning Objectives

After reading this section, you should be able to do the following:

- Understand what constitutes diversity.
- Explain the benefits of managing diversity.
- Describe challenges of managing a workforce with diverse demographics.
- Describe the challenges of managing a multicultural workforce.
- Understand diversity and ethics.
- Understand cross-cultural issues regarding diversity.
- Explain what culture is.
- Define the four dimensions of culture that are part of Hofstede's framework.
- Describe some ways in which national culture affects organizational behavior.

Managing Demographic and Cultural Diversity

Around the world, the workforce is becoming diverse. In 2007, women constituted 46% of the workforce in the United States. In the same year, 11% of the workforce was African American, 14% were of Hispanic origin, and 5% were Asian. Employees continue to work beyond retirement, introducing age diversity to the workforce. Regardless of your gender, race, and age, it seems that you will need to work with, communicate with, and understand people different from you at school as well as at work. Understanding cultures different from your own is also becoming increasingly important due to the globalization of business. In the United States, 16% of domestic employees were foreign-born, indicating that even those of us who are not directly involved in international business may benefit from developing an appreciation for the differences and similarities between cultures. In this section, we will examine the particular benefits and challenges of managing a diverse workforce and discuss ways in which you can increase your effectiveness when working with diversity.

As we discuss differing environments faced by employees with different demographic traits, we primarily concentrate on the legal environment in the United States. Please note that the way in which demographic diversity is treated legally and socially varies around the globe. For example, countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom have their own versions of equal employment legislation. Moreover, how women, employees of different races, older employees, employees with disabilities, and employees of different religions are viewed and treated shows much variation based on the societal context.

Doing Good as a Core Business Strategy: The Case of Goodwill Industries

Goodwill Industries International has been an advocate of diversity for over 100 years. In 1902, in Boston, Massachusetts, a young missionary set up a small operation enlisting struggling immigrants in his parish to clean and repair clothing and goods to later sell. This provided workers with the opportunity for basic education and language training. His philosophy was to provide a “hand up,” not a “hand out.” Although today you can find retail stores in over 2,300 locations worldwide, and in 2009 more than 64 million people in the United States and Canada donated to Goodwill, the organization has maintained its core mission to respect the dignity of individuals by eliminating barriers to opportunity through the power of work. Goodwill accomplishes this goal, in part, by putting 84% of its revenue back into programs to provide employment, which in 2008 amounted to \$3.23 billion. As a result of these programs, every 42 seconds of every business day, someone gets a job and is one step closer to achieving economic stability.

Goodwill is a pioneer of social enterprise and has managed to build a culture of respect through its diversity programs. If you walk into a local Goodwill retail store you are likely to see employees from all walks of life, including differences in gender and race, physical ability, sexual orientation, and age. Goodwill provides employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, lack of education, or lack of job experience. The company has created programs for individuals with criminal backgrounds who might otherwise be unable to find employment, including basic work skill development, job placement assistance, and life skills. In 2008, more than 172,000 people obtained employment, earning \$2.3 billion in wages and gaining tools to be productive members of their community. Goodwill has established diversity as an organizational norm, and as a result, employees are

comfortable addressing issues of stereotyping and discrimination. In an organization of individuals with such wide-ranging backgrounds, it is not surprising that there is a wide range of values and beliefs.

Management and operations are decentralized within the organization with 166 independent community-based Goodwill stores. These regional businesses are independent, not-for-profit human services organizations. Despite its decentralization, the company has managed to maintain its core values. Seattle's Goodwill is focused on helping the city's large immigrant population and those individuals without basic education and English language skills. And at Goodwill Industries of Kentucky, the organization recently invested in custom software to balance daily sales at stores to streamline operations so managers can spend less time on paperwork and more time managing employees.

Part of Goodwill's success over the years can be attributed to its ability to innovate. As technology evolves and such skills became necessary for most jobs, Goodwill has developed training programs to ensure that individuals are fully equipped to be productive members of the workforce, and in 2008 Goodwill was able to provide 1.5 million people with career services. As an organization, Goodwill itself has entered into the digital age. You can now find Goodwill on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Goodwill's business practices encompass the values of the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit. The organization is taking advantage of new green initiatives and pursuing opportunities for sustainability. For example, at the beginning of 2010, Goodwill received a \$7.3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, which will provide funds to prepare individuals to enter the rapidly growing green industry of their choice. Oregon's Goodwill Industries has partnered with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and its Oregon E-Cycles program to prevent the improper disposal of electronics. Goodwill discovered long ago that diversity is an advantage rather than a hindrance.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are Goodwill's competitive advantages?
2. Goodwill has found success in the social services. What problems might result from hiring and training the diverse populations that Goodwill is involved with?
3. Have you ever experienced problems with discrimination in a work or school setting?
4. Why do you think that Goodwill believes it necessary to continually innovate?

The Value of Ethnic Diversity in the Teaching Profession: A New Zealand Case Study

Read [this article](#) and consider the following questions: What is the impact of changing demographics on the workforce in New Zealand? And, as demographics change worldwide, how should organizations respond in terms of their hiring practices? Do you think the outcomes of this case study could be applied to other industries besides education? In conjunction with the findings within the education industry, do you think that educating all employees about diversity is beneficial to a business' success? If so, how?

Demographic Diversity

Diversity refers to the ways in which people are similar or different from each other. It may be defined by any characteristic that varies within a particular work unit such as gender, race, age, education, tenure, or functional background (such as being an engineer versus being an accountant). Even though diversity may occur with respect to any characteristic, our focus will be on diversity with respect to demographic, relatively stable, and visible characteristics: specifically gender, race, age, religion, physical abilities, and sexual orientation. Understanding how these characteristics shape organizational behavior is important. While many organizations publicly rave about the benefits of diversity, many find it challenging to manage diversity effectively. This is evidenced by the number of complaints filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regarding discrimination. In the United States, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlaw discrimination based on age, gender, race, national origin, or religion. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination of otherwise capable employees based on physical or mental disabilities. In 2008, over 95,000 individuals filed a complaint claiming that they were discriminated based on these protected characteristics. Of course, this number represents only the most extreme instances in which victims must have received visibly discriminatory treatment to justify filing a complaint. It is reasonable to assume that many instances of discrimination go unreported because they are more subtle and employees may not even be aware of inconsistencies such as pay discrimination. Before the passing of anti-discrimination laws in the United States, many forms of discrimination were socially acceptable. This acceptance of certain discrimination practices is more likely to be

seen in countries without similar employment laws. It seems that there is room for improvement when it comes to benefiting from diversity, understanding its pitfalls, and creating a work environment where people feel appreciated for their contributions regardless of who they are.

Benefits of Diversity

What is the business case for diversity? Having a diverse workforce and managing it effectively have the potential to bring about a number of benefits to organizations.

Higher Creativity in Decision Making

An important potential benefit of having a diverse workforce is the ability to make higher quality decisions. In a diverse work team, people will have different opinions and perspectives. In these teams, individuals are more likely to consider more alternatives and think outside the box when making decisions. When thinking about a problem, team members may identify novel solutions. Research shows that diverse teams tend to make higher quality decisions. Therefore, having a diverse workforce may have a direct impact on a company's bottom line by increasing creativity in decision making.

Better Understanding and Service of Customers

A company with a diverse workforce may create products or services that appeal to a broader customer base. For example, PepsiCo Inc. planned and executed a successful diversification effort in the recent past. The company was able to increase the percentage of women and ethnic minorities in many levels of the company, including management. The company points out that in 2004, about 1% of the company's 8% revenue growth came from products that were inspired by the diversity efforts, such as guacamole-flavored Doritos chips and wasabi-flavored snacks. Similarly, Harley-Davidson Motor Company is pursuing diversification of employees at all levels because the company realizes that they need to reach beyond their traditional customer group to stay competitive. Wal-Mart Stores Inc. heavily advertises in Hispanic neighborhoods between Christmas and The Epiphany because the company understands that Hispanics tend to exchange gifts on that day as well. A company with a diverse workforce may understand the needs of particular groups of customers better, and customers may feel more at ease when they are dealing with a company that understands their needs.

More Satisfied Workforce

When employees feel that they are fairly treated, they tend to be more satisfied. On the other hand, when employees perceive that they are being discriminated against, they tend to be less attached to the company, less satisfied with their jobs, and experience more stress at work. Organizations where employees are satisfied often have lower turnover.

Higher Stock Prices

Companies that do a better job of managing a diverse workforce are often rewarded in the stock market, indicating that investors use this information to judge how well a company is being managed. For example, companies that receive an award from the U.S. Department of Labor for their diversity management programs show increases in the stock price in the days following the announcement. Conversely, companies that announce settlements for discrimination lawsuits often show a decline in stock prices afterward.

Lower Litigation Expenses

Companies doing a particularly bad job in diversity management face costly litigations. When an employee or a group of employees feel that the company is violating EEOC laws, they may file a complaint. The EEOC acts as a mediator between the company and the person, and the company may choose to settle the case outside the court. If no settlement is reached, the EEOC may sue the company on behalf of the complainant or may provide the injured party with a right-to-sue letter. Regardless of the outcome, these lawsuits are expensive and include attorney fees as well as the cost of the settlement or judgment, which may reach millions of dollars. The resulting poor publicity also has a cost to the company. For example, in 1999, the Coca-Cola Company faced a race discrimination lawsuit claiming that the company discriminated against African Americans in promotions.

The company settled for a record \$192.5 million. In 2004, the clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch faced a race discrimination lawsuit that led to a \$40 million settlement and over \$7 million in legal fees. The company had constructed a primarily Caucasian image and was accused of discriminating against Hispanic and African American job candidates, steering these applicants to jobs in the back of the store. As part of the settlement, the company agreed to diversify its workforce and catalog, change its image to promote diversity, and stop recruiting employees primarily from college fraternities and sororities. In 2007, the new African American district attorney of New Orleans, Eddie Jordan, was accused of firing 35 Caucasian employees and replacing them with African American employees. In the resulting reverse-discrimination lawsuit, the office was found liable for \$3.7 million, leading Jordan to step down from his office in the hopes of preventing the assets of the office from being seized. After \$3.7 million reverse discrimination lawsuit, the New Orleans district attorney resigns. As you can see, effective management of diversity can lead to big cost savings by decreasing the probability of facing costly and embarrassing lawsuits.

Higher Company Performance

As a result of all these potential benefits, companies that manage diversity more effectively tend to outperform others. Research shows that in companies pursuing a growth strategy, there was a positive relationship between racial diversity of the company and firm performance. Companies ranked in the Diversity 50 list created by *Diversity Inc.* magazine performed better than their counterparts. And, in a survey of 500 large companies, those with the largest percentage of female executives performed better than those with the smallest percentage of female executives.

Challenges of Diversity

If managing diversity effectively has the potential to increase company performance, increase creativity, and create a more satisfied workforce, why aren't all companies doing a better job of encouraging diversity? Despite all the potential advantages, there are also a number of challenges associated with increased levels of diversity in the workforce.

Similarity-Attraction Phenomenon

One of the commonly observed phenomena in human interactions is the tendency for individuals to be attracted to similar individuals. Research shows that individuals communicate less frequently with those who are perceived as different from themselves. They are also more likely to experience emotional conflict with people who differ with respect to race, age, and gender. Individuals who are different from their team members are more likely to report perceptions of unfairness and feel that their contributions are ignored.

The **similarity-attraction phenomenon** may explain some of the potentially unfair treatment based on demographic traits. If a hiring manager chooses someone who is racially similar over a more qualified candidate from a different race, the decision will be ineffective and unfair. In other words, similarity-attraction may prevent some highly qualified women, minorities, or persons with disabilities from being hired. Of course, the same tendency may prevent highly qualified Caucasian and male candidates from being hired as well, but given that Caucasian males are more likely to hold powerful management positions in today's U.S.-based organizations, similarity-attraction may affect women and minorities to a greater extent. Even when candidates from minority or underrepresented groups are hired, they may receive different treatment within the organization. For example, research shows that one way in which employees may get ahead within organizations is through being mentored by a knowledgeable and powerful mentor. Yet, when the company does not have a formal mentoring program in which people are assigned a specific mentor, people are more likely to develop a mentoring relationship with someone who is similar to them in demographic traits. This means that those who are not selected as protégés will not be able to benefit from the support and advice that would further their careers. Similarity-attraction may even affect the treatment people receive daily. If the company CEO constantly invites a male employee to play golf with him while a female employee never receives the invitation, the male employee may have a serious advantage when important decisions are made.

Why are we more attracted to those who share our demographic attributes? Demographic traits are part of what makes up **surface-level diversity**. Surface-level diversity includes traits that are highly visible to us and those around us, such as race, gender, and age. Researchers believe that people pay attention to surface diversity because they are assumed to be related to **deep-level diversity**, which includes values, beliefs, and attitudes. We want to interact with those who share our values and attitudes, but when we meet people for the first time, we have no way of knowing whether they share similar values. As a result, we tend to use surface-level diversity to make judgments about deep-level diversity. Research shows that surface-level traits affect our interactions with other people early in our acquaintance with them, but as we get to know people, the influence of surface-level traits is replaced by deep-level traits such as similarity in values and attitudes. Age, race, and gender dissimilarity are also

stronger predictors of employee turnover during the first few weeks or months within a company. It seems that people who are different from others may feel isolated during their early tenure when they are dissimilar to the rest of the team, but these effects tend to disappear as people stay longer and get to know other employees.

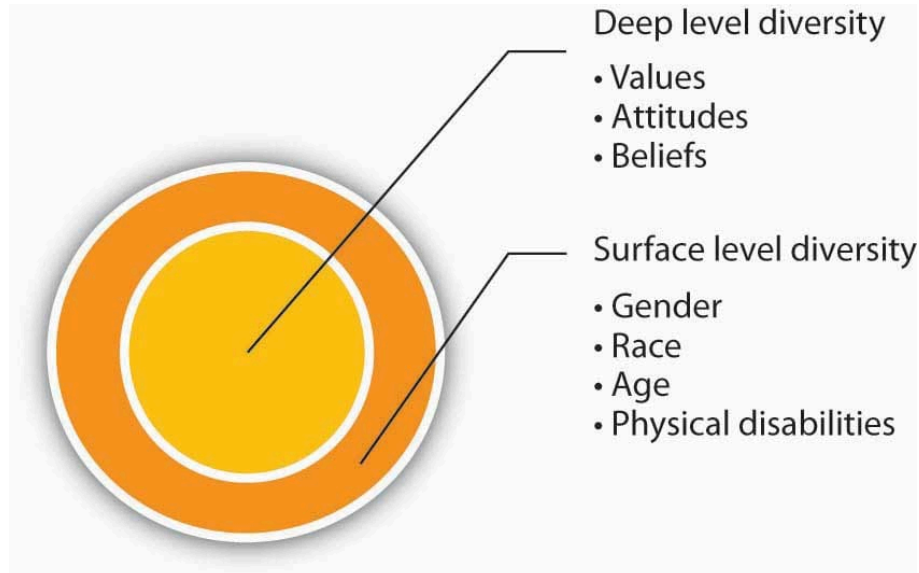


Figure 5.2.1: Individuals often initially judge others based on surface-level diversity. Over time, this effect tends to fade and is replaced by deep-level traits such as similarity in values and attitudes.

As you may see, while similarity-attraction may put some employees at a disadvantage, it is a tendency that can be managed by organizations. By paying attention to employees early in their tenure, having formal mentoring programs in which people are assigned mentors, and training managers to be aware of the similarity-attraction tendency, organizations can go a long way in dealing with potential diversity challenges.

Faultlines

A **faultline** is an attribute along which a group is split into subgroups. For example, in a group with three female and three male members, gender may act as a faultline because the female members may see themselves as separate from the male members. Now imagine that the female members of the same team are all over 50 years old and the male members are all younger than 25. In this case, age and gender combine to further divide the group into two subgroups. Teams that are divided by faultlines experience a number of difficulties. For example, members of the different subgroups may avoid communicating with each other, reducing the overall cohesiveness of the team. Research shows that these types of teams make less effective decisions and are less creative. Faultlines are more likely to emerge in diverse teams, but not all diverse teams have faultlines. Going back to our example, if the team has three male and three female members, but if two of the female members are older and one of the male members is also older, then the composition of the team will have much different effects on the team's processes. In this case, age could be a bridging characteristic that brings together people divided across gender.

Research shows that even groups that have strong faultlines can perform well if they establish certain norms. When members of subgroups debate the decision topic among themselves before having a general group discussion, there seems to be less communication during the meeting on pros and cons of different alternatives. Having a norm stating that members should not discuss the issue under consideration before the actual meeting may be useful in increasing decision effectiveness.

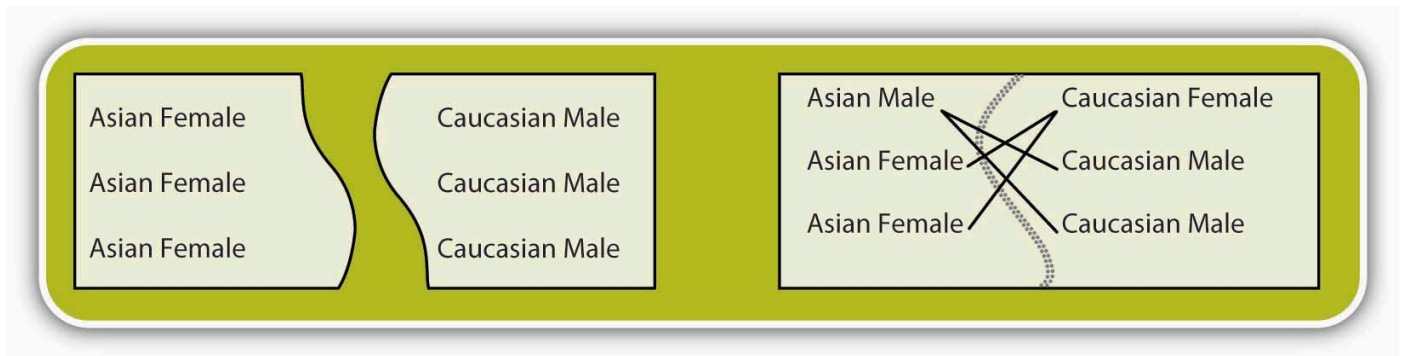


Figure 5.2.2: The group on the left will likely suffer a strong faultline due to the lack of common ground. The group to the right will likely only suffer a weak faultline because the men and women of the different groups will likely identify with each other.

Stereotypes

An important challenge of managing a diverse workforce is the possibility that stereotypes about different groups could lead to unfair decision making. **Stereotypes** are generalizations about a particular group of people. The assumption that women are more relationship-oriented, while men are more assertive, is an example of a stereotype. The problem with stereotypes is that people often use them to make decisions about a particular individual without actually verifying whether the assumption holds for the person in question. As a result, stereotypes often lead to unfair and inaccurate decision making. For example, a hiring manager holding the stereotype mentioned above may prefer a male candidate for a management position over a well-qualified female candidate. The assumption would be that management positions require assertiveness and the male candidate would be more assertive than the female candidate. Being aware of these stereotypes is the first step to preventing them from affecting decision making.

Specific Diversity Issues

Different demographic groups face unique work environments and varying challenges in the workplace. In this section, we will review the particular challenges associated with managing gender, race, religion, physical ability, and sexual orientation diversity in the workplace.

Gender Diversity in the Workplace

In the United States, two important pieces of legislation prohibit gender discrimination at work. The Equal Pay Act (1963) prohibits discrimination in pay based on gender. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) prohibits discrimination in all employment-related decisions based on gender. Despite the existence of strong legislation, women and men often face different treatment at work. The earnings gap and the glass ceiling are two of the key problems women may experience in the workplace.

Earnings Gap

An often publicized issue women face at work is the earnings gap. The median earnings of women who worked full time in 2008 was 79% of men working full time. There are many potential explanations for the earnings gap that is often reported in the popular media. One explanation is that women are more likely to have gaps in their resumes because they are more likely to take time off to have children. Women are still the primary caregiver for young children in many families and career gaps tend to affect earnings potential because it prevents employees from accumulating job tenure. Another potential explanation is that women are less likely to pursue high-paying occupations such as engineering and business.

In fact, research shows that men and women have somewhat different preferences in job attributes, with women valuing characteristics such as good hours, an easy commute, interpersonal relationships, helping others, and opportunities to make friends more than men do. In turn, men seem to value promotion opportunities, freedom, challenge, leadership, and power more than women do. These differences are relatively small, but they could explain some of the earnings gap. Finally, negotiation differences among women are often cited as a potential reason for the earnings gap. In general, women are less likely to initiate negotiations. Moreover, when they actually negotiate, they achieve less favorable outcomes compared to men. Laboratory studies

show that female candidates who negotiated were more likely to be penalized for their attempts to negotiate and male evaluators expressed an unwillingness to work with a female who negotiated. The differences in the tendency to negotiate and success in negotiating are important factors contributing to the earnings gap. According to one estimate, as much as 34% of the differences between women's and men's pay can be explained by their starting salaries. When differences in negotiation skills or tendencies affect starting salaries, they tend to have a large impact over the course of years.

If the earnings gap could be traced only to resume gaps, choice of different occupations, or differences in negotiation behavior, the salary difference might be viewed as legitimate. Yet, these factors fail to completely account for gender differences in pay, and lawsuits about gender discrimination in pay abound. In these lawsuits, stereotypes or prejudices about women seem to be the main culprit. In fact, according to a Gallup poll, women are over 12 times more likely than men to perceive gender-based discrimination in the workplace. For example, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. was recently sued for alleged gender-discrimination in pay. One of the people who initiated the lawsuit was a female assistant manager who found out that a male assistant manager with similar qualifications was making \$10,000 more per year. When she approached the store manager, she was told that the male manager had a "wife and kids to support." She was then asked to submit a household budget to justify a raise. Such explicit discrimination, while less frequent, contributes to creating an unfair work environment.

Glass Ceiling

Another issue that provides a challenge for women in the workforce is the so-called **glass ceiling**. While women may be represented in lower-level positions, they are less likely to be seen in higher management and executive suites of companies. In fact, while women constitute close to one-half of the workforce, men are four times more likely to reach the highest levels of organizations. In 2008, only 12 of the *Fortune* 500 companies had female CEOs, including Xerox Corporation, PepsiCo, Kraft Foods Inc., and Avon Products Inc. The absence of women in leadership is unfortunate, particularly in light of studies that show the leadership performance of female leaders is comparable to, and in some dimensions such as transformational or change-oriented leadership, superior to, the performance of male leaders.



Figure 5.2.3: Ursula Burns became president of Xerox Corporation in 2007. She is responsible for the company's global R&D, engineering, manufacturing, and marketing. Used by permission of Xerox Corporation.

One explanation for the glass ceiling is the gender-based stereotypes favoring men in managerial positions. Traditionally, men have been viewed as more assertive and confident than women, while women have been viewed as more passive and submissive. Studies show that these particular stereotypes are still prevalent among male college students, which may mean that these stereotypes may be perpetuated among the next generation of managers. Assumptions such as these are problematic for women's advancement because stereotypes associated with men are characteristics often associated with being a manager. Stereotypes are also found to influence how managers view male versus female employees' work accomplishments. For example, when men and women work together in a team on a "masculine" task such as working on an investment portfolio and it is not clear to management which member has done what, managers are more likely to attribute the team's success to the male employees and give less credit to the female employees. It seems that in addition to working hard and contributing to the team, female employees should pay extra attention to ensure that their contributions are known to decision-makers.

There are many organizations making the effort to make work environments more welcoming to men and women. For example, IBM is reaching out to female middle school students to get them interested in science, hoping to increase female presence in the field of engineering. Companies such as IBM, Booz Allen Hamilton Inc., Ernst & Young Global Ltd., and General Mills Inc. top the 100 Best Companies list created by *Working Mother* magazine by providing flexible work arrangements to balance work and family demands. In addition, these companies provide employees of both sexes with learning, development, and networking opportunities.

Race Diversity in the Workplace

Race is another demographic characteristic that is under legal protection in the United States. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) prohibits race discrimination in all employment-related decisions. Yet race discrimination still exists in organizations. In a Korn-Ferry/Columbia University study of 280 minority managers earning more than \$100,000, 60% of the respondents reported that they had seen discrimination in their work assignments and 45% have been the target of racial or cultural jokes. The fact that such discrimination exists even at higher levels in organizations is noteworthy. In a different study of over 5,500 workers, only 32% reported that their company did a good job hiring and promoting minorities. One estimate suggests that when compared to Caucasian employees, African Americans are four times more likely and Hispanics are three times more likely to experience discrimination.

Ethnic minorities experience both an earnings gap and a glass ceiling. In 2008, for every dollar a Caucasian male employee made, African American males made around 79 cents while Hispanic employees made 64 cents. Among *Fortune* 500 companies, only three (American Express Company, Aetna Inc., and Darden Restaurants Inc.) have African American CEOs. It is interesting that while ethnic minorities face these challenges, the demographic trends are such that by 2042, Caucasians are estimated to constitute less than one-half of the population in the United States. This demographic shift has already taken place in some parts of the United States such as the Los Angeles area where only 30% of the population is Caucasian.

Unfortunately, discrimination against ethnic minorities still occurs. One study conducted by Harvard University researchers found that when Chicago-area companies were sent fictitious resumes containing identical background information, resumes with “Caucasian” sounding names (such as Emily and Greg) were more likely to get callbacks compared to resumes with African American sounding names (such as Jamal and Lakisha).

Studies indicate that ethnic minorities are less likely to experience a satisfying work environment. One study found that African Americans were more likely to be absent from work compared to Caucasians, but this trend existed only in organizations viewed as not valuing diversity. Similarly, among African Americans, the perception that the organization did not value diversity was related to higher levels of turnover. Another study found differences in the sales performance of Hispanic and Caucasian employees, but again this difference disappeared when the organization was viewed as valuing diversity. It seems that the *perception* that the organization does not value diversity is a fundamental explanation for why ethnic minorities may feel alienated from coworkers. Creating a fair work environment where diversity is valued and appreciated seems to be the key.

Organizations often make news headlines for alleged or actual race discrimination, but there are many stories involving complete turnarounds, suggesting that conscious planning and motivation to improve may make organizations friendlier to all races. One such success story is Denny's Corporation. In 1991, Denny's restaurants settled a \$54 million race discrimination lawsuit. In 10 years, the company was able to change the situation completely. Now, women and minorities make up half of their board and almost half of their management team. The company started by hiring a chief diversity officer who reported directly to the CEO. The company implemented a diversity-training program, extended recruitment efforts to diverse colleges, and increased the number of minority-owned franchises. At the same time, customer satisfaction among African Americans increased from 30% to 80%.

Age Diversity in the Workplace

The workforce is rapidly aging. By 2015, those who are 55 and older are estimated to constitute 20% of the workforce in the United States. The same trend seems to be occurring elsewhere in the world. In the European Union, employees over 50 years of age are projected to increase by 25% in the next 25 years. According to International Labor Organization (ILO), out of the world's working population, the largest group is those between 40 and 44 years old. In contrast, the largest segment in 1980 was the 20- to 24-year-old group. In other words, age diversity at work will grow in the future.

What happens to work performance as employees get older? Research shows that age is correlated with a number of positive workplace behaviors, including higher levels of citizenship behaviors such as volunteering, higher compliance with safety rules,

lower work injuries, lower counterproductive behaviors, and lower rates of tardiness or absenteeism. As people get older, they are also less likely to want to quit their job when they are dissatisfied at work.

Despite their positive workplace behaviors, employees who are older often have to deal with age-related stereotypes at work. For example, a review of a large number of studies showed that those between 17 and 29 years of age tend to rate older employees more negatively, while younger employees were viewed as more qualified and having higher potential. However, these stereotypes have been largely refuted by research. Another review showed that stereotypes about older employees—they perform on a lower level, they are less able to handle stress, or their performance declines with age—are simply inaccurate. The problem with these stereotypes is that they may discourage older workers from remaining in the workforce or may act as a barrier to their being hired in the first place.

In the United States, age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, which made it illegal for organizations to discriminate against employees over 40 years of age. Still, age discrimination is prevalent in workplaces. For example, while not admitting wrongdoing, Honeywell International Inc. recently settled an age discrimination lawsuit for \$2.15 million. A group of older sales representatives were laid off during company reorganization while younger employees with less experience were kept in their positions. Older employees may also face discrimination because some jobs have a perceived “correct age.” This was probably the reason behind the lawsuit International Creative Management Inc. faced against 150 TV writers. The lawsuit claimed that the talent agency systematically prevented older workers from getting jobs at major networks. TV writers settle age discrimination lawsuit.

What are the challenges of managing age diversity beyond the management of stereotypes? Age diversity within a team can actually lead to higher team performance. In a simulation, teams with higher age diversity were able to think of different possibilities and diverse actions, leading to higher performance for the teams. At the same time, managing a team with age diversity may be challenging because different age groups seem to have different opinions about what is fair treatment, leading to different perceptions of organizational justice. Age diversity also means that the workforce will consist of employees from different generations. Some organizations are noticing a generation gap and noting implications for the management of employees. For example, the pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk Inc. noticed that baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) were competitive and preferred individual feedback on performance, while Generation Y workers (born between 1979 and 1994) were more team-oriented. This difference led one regional manager to start each performance feedback e-mail with recognition of team performance, which was later followed by feedback on individual performance. Similarly, Lockheed Martin Corporation noticed that employees from different generations had different learning styles, with older employees preferring PowerPoint presentations and younger employees preferring more interactive learning. Paying attention to such differences and tailoring various aspects of management to the particular employees in question may lead to more effective management of an age-diverse workforce.

Religious Diversity in the Workplace

In the United States, employers are prohibited from using religion in employment decisions based on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Moreover, employees are required to make reasonable accommodations to ensure that employees can practice their beliefs unless doing so provides an unreasonable hardship on the employer. After September 11, cases involving religion and particularly those involving Muslim employees have been on the rise. Religious discrimination often occurs because the religion necessitates modifying the employee's schedule. For example, devout Muslim employees may want to pray five times a day with each prayer lasting 5 to 10 minutes. Some Jewish employees may want to take off Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, although these days are not recognized as holidays in the United States. These situations pit employers' concerns for productivity against employees' desires to fulfill religious obligations.

Accommodating someone's religious preferences may also require companies to relax their dress code to take into account religious practices such as wearing a turban for Sikhs or covering one's hair with a scarf for Muslim women. In these cases, what matters most is that the company makes a good faith attempt to accommodate the employee. For example, in a recent lawsuit that was decided in favor of Costco Wholesale Corporation, the retailer was accused of religious discrimination. A cashier who belonged to the Church of Body Modification, which is a church with about 1,000 members worldwide, wanted to be able to display her tattoos and facial piercings, which was against the dress code of Costco. Costco wanted to accommodate the employee by asking the individual to cover the piercings with skin-colored Band-Aids, which the employee refused. This is likely the primary reason why the case was decided in favor of Costco.

Employees with Disabilities in the Workplace

Employees with a wide range of physical and mental disabilities are part of the workforce. In 2008 alone, over 19,000 cases of discrimination based on disabilities have been filed with the EEOC. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) prohibits discrimination in employment against individuals with physical as well as mental disabilities if these individuals are otherwise qualified to do their jobs with or without reasonable accommodation. For example, an organization may receive a job application from a hearing-impaired candidate whose job responsibilities will include talking over the phone. With the help of a telephone amplifier, which costs around \$50, the employee will be able to perform the job; therefore, the company cannot use the hearing impairment as a reason not to hire the person, again, as long as the employee is otherwise qualified. In 2008, the largest groups of complaints were cases based on discrimination related to disabilities or illnesses such as cancer, depression, diabetes, hearing impairment, manic-depressive disorder, and orthopedic impairments, among others. Particularly employees suffering from illnesses that last for a long time and require ongoing care seem to be at a disadvantage, because they are more likely to be stereotyped, locked into dead-end jobs, and employed in jobs that require substantially lower skills and qualifications than they possess. They also are more likely to quit their jobs.

What can organizations do to create a better work environment for employees with disabilities? One legal requirement is that, when an employee brings up a disability, the organization should consider reasonable accommodations. This may include modifying the employee's schedule and reassigning some nonessential job functions. Organizations that offer flexible work hours may also make it easier for employees with disabilities to be more effective. Finally, supportive relationships with others seem to be the key for making these employees feel at home. Particularly, having an understanding boss and an effective relationship with supervisors are particularly important for employees with disabilities. Because the visible differences between individuals may act as an initial barrier against developing rapport, employees with disabilities and their managers may benefit from being proactive in relationship development.

Sexual Orientation Diversity in the Workplace

Lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender (LBGT) employees in the workplace face a number of challenges and barriers to employment. There is currently no federal law in the United States prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation, but as of 2008, 20 states, as well as the District of Columbia, had laws prohibiting discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation.

Research shows that one of the most important issues relating to sexual orientation is the disclosure of sexual identity in the workplace. According to one estimate, up to one-third of lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees do not disclose their sexual orientation at work. Employees may fear the reactions of their managers and coworkers, leading to keeping their sexual identity a secret. In reality though, it seems that disclosing sexual orientation is not the key to explaining work attitudes of these employees—it is whether or not they are *afraid* to disclose their sexual identity. In other words, those employees who fear that full disclosure would lead to negative reactions experience lower job satisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, and higher intentions to leave their jobs. Creating an environment where all employees feel welcome and respected regardless of their sexual orientation is the key to maintaining a positive work environment.

How can organizations show their respect for diversity in sexual orientation? Some companies start by creating a written statement that the organization will not tolerate discrimination based on sexual orientation. They may have workshops addressing issues relating to sexual orientation and facilitate and create networking opportunities for lesbian and gay employees. Perhaps the most powerful way in which companies show respect for sexual orientation diversity is by extending benefits to the partners of same-sex couples. In fact, more than half of *Fortune* 500 companies currently offer health benefits to domestic partners of same-sex couples. Research shows that in companies that have these types of programs, discrimination based on sexual orientation is less frequent, and the job satisfaction and commitment levels are higher.

OB Toolbox: I think I am being asked illegal interview questions. What can I do?

In the United States, demographic characteristics such as race, gender, national origin, age, and disability status are protected by law. Yet according to a survey of 4,000 job seekers, about one-third of job applicants have been asked illegal interview questions. How can you answer such questions?

Here are some options:

- *Refuse to answer.* You may point out that the question is illegal and refuse to answer. Of course, this may cost you the job

offer, because you are likely to seem confrontational and aggressive.

- *Answer shortly.* Instead of giving a full answer to a question such as “are you married,” you could answer the question briefly and change the subject. In many cases, the interviewer may be trying to initiate small talk and may be unaware that the question is potentially illegal.
- *Answer the intent.* Sometimes, the illegal question hides a legitimate concern. When you are being asked where you are from, the potential employer might be concerned that you do not have a work permit. Addressing the issue in your answer may be better than answering the question you are being asked.
- *Walk away from the interview.* If you feel that the intent of the question is discriminatory, and if you feel that you would rather not work at a company that would ask such questions, you can always walk away from the interview. If you feel that you are being discriminated against, you may also want to talk to a lawyer later on.

Suggestions for Managing Demographic Diversity

What can organizations do to manage diversity more effectively? In this section, we review research findings and the best practices from different companies to create a list of suggestions for organizations.

Build a Culture of Respecting Diversity

In the most successful companies, diversity management is not the responsibility of the human resource department. Starting from top management and including the lowest levels in the hierarchy, each person understands the importance of respecting others. If this respect is not part of an organization’s culture, no amount of diversity training or other programs are likely to be effective. In fact, in the most successful companies, diversity is viewed as everyone’s responsibility. The United Parcel Service of America Inc. (UPS), the international shipping company, refuses to hire a diversity officer, underlining that it is not one person’s job. Companies with a strong culture—where people have a sense of shared values, loyalty to the organization is rewarded, and team performance is celebrated—enable employees with vastly different demographics and backgrounds to feel a sense of belonging.



Figure 5.2.4: UPS operates in 200 countries, including Italy where a boat is carrying packages on the Canal Grande in Venice. At UPS, 58% of all senior officers are women or minorities. Source: <http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Venezia0750UPS.jpg>.

Make Managers Accountable for Diversity

People are more likely to pay attention to aspects of performance that are measured. In successful companies, diversity metrics are carefully tracked. For example, in PepsiCo, during the tenure of former CEO Steve Reinemund, half of all new hires had to be either women or minorities. Bonuses of managers partly depended on whether they had met their diversity-related goals. When managers are evaluated and rewarded based on how effective they are in diversity management, they are more likely to show commitment to diversity that in turn affects the diversity climate in the rest of the organization.

Diversity Training Programs

Many companies provide employees and managers with training programs relating to diversity. However, not all diversity programs are equally successful. You may expect that more successful programs are those that occur in companies where a culture of diversity exists. A study of over 700 companies found that programs with a higher perceived success rate were those that occurred in companies where top management believed in the importance of diversity, where there were explicit rewards for increasing diversity of the company, and where managers were required to attend the diversity training programs.

Review Recruitment Practices

Companies may want to increase diversity by targeting a pool that is more diverse. There are many minority professional groups such as the National Black MBA Association or the Chinese Software Professionals Association. By building relations with these occupational groups, organizations may attract a more diverse group of candidates to choose from. The auditing company Ernst & Young Global Ltd. increases diversity of job candidates by mentoring undergraduate students. Companies may also benefit from reviewing their employment advertising to ensure that diversity is important at all levels of the company.

Affirmative Action Programs

Policies designed to recruit, promote, train, and retain employees belonging to a protected class are referred to as **affirmative action**. Based on Executive order 11246 (1965), federal contractors are required to use affirmative action programs. In addition, the federal government, many state and local governments, and the U.S. military are required to have affirmative action plans. An organization may also be using affirmative action as a result of a court order or due to a past history of discrimination. Affirmative action programs are among the most controversial methods in diversity management because some people believe that they lead to an unfair advantage for minority members.

In many cases, the negative perceptions about affirmative action can be explained by misunderstandings relating to what such anti-discrimination policies entail. Moreover, affirmative action means different things to different people and therefore it is inaccurate to discuss affirmative action as a uniform package.

Four groups of programs can be viewed as part of affirmative action programs:

1. **Simple elimination of discrimination.** These programs are the least controversial and are received favorably by employees.
2. **Targeted recruitment.** These affirmative action plans involve ensuring that the candidate pool is diverse. These programs are also viewed as fair by most employees.
3. **Tie-breaker.** In these programs, if all other characteristics are equal, then preference may be given to a minority candidate. In fact, these programs are not widely used and their use needs to be justified by organizations. In other words, organizations need to have very specific reasons for why they are using this type of affirmative action, such as past illegal discrimination. Otherwise, their use may be illegal and lead to reverse discrimination. These programs are viewed as less fair by employees.
4. **Preferential treatment.** These programs involve hiring a less-qualified minority candidate. Strong preferential treatment programs are illegal in most cases.

It is plausible that people who are against affirmative action programs may have unverified assumptions about the type of affirmative action program the company is using. Informing employees about the specifics of how affirmative action is being used may be a good way of dealing with any negative attitudes. In fact, a review of the past literature revealed that when specifics of affirmative action are not clearly defined, observers seem to draw their own conclusions about the particulars of the programs.

In addition to employee reactions to affirmative action, there is some research indicating that affirmative action programs may lead to stigmatization of the perceived beneficiaries. For example, in companies using affirmative action, coworkers of new hires may make the assumption that the new hire was chosen due to gender or race as opposed to having the necessary qualifications. These effects may even occur in the new hires themselves, who may have doubts about the fact that they were chosen because they were the best candidate for the position. Research also shows that giving coworkers information about the qualifications and performance of the new hire eliminates these potentially negative effects of affirmative action programs.

OB Toolbox: Dealing with Being Different

At any time in your career, you may find yourself in a situation in which you are different from those around you. Maybe you are

the only male in an organization where most of your colleagues and managers are females. Maybe you are older than all your colleagues. How do you deal with the challenges of being different?

- *Invest in building effective relationships.* Early in a relationship, people are more attracted to those who are demographically similar to them. This means that your colleagues or manager may never get to find out how smart, fun, or hardworking you are if you have limited interactions with them. Create opportunities to talk to them. Be sure to point out areas of commonality.
- *Choose your mentor carefully.* Mentors may help you make sense of the organization's culture, give you career-related advice, and help you feel like you belong. That said, how powerful and knowledgeable your mentor is also matters. You may be more attracted to someone at your same level and who is similar to you, but you may have more to learn from someone who is more experienced, knowledgeable, and powerful than you are.
- *Investigate company resources.* Many companies offer networking opportunities and interest groups for women, ethnic minorities, and employees with disabilities among others. Check out what resources are available through your company.
- *Know your rights.* You should know that harassment based on protected characteristics such as gender, race, age, or disabilities, as well as discrimination based on these traits are illegal in the United States. If you face harassment or discrimination, you may want to notify your manager or your company's HR department.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Organizations managing diversity effectively benefit from diversity because they achieve higher creativity, better customer service, higher job satisfaction, higher stock prices, and lower litigation expenses. At the same time, managing a diverse workforce is challenging for several key reasons. Employees are more likely to associate with those who are similar to them early in a relationship, the distribution of demographic traits could create faultlines within a group, and stereotypes may act as barriers to advancement and fair treatment of employees. Demographic traits such as gender, race, age, religion, disabilities, and sexual orientation each face unique challenges. Organizations can manage demographic diversity more effectively by building a culture of respect, making managers accountable for diversity, creating diversity-training programs, reviewing recruitment practices, and under some conditions, utilizing affirmative action programs.

EXERCISES

1. What does it mean for a company to manage diversity effectively? How would you know if a company is doing a good job of managing diversity?
2. What are the benefits of effective diversity management?
3. How can organizations deal with the "similarity-attraction" phenomenon? Left unchecked, what are the problems this tendency can cause?
4. What is the earnings gap? Who does it affect? What are the reasons behind the earnings gap?
5. Do you think that laws and regulations are successful in eliminating discrimination in the workplace? Why or why not?

Cultural Diversity

Culture refers to values, beliefs, and customs that exist in a society. In the United States, the workforce is becoming increasingly multicultural, with close to 16% of all employees being born outside the country. In addition, the world of work is becoming increasingly international. The world is going through a transformation in which China, India, and Brazil are emerging as major players in world economics. Companies are realizing that doing international business provides access to raw materials, resources, and a wider customer base. For many companies, international business is where most of the profits lie, such as for Intel Corporation, where 70% of all revenues come from outside the United States. International companies are also becoming major players within the United States. For example, China's Lenovo acquired IBM's personal computer business and became the world's third-largest computer manufacturer. As a result of these trends, understanding the role of national culture for organizational behavior may provide you with a competitive advantage in your career. In fact, sometime in your career, you may find yourself working as an expatriate. An **expatriate** is someone who is temporarily assigned to a position in a foreign country. Such an experience may be invaluable for your career and challenge you to increase your understanding and appreciation of differences across cultures.

How do cultures differ from each other? If you have ever visited a country different from your own, you probably have stories to tell about what aspects of the culture were different and which were similar. Maybe you have noticed that in many parts of the United States people routinely greet strangers with a smile when they step into an elevator or see them on the street, but the

same behavior of saying hello and smiling at strangers would be considered odd in many parts of Europe. In India and other parts of Asia, traffic flows with rules of its own, with people disobeying red lights, stopping and loading passengers in highways, or honking continuously for no apparent reason. In fact, when it comes to culture, we are like fish in the sea: We may not realize how culture is shaping our behavior until we leave our own and go someplace else. Cultural differences may shape how people dress, how they act, how they form relationships, how they address each other, what they eat, and many other aspects of daily life. Of course, talking about national cultures does not mean that national cultures are uniform. In many countries, it is possible to talk about the existence of cultures based on region or geography. For example, in the United States, the southern, eastern, western, and midwestern regions of the country are associated with slightly different values.

Thinking about hundreds of different ways in which cultures may differ is not very practical when you are trying to understand how culture affects work behaviors. For this reason, the work of Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social scientist, is an important contribution to the literature. Hofstede studied IBM employees in 66 countries and showed that four dimensions of national culture explain an important source of variation among cultures. Research also shows that cultural variation with respect to these four dimensions influence employee job behaviors, attitudes, well-being, motivation, leadership, negotiations, and many other aspects of organizational behavior.

Individualism Cultures in which people define themselves as individuals and form looser ties with their groups. • USA • Australia • UK • Canada • Hungary	Collectivism Cultures where people have stronger bonds to their groups and group membership forms a person's self identity. • Guatemala • Ecuador • Indonesia • Pakistan • China
Low Power Distance A society that views an unequal distribution of power as relatively unacceptable. • Austria • Denmark • Israel • Ireland • New Zealand	High Power Distance A society that views an unequal distribution of power as relatively acceptable. • Malaysia • Slovakia • Philippines • Russia • Mexico
Low Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures in which people are comfortable in unpredictable situations and have high tolerance for ambiguity. • Denmark • Jamaica • Singapore • China • Sweden	High Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures in which people prefer predictable situations and have low tolerance for ambiguity. • Belgium • El Salvador • Greece • Guatemala • Portugal
Masculinity Cultures in which people value achievement and competitiveness, as well as acquisition of money and other material objects. • Slovakia • Japan • Hungary • Austria • Venezuela	Femininity Cultures in which people value maintaining good relationships, caring for the weak, and quality of life. • Norway • Netherlands • Sweden • Costa Rica • Chile

Figure 5.2.5: Hofstede's culture framework is a useful tool to understand the systematic differences across cultures. Source: Adapted from information in Geert Hofstede cultural dimensions. Retrieved November 12, 2008, from www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php.

Individualism-Collectivism

Individualistic cultures are cultures in which people define themselves as an individual and form looser ties with their groups. These cultures value autonomy and independence of the person, self-reliance, and creativity. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia are examples of individualistic cultures. In contrast, **collectivistic cultures** are cultures where people have stronger bonds to their groups and group membership forms a person's self-identity. Asian countries such as China and Japan, as well as countries in Latin America are higher in collectivism.

In collectivistic cultures, people define themselves as part of a group. In fact, this may be one way to detect people's individualism-collectivism level. When individualists are asked a question such as "Who are you? Tell me about yourself," they are more likely to talk about their likes and dislikes, personal goals, or accomplishments. When collectivists are asked the same question, they are more likely to define themselves in relation to others, such as "I am Chinese" or "I am the daughter of a doctor and a homemaker. I have two brothers." In other words, in collectivistic cultures, self-identity is shaped to a stronger extent by group memberships.

In collectivistic societies, family bonds are more influential in people's daily lives. While individualists often refer to their nuclear family when thinking about their families, collectivists are more likely to define family in a broader sense, including cousins, uncles, aunts, and second cousins. Family members are more involved in each others' lives. For example, in societies such as Iran, Greece, and Turkey, extended family members may see each other several times a week. In many collectivistic societies, the language reflects the level of interaction among extended family members such that there may be different words used to

refer to maternal versus paternal grandparents, aunts, or uncles. In addition to interacting with each other more often, family members have a strong sense of obligation toward each other. For example, children often expect to live with their parents until they get married. In collectivistic countries such as Thailand, Japan, and India, choosing a career or finding a spouse are all family affairs. In these cultures, family members feel accountable for each others' behavior such that one person's misbehavior may be a cause of shame for the rest of the family. Understanding the importance of family in collectivistic cultures is critical to understanding their work behaviors. For example, one multinational oil company in Mexico was suffering from low productivity. When the situation was investigated, it became clear that the new manager of the subsidiary had gotten rid of a monthly fiesta for company employees and their families under the assumption that it was a waste of time and money. Employees had interpreted this to mean that the company no longer cared about their families. In India, companies such as Intel organize "take your parents to work day" and involve parents in recruitment efforts, understanding the role of parents in the career and job choices of prospective employees.

Collectivists are more attached to their groups and have more permanent attachments to these groups. Conversely, individualists attempt to change groups more often and have weaker bonds to them. It is important to recognize that to collectivists the entire human universe is not considered to be their in-group. In other words, collectivists draw sharper distinctions between the groups they belong to and those they do not belong to. They may be nice and friendly to their in-group members while acting much more competitively and aggressively toward out-group members. This tendency has important work implications. While individualists may evaluate the performance of their colleagues more accurately, collectivists are more likely to be generous when evaluating their in-group members. Freeborders, a software company based in San Francisco, California, found that even though it was against company policy, Chinese employees were routinely sharing salary information with their coworkers. This situation led them to change their pay system by standardizing pay at job levels and then giving raises after more frequent appraisals.

Collectivistic societies emphasize conformity to the group. The Japanese saying "the nail that sticks up gets hammered down" illustrates that being different from the group is undesirable. In these cultures, disobeying or disagreeing with one's group is difficult and people may find it hard to say no to their colleagues or friends. Instead of saying no, which would be interpreted as rebellion or at least be considered rude, they may use indirect ways of disagreeing, such as saying "I have to think about this" or "this would be difficult." Such indirect communication prevents the other party from losing face but may cause misunderstandings in international communications with cultures that have a more direct style. Collectivist cultures may have a greater preference for team-based rewards as opposed to individual-based rewards. For example, in one study, more than 75% of the subjects in Philippines viewed team-based pay as fair, while less than 50% of the U.S.-based subjects viewed team-based rewards as fair.

Power Distance

Power distance refers to the degree to which the society views an unequal distribution of power as acceptable. Simply put, some cultures are more egalitarian than others. In low power distance cultures, egalitarianism is the norm. In high power distance cultures, people occupying more powerful positions such as managers, teachers, or those who are older are viewed as more powerful and deserving of a higher level of respect. High power distance cultures are hierarchical cultures where everyone has their place. Powerful people are supposed to act powerful, while those in inferior positions are expected to show respect. For example, Thailand is a high power distance culture and, starting from childhood, people learn to recognize who is superior, equal, or inferior to them. When passing people who are more powerful, individuals are expected to bow, and the more powerful the person, the deeper the bow would be. Managers in high power distance cultures are treated with a higher degree of respect, which may surprise those in lower power distance cultures. A Citibank manager in Saudi Arabia was surprised when employees stood up every time he passed by. Similarly, in Turkey, students in elementary and high schools greet their teacher by standing up every time the teacher walks into the classroom. In these cultures, referring to a manager or a teacher with their first name would be extremely rude. High power distance within a culture may easily cause misunderstandings with those from low power distance societies. For example, the limp handshake someone from India may give or a job candidate from Chad who is looking at the floor throughout the interview are in fact showing their respect, but these behaviors may be interpreted as indicating a lack of confidence or even disrespect in low power distance cultures.

One of the most important ways in which power distance is manifested in the workplace is that in high power distance cultures, employees are unlikely to question the power and authority of their manager, and conformity to the manager will be expected. Managers in these cultures may be more used to an authoritarian style with lower levels of participative leadership demonstrated. People will be more submissive to their superiors and may take orders without questioning the manager. In these cultures, people may feel uncomfortable when they are asked to participate in decision making. For example, peers are much less likely to be involved in hiring decisions in high power distance cultures. Instead, these cultures seem to prefer paternalistic leaders—leaders who are authoritarian but make decisions while showing a high level of concern toward employees as if they were family members.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which people feel threatened by ambiguous, risky, or unstructured situations. Cultures high in uncertainty avoidance prefer predictable situations and have low tolerance for ambiguity. Employees in these cultures expect a clear set of instructions and clarity in expectations. Therefore, there will be a greater level of creating procedures to deal with problems and writing out expected behaviors in manuals.

Cultures high in uncertainty avoidance prefer to avoid risky situations and attempt to reduce uncertainty. For example, one study showed that when hiring new employees, companies in high uncertainty avoidance cultures are likely to use a larger number of tests, conduct a larger number of interviews, and use a fixed list of interview questions. Employment contracts tend to be more popular in cultures higher in uncertainty avoidance compared to cultures low in uncertainty avoidance. The level of change-oriented leadership seems to be lower in cultures higher in uncertainty avoidance. Companies operating in high uncertainty avoidance cultures also tend to avoid risky endeavors such as entering foreign target markets unless the target market is very large.

Germany is an example of a high uncertainty avoidance culture where people prefer structure in their lives and rely on rules and procedures to manage situations. Similarly, Greece is a culture relatively high in uncertainty avoidance, and Greek employees working in hierarchical and rule-oriented companies report lower levels of stress. In contrast, cultures such as Iran and Russia are lower in uncertainty avoidance, and companies in these regions do not have rule-oriented cultures. When they create rules, they also selectively enforce rules and make a number of exceptions to them. In fact, rules may be viewed as constraining. Uncertainty avoidance may influence the type of organizations employees are attracted to. Japan's uncertainty avoidance is associated with valuing job security, while in uncertainty-avoidant Latin American cultures, many job candidates prefer the stability of bigger and well-known companies with established career paths.

Masculinity–Femininity

Masculine cultures are cultures that value achievement, competitiveness, and acquisition of money and other material objects. Japan and Hungary are examples of masculine cultures. Masculine cultures are also characterized by a separation of gender roles. In these cultures, men are more likely to be assertive and competitive compared to women. In contrast, **feminine cultures** are cultures that value maintaining good relationships, caring for the weak, and emphasizing quality of life. In these cultures, values are not separated by gender, and both women and men share the values of maintaining good relationships. Sweden and the Netherlands are examples of feminine cultures. The level of masculinity inherent in the culture has implications for the behavior of individuals as well as organizations. For example, in masculine cultures, the ratio of CEO pay to other management-level employees tends to be higher, indicating that these cultures are more likely to reward CEOs with higher levels of pay as opposed to other types of rewards. The femininity of a culture affects many work practices, such as the level of work/life balance. In cultures high in femininity such as Norway and Sweden, work arrangements such as telecommuting seem to be more popular compared to cultures higher in masculinity like Italy and the United Kingdom.

OB Toolbox: Prepare Yourself for a Global Career

With the globalizing economy, boundaries with respect to careers are also blurring. How can you prepare yourself for a career that crosses national boundaries?

- *Learn a language.* If you already know that you want to live in China after you finish school, now may be the time to start learning the language. It is true that business is often conducted in English, but it is becoming increasingly ethnocentric to speak only one language while many in the rest of the world can speak two or more. For example, only 9% of those living in the United States can speak their native language plus another language fluently, as opposed to 53% of Europeans. Plus, even if business is conducted in English, your adaptation to a different society, making friends, and leading a satisfying life will be much easier if you can speak the language.
- *Immerse yourself in different cultures.* Visit different cultures. This does not mean visiting five countries in 5 days. Plan on spending more time in one locale, and get to know, observe, and understand the culture.
- *Develop an openness to different experiences.* Be open to different cuisines, different languages, and different norms of working and living. If you feel very strongly that your way of living and working is the right way, you will have a hard time adjusting to a different culture.
- *Develop a strong social support network.* Once you arrive in the culture you will live in, be proactive in making friends. Being connected to people in a different culture will have an influence on your ability to adjust to living there. If you are planning on taking family members with you, their level of readiness will also influence your ability to function in a different culture.

- *Develop a sense of humor.* Adjusting to a different culture is often easier if you can laugh at yourself and the mistakes you make. If you take every mistake too personally, your stay will be less enjoyable and more frustrating.
- *Plan your return.* If you have plans to come back and work in your home country, you will need to plan your return in advance. When people leave home for a long time, they often adapt to the foreign culture they live in and may miss many elements of it when they go back home. Your old friends may have moved on, local employers may not immediately appreciate your overseas experience, and you may even find that cultural aspects of your home country may have changed in your absence. Be ready for a reverse culture shock!

Suggestions for Managing Cultural Diversity

With the increasing importance of international business as well as the culturally diverse domestic workforce, what can organizations do to manage cultural diversity?

Help Employees Build Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence is a person's capability to understand how a person's cultural background influences one's behavior. Developing cultural intelligence seems important, because the days when organizations could prepare their employees for international work simply by sending them to long seminars on a particular culture are gone. Presently, international business is not necessarily conducted between pairs of countries. A successful domestic manager is not necessarily assigned to work on a long-term assignment in China. Of course, such assignments still happen, but it is more likely that the employees will continually work with others from diverse cultural backgrounds. This means employees will not necessarily have to become experts in one culture. Instead, they should have the ability to work with people from many diverse backgrounds all at the same time. For these types of assignments, employees will need to develop an awareness of overall cultural differences and learn how to recognize cultural principles that are operating in different situations. In other words, employees will need to be selected based on cultural sensitivity and understanding and trained to enhance such qualities. For example, GlobeSmart by Aperian Global is an online tool that helps employees learn how to deal with people from around the world. The process starts by completing a survey about your cultural values, and then these values are compared to those of different cultures. The tool provides specific advice about interpersonal interactions with these cultures.

Avoid Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own culture is superior to other cultures one comes across. Ethnocentrism leads organizations to adopt universal principles when doing business around the globe and may backfire. In this chapter, we highlighted research findings showing how culture affects employee expectations of work life such as work-life balance, job security, or the level of empowerment. Ignoring cultural differences, norms, and local habits may be costly for businesses and may lead to unmotivated and dissatisfied employees. Successful global companies modify their management styles, marketing, and communication campaigns to fit with the culture in which they are operating. For example, Apple Inc.'s famous PC versus Mac advertising campaign was reshot in Japan and the United Kingdom using local actors. The American ads were found to be too aggressive for the Japanese culture, where direct product comparisons are rare and tend to make people uncomfortable. The new ads feature more friendly banter and are subtler than the U.S. ads. For the British market, the advertisers localized the humor.

Listen to Locals

When doing cross-cultural business, locals are a key source of information. To get timely and accurate feedback, companies will need to open lines of communication and actively seek feedback. For example, Convergys, a Cincinnati-based call-center company, built a cafeteria for the employees in India. During the planning phase, the Indian vice president pointed out that because Indian food is served hot and employees would expect to receive hot meals for lunch, building a cafeteria that served only sandwiches would create dissatisfied employees. By opening the lines of communication in the planning phase of the project, Convergys was alerted to this important cultural difference in time to change the plans.

Recognize That Culture Changes

Cultures are not static—they evolve over the years. A piece of advice that was true 5 years ago may no longer hold true. For example, showing sensitivity to the Indian caste system may be outdated advice for those internationals doing business in India

today.

Do Not Always Assume That Culture Is the Problem

When doing business internationally, failure may occur due to culture as well as other problems. Attributing all misunderstandings or failures to culture may enlarge the cultural gap and shift the blame to others. In fact, managing people who have diverse personalities or functional backgrounds may create misunderstandings that are not necessarily due to cultural differences. When marketing people from the United States interact with engineers in India, misunderstandings may be caused by the differences in perceptions between marketing and engineering employees. While familiarizing employees with culture, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal skills regardless of cultural background will be important.

KEY TAKEAWAY

With the increasing prevalence of international business as well as diversification of the domestic workforce in many countries, understanding how culture affects organizational behavior is becoming important. Individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity are four key dimensions in which cultures vary. The position of a culture on these dimensions affects the suitable type of management style, reward systems, employee selection, and ways of motivating employees.

EXERCISES

1. What is culture? Do countries have uniform national cultures?
2. How would you describe your own home country's values on the four dimensions of culture?
3. Reflect on a time when you experienced a different culture or interacted with someone from a different culture. How did the cultural differences influence your interaction?
4. How does culture influence the proper leadership style and reward system that would be suitable for organizations?
5. Imagine that you will be sent to live in a foreign country different from your own in a month. What are the types of preparations you would benefit from doing?

Managing Diversity for Success: The Case of IBM

When you are a company that operates in over 170 countries with a workforce of over 398,000 employees, understanding and managing diversity effectively is not optional—it is a key business priority. A company that employs individuals and sells products worldwide needs to understand the diverse groups of people that make up the world.

Starting from its early history in the United States, IBM Corporation (NYSE: IBM) has been a pioneer in valuing and appreciating its diverse workforce. In 1935, almost 30 years before the Equal Pay Act guaranteed pay equality between the sexes, then IBM president Thomas Watson promised women equal pay for equal work. In 1943, the company had its first female vice president. Again, 30 years before the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) granted women unpaid leave for the birth of a child, IBM offered the same benefit to female employees, extending it to one year in the 1960s and to three years in 1988. In fact, the company ranks in the top 100 on *Working Mother* magazine's "100 Best Companies" list and has been on the list every year since its inception in 1986. It was awarded the honor of number 1 for multicultural working women by the same magazine in 2009.

IBM has always been a leader in diversity management. Yet, the way diversity was managed was primarily to ignore differences and provide equal employment opportunities. This changed when Louis Gerstner became CEO in 1993.

Gerstner was surprised at the low level of diversity in the senior ranks of the company. For all the effort being made to promote diversity, the company still had what he perceived a masculine culture.

In 1995, he created eight diversity task forces around demographic groups such as women and men, as well as Asians, African Americans, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals, Hispanics, Native Americans, and employees with disabilities. These task forces consisted of senior-level, well-respected executives and higher-level managers, and members were charged with gaining an understanding of how to make each constituency feel more welcome and at home at IBM. Each task force conducted a series of meetings and surveyed thousands of employees to arrive at the key factors concerning each particular

group. For example, the presence of a male-dominated culture, lack of networking opportunities, and work-life management challenges topped the list of concerns for women. Asian employees were most concerned about stereotyping, lack of networking, and limited employment development plans. African American employee concerns included retention, lack of networking, and limited training opportunities. Armed with a list of priorities, the company launched a number of key programs and initiatives to address these issues. As an example, employees looking for a mentor could use the company's Web site to locate one willing to provide guidance and advice. What is probably most unique about this approach is that the company acted on each concern whether it was based on reality or perception. They realized that some women were concerned that they would have to give up leading a balanced life if they wanted to be promoted to higher management, whereas 70% of the women in higher levels actually had children, indicating that perceptual barriers can also act as a barrier to employee aspirations. IBM management chose to deal with this particular issue by communicating better with employees as well as through enhancing their networking program.

The company excels in its recruiting efforts to increase the diversity of its pool of candidates. One of the biggest hurdles facing diversity at IBM is the limited minority representation in fields such as computer sciences and engineering. For example, only 4% of students graduating with a degree in computer sciences are Hispanic. To tackle this issue, IBM partners with colleges to increase recruitment of Hispanics to these programs. In a program named EXITE (Exploring Interest in Technology and Engineering), they bring middle school female students together for a weeklong program where they learn math and science in a fun atmosphere from IBM's female engineers. To date, over 3,000 girls have gone through this program.

What was the result of all these programs? IBM tracks results through global surveys around the world and identifies which programs have been successful and which issues no longer are viewed as problems. These programs were instrumental in more than tripling the number of female executives worldwide as well as doubling the number of minority executives. The number of LGBT executives increased sevenfold, and executives with disabilities tripled. With growing emerging markets and women and minorities representing a \$1.3 trillion market, IBM's culture of respecting and appreciating diversity is likely to be a source of competitive advantage.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. IBM has been championed for its early implementation of equality among its workforce. At the time, many of these policies seemed radical. To IBM's credit, the movement toward equality worked out exceptionally well for them. Have you experienced policy changes that might seem radical? Have these policies worked out? What policies do you feel are still lacking in the workforce?
2. If you or your spouse is currently employed, how difficult would it be to take time off for having a child?
3. Some individuals feel that so much focus is put on making the workplace better for underrepresented groups that the majority of the workforce becomes neglected. Do you feel this was the case at IBM? Why or why not? How can a company ensure that *no* employee is neglected, regardless of demographic group?
4. What types of competitive advantages could IBM have gained from having such a diverse workforce?

5.3: Generational Diversity

Read [this article](#) and consider the following questions: How prevalent is generational diversity in today's organizations? What are some of the differences between each generation group? How important is it for a person to know his or her own generational tendencies as well as the generational tendencies of coworkers? What generation group do you belong to, and what generational tendencies do you notice in your own behavior? How do these tendencies affect your interactions with others?

Reflect on the article about generational diversity that you have just read. What, if any, impact does generational diversity have on your own workplace? Are younger, more technologically comfortable employees tolerant of older employees who may not possess as many technological skills? Have you observed the reactions of older employees to new technology, and if so, how did these employees deal with those changes?

6: SOCIAL PROBLEMS

6.1: What is a Social Problem?

6.2: Explaining Poverty

6.3: Prejudice

6.4: Ingroup Favoritism and Prejudice

6.5: Discrimination

6.6: Understanding Sex and Gender

6.1: What is a Social Problem?

Learning Objectives

1. Define “social problem.”
2. Explain the objective and subjective components of the definition of a social problem.
3. Understand the social constructionist view of social problems.
4. List the stages of the natural history of social problems.

A social problem is any condition or behavior that has negative consequences for large numbers of people and that is generally recognized as a condition or behavior that needs to be addressed. This definition has both an *objective* component and a *subjective* component.

The *objective* component is this: For any condition or behavior to be considered a social problem, it must have negative consequences for large numbers of people, as each chapter of this book discusses. How do we know if a social problem has negative consequences? Reasonable people can and do disagree on whether such consequences exist and, if so, on their extent and seriousness, but ordinarily a body of data accumulates—from work by academic researchers, government agencies, and other sources—that strongly points to extensive and serious consequences. The reasons for these consequences are often hotly debated, and sometimes, as we shall see in certain chapters in this book, sometimes the very existence of these consequences is disputed. A current example is *climate change*: Although the overwhelming majority of climate scientists say that climate change (changes in the earth’s climate due to the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere) is real and serious, fewer than two-thirds of Americans (64 percent) in a 2011 poll said they “think that global warming is happening” (Leiserowitz, et. al., 2011).

This type of dispute points to the *subjective* component of the definition of social problems: There must be a perception that a condition or behavior needs to be addressed for it to be considered a social problem. This component lies at the heart of the social constructionist view of social problems (Rubington & Weinberg, 2010). In this view, many types of negative conditions and behaviors exist. Many of these are considered sufficiently negative to acquire the status of a social problem; some do not receive this consideration and thus do not become a social problem; and some become considered a social problem only if citizens, policymakers, or other parties call attention to the condition or behavior.



Figure 6.1.1: Sometimes disputes occur over whether a particular condition or behavior has negative consequences and is thus a social problem. A current example is climate change: although almost all climate scientists think climate change is real and serious, more than one-third of the American public thinks that climate change is not happening. Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

The history of attention given to rape and sexual assault in the United States before and after the 1970s provides an example of this latter situation. These acts of sexual violence against women have probably occurred from the beginning of humanity

and certainly were very common in the United States before the 1970s. Although men were sometimes arrested and prosecuted for rape and sexual assault, sexual violence was otherwise ignored by legal policymakers and received little attention in college textbooks and the news media, and many people thought that rape and sexual assault were just something that happened (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993). Allison, J. A., & Wrightsman, L. S. (1993). *Rape: The misunderstood crime*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Thus although sexual violence existed, it was not considered a social problem. When the contemporary women's movement began in the late 1970s, it soon focused on rape and sexual assault as serious crimes and as manifestations of women's inequality. Thanks to this focus, rape and sexual assault eventually entered the public consciousness, views of these crimes began to change, and legal policymakers began to give them more attention. In short, sexual violence against women became a social problem.



Before the 1970s, rape and sexual assault certainly existed and were very common, but they were generally ignored and not considered a social problem. When the contemporary women's movement arose during the 1970s, it focused on sexual violence against women and turned this behavior into a social problem. Image courtesy of Women's eNews, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/wenews/5167303294/>.

The social constructionist view raises an interesting question: When is a social problem a social problem? According to some sociologists who adopt this view, negative conditions and behaviors are *not* a social problem unless they are recognized as such by policymakers, large numbers of lay citizens, or other segments of our society; these sociologists would thus say that rape and sexual assault before the 1970s were not a social problem because our society as a whole paid them little attention. Other sociologists say that negative conditions and behaviors *should be* considered a social problem even if they receive little or no attention; these sociologists would thus say that rape and sexual assault before the 1970s were a social problem.

This type of debate is probably akin to the age-old question: If a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it, is a sound made? As such, it is not easy to answer, but it does reinforce one of the key beliefs of the social constructionist view: Perception matters at least as much as reality, and sometimes more so. In line with this belief, social constructionism emphasizes that citizens, interest groups, policymakers, and other parties often compete to influence popular perceptions of many types of conditions and behaviors. They try to influence news media coverage and popular views of the nature and extent of any negative consequences that may be occurring, the reasons underlying the condition or behavior in question, and possible solutions to the problem.



Sometimes a condition or behavior becomes a social problem even if there is little or no basis for this perception. A historical example involves women in college. During the late 1800s, medical authorities and other experts warned women not to go to college for two reasons: they feared that the stress of college would disrupt women's menstrual cycles, and they thought that women would not do well on exams while they were menstruating. (Unsplash License; Yustinus Tjiuwanda via Unsplash)

Social constructionism's emphasis on perception has a provocative implication: Just as a condition or behavior may not be considered a social problem even if there is strong basis for this perception, so may a condition or behavior be considered a social problem even if there is little or no basis for this perception. The "issue" of women in college provides a historical example of this latter possibility. In the late 1800s, leading physicians and medical researchers in the United States wrote journal articles, textbooks, and newspaper columns in which they warned women not to go to college. The reason? They feared that the stress of college would disrupt women's menstrual cycles, and they also feared that women would not do well in exams during "that time of the month" (Ehrenreich & English, 2005)! Ehrenreich, B., & English, D. (2005). *For her own good: Two centuries of the experts' advice to women* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Anchor Books. We now know better, of course, but the sexist beliefs of these writers turned the idea of women going to college into a social problem and helped to reinforce restrictions by colleges and universities on the admission of women.

In a related dynamic, various parties can distort certain aspects of a social problem that does exist: politicians can give speeches, the news media can use scary headlines and heavy coverage to capture readers' or viewers' interest, businesses can use advertising and influence news coverage. News media coverage of violent crime provides many examples of this dynamic (Robinson, 2011; Surette, 2011). Robinson, M. B. (2011). *Media coverage of crime and criminal justice*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press; Surette, R. (2011). *Media, crime, and criminal justice: Images, realities, and policies* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. The news media overdramatize violent crime, which is far less common than property crime like burglary and larceny, by featuring so many stories about it, and this coverage contributes to public fear of crime. Media stories about violent crime also tend to be more common when the accused offender is black and the victim is white and when the offender is a juvenile. This type of coverage is thought to heighten the public's prejudice toward African Americans and to contribute to negative views about teenagers.

The Natural History of a Social Problem

We have just discussed some of the difficulties in defining a social problem and the fact that various parties often try to influence public perceptions of social problems. These issues aside, most social problems go through a *natural history* consisting of several stages of their development (Spector & Kitsuse, 2001). Spector, M., & Kitsuse, J. I. (2001). *Constructing social problems*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Stage 1: Emergence and Claims Making

A social problem emerges when a social entity (such as a social change group, the news media, or influential politicians) begins to call attention to a condition or behavior that it perceives to be undesirable and in need of remedy. As part of this process, it tries

to influence public perceptions of the problem, the reasons for it, and possible solutions to it. Because the social entity is making claims about all these matters, this aspect of Stage 1 is termed the **claims-making process**. Not all efforts to turn a condition or behavior into a social problem succeed, and if they do not succeed, a social problem does not emerge. Because of the resources they have or do not have, some social entities are more likely than others to succeed at this stage. A few ordinary individuals have little influence in the public sphere, but masses of individuals who engage in protest or other political activity have greater ability to help a social problem emerge. Because politicians have the ear of the news media and other types of influence, their views about social problems are often very influential. Most studies of this stage of a social problem focus on the efforts of social change groups and the larger social movement to which they may belong, as most social problems begin with bottom-up efforts from such groups.



A social problem emerges when a social change group successfully calls attention to a condition or behavior that it considers serious. Protests like the one depicted here have raised the environmental consciousness of Americans and helped put pressure on businesses to be environmentally responsible. Image courtesy of ItzaFineDay, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/itzafineday/3085307050/>.

Stage 2: Legitimacy

Once a social group succeeds in turning a condition or behavior into a social problem, it usually tries to persuade the government (local, state, and/or federal) to take some action—spending and policymaking—to address the problem. As part of this effort, it tries to convince the government that its claims about the problem are legitimate—that they make sense and are supported by *empirical* (research-based) evidence. To the extent that the group succeeds in convincing the government of the legitimacy of its claims, government action is that much more likely to occur.

Stage 3: Renewed Claims Making

Even if government action does occur, social change groups often conclude that the action is too limited in goals or scope to be able to successfully address the social problem. If they reach this conclusion, they often decide to press their demands anew. They do so by reasserting their claims and by criticizing the official response they have received from the government or other established interests, such as big businesses. This stage may involve a fair amount of tension between the social change groups and these targets of their claims.

Stage 4: Development of Alternative Strategies

Despite the renewed claims making, social change groups often conclude that the government and established interests are not responding adequately to their claims. Although the groups may continue to press their claims, they nonetheless realize that these claims may fail to win an adequate response from established interests. This realization leads them to develop their own strategies for addressing the social problem.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The definition of a social problem has both an objective component and a subjective component. The objective component involves empirical evidence of the negative consequences of a social condition or behavior, while the subjective component involves the perception that the condition or behavior is indeed a problem that needs to be addressed.
- The social constructionist view emphasizes that a condition or behavior does not become a social problem unless there is a perception that it should be considered a social problem.
- The natural history of a social problem consists of four stages: emergence and claims making, legitimacy, renewed claims making, and alternative strategies.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. What do you think is the most important social problem facing our nation right now? Explain your answer.
2. Do you agree with the social constructionist view that a negative social condition or behavior is not a social problem unless there is a perception that it should be considered a social problem? Why or why not?

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6.2: Explaining Poverty

Learning Objectives

- Describe the assumptions of the functionalist and conflict views of stratification and of poverty.
- Explain the focus of symbolic interactionist work on poverty.
- Understand the difference between the individualist and structural explanations of poverty.

Why does poverty exist, and why and how do poor people end up being poor? The sociological perspectives introduced earlier provide some possible answers to these questions through their attempt to explain why American society is *stratified*—that is, why it has a range of wealth ranging from the extremely wealthy to the extremely poor. We review what these perspectives say generally about social stratification (rankings of people based on wealth and other resources a society values) before turning to explanations focusing specifically on poverty.

In general, the functionalist perspective and conflict perspective both try to explain why social stratification exists and endures, while the symbolic interactionist perspective discusses the differences that stratification produces for everyday interaction. Table 6.2.1 “Theory Snapshot” summarizes these three approaches.

Table 6.2.1 Theory Snapshot

Theoretical perspective	Major assumptions
Functionalism	Stratification is necessary to induce people with special intelligence, knowledge, and skills to enter the most important occupations. For this reason, stratification is necessary and inevitable.
Conflict theory	Stratification results from lack of opportunity and from discrimination and prejudice against the poor, women, and people of color. It is neither necessary nor inevitable.
Symbolic interactionism	Stratification affects people’s beliefs, lifestyles, daily interaction, and conceptions of themselves.

The Functionalist View

Functionalist theory assumes that society’s structures and processes exist because they serve important functions for society’s stability and continuity. In line with this view, functionalist theorists in sociology assume that stratification exists because it also serves important functions for society. This explanation was developed more than sixty years ago by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (Davis & Moore, 1945) in the form of several logical assumptions that imply stratification is both necessary and inevitable. When applied to American society, their assumptions would be as follows:

1. **Some jobs are more important than other jobs.** For example, the job of a brain surgeon is more important than the job of shoe shining.
2. **Some jobs require more skills and knowledge than other jobs.** To stay with our example, it takes more skills and knowledge to perform brain surgery than to shine shoes.
3. **Relatively few people have the ability to acquire the skills and knowledge that are needed to do these important, highly skilled jobs.** Most of us would be able to do a decent job of shining shoes, but very few of us would be able to become brain surgeons.
4. **To encourage the people with the skills and knowledge to do the important, highly skilled jobs, society must promise them higher incomes or other rewards.** If this is true, some people automatically end up higher in society’s ranking system than others, and stratification is thus necessary and inevitable.

To illustrate their assumptions, say we have a society where shining shoes and doing brain surgery both give us incomes of \$150,000 per year. (This example is very hypothetical, but please keep reading.) If you decide to shine shoes, you can begin making this money at age 16, but if you decide to become a brain surgeon, you will not start making this same amount until about age 35, as you must first go to college and medical school and then acquire several more years of medical training. While

you have spent nineteen additional years beyond age 16 getting this education and training and taking out tens of thousands of dollars in student loans, you could have spent those years shining shoes and making \$150,000 a year, or \$2.85 million overall. Which job would you choose?



Figure 6.2.1

Functional theory argues that the promise of very high incomes is necessary to encourage talented people to pursue important careers such as surgery. If physicians and shoe shiners made the same high income, would enough people decide to become physicians?

As this example suggests, many people might not choose to become brain surgeons unless considerable financial and other rewards awaited them. By extension, we might not have enough people filling society's important jobs unless they know they will be similarly rewarded. If this is true, we must have stratification. And if we must have stratification, then that means some people will have much less money than other people. If stratification is inevitable, then, poverty is also inevitable. The functionalist view further implies that if people are poor, it is because they do not have the ability to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for the important, high-paying jobs.

The functionalist view sounds very logical, but a few years after Davis and Moore published their theory, other sociologists pointed out some serious problems in their argument (Tumin, 1953; Wrong, 1959).

First, it is difficult to compare the importance of many types of jobs. For example, which is more important, doing brain surgery or mining coal? Although you might be tempted to answer with brain surgery, if no coal were mined then much of our society could not function. In another example, which job is more important, attorney or professor? (Be careful how you answer this one!)

Second, the functionalist explanation implies that the most important jobs have the highest incomes and the least important jobs the lowest incomes, but many examples, including the ones just mentioned, counter this view. Coal miners make much less money than physicians, and professors, for better or worse, earn much less on the average than lawyers. A professional athlete making millions of dollars a year earns many times the income of the president of the United States, but who is more important to the nation? Elementary school teachers do a very important job in our society, but their salaries are much lower than those of sports agents, advertising executives, and many other people whose jobs are far less essential.

Third, the functionalist view assumes that people move up the economic ladder based on their abilities, skills, knowledge, and, more generally, their merit. This implies that if they do not move up the ladder, they lack the necessary merit. However, this view ignores the fact that much of our stratification stems from lack of equal opportunity. Because of their race, ethnicity, gender, and class standing at birth, some people have less opportunity than others to acquire the skills and training they need to fill the types of jobs addressed by the functionalist approach.

Finally, the functionalist explanation might make sense up to a point, but it does not justify the extremes of wealth and poverty found in the United States and other nations. Even if we do have to promise higher incomes to get enough people to become physicians, does that mean we also need the amount of poverty we have? Do CEOs of corporations really need to make millions

of dollars per year to get enough qualified people to become CEOs? Do people take on a position as CEO or other high-paying job at least partly because of the challenge, working conditions, and other positive aspects they offer? The functionalist view does not answer these questions adequately.

One other line of functionalist thinking focuses more directly on poverty than generally on stratification. This particular functionalist view provocatively argues that poverty exists because it serves certain positive functions for our society. These functions include the following: (1) poor people do the work that other people do not want to do; (2) the programs that help poor people provide a lot of jobs for the people employed by the programs; (3) the poor purchase goods, such as day-old bread and used clothing, that other people do not wish to purchase, and thus extend the economic value of these goods; and (4) the poor provide jobs for doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals who may not be competent enough to be employed in positions catering to wealthier patients, clients, students, and so forth (Gans, 1972). Because poverty serves all these functions and more, according to this argument, the middle and upper classes have a vested interest in neglecting poverty to help ensure its continued existence.

The Conflict View

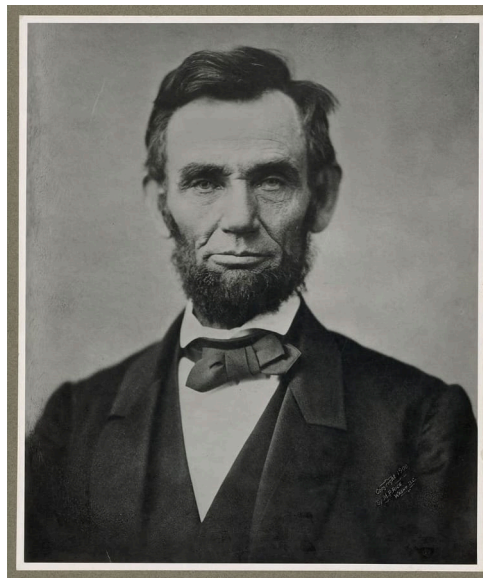


Figure 6.2.2: Because he was born in a log cabin and later became president, Abraham Lincoln's life epitomizes the American Dream, which is the belief that people born into poverty can become successful through hard work. The popularity of this belief leads many Americans to blame poor people for their poverty. US Library of Congress – public domain.

Conflict theory's explanation of stratification draws on Karl Marx's view of class societies and incorporates the critique of the functionalist view just discussed. Many different explanations grounded in conflict theory exist, but they all assume that stratification stems from a fundamental conflict between the needs and interests of the powerful, or "haves," in society and those of the weak, or "have-nots" (Kerbo, 2012). The former take advantage of their position at the top of society to stay at the top, even if it means oppressing those at the bottom. At a minimum, they can heavily influence the law, the media, and other institutions in a way that maintains society's class structure.

In general, conflict theory attributes stratification and thus poverty to lack of opportunity from discrimination and prejudice against the poor, women, and people of color. In this regard, it reflects one of the early critiques of the functionalist view that the previous section outlined. To reiterate an earlier point, we will later discuss the various obstacles that make it difficult for the poor, women, and people of color in the United States to move up the socioeconomic ladder and to otherwise enjoy healthy and productive lives.

Symbolic Interactionism

Consistent with its micro orientation, symbolic interactionism tries to understand stratification and thus poverty by looking at people's interaction and understandings in their daily lives. Unlike the functionalist and conflict views, it does not try to explain why we have stratification in the first place. Rather, it examines the differences that stratification makes for people's lifestyles and their interaction with other people.

Many detailed, insightful sociological books on the lives of the urban and rural poor reflect the symbolic interactionist perspective (Anderson, 1999; C. M. Duncan, 2000; Liebow, 1993; Rank, 1994). These books focus on different people in different places, but they all make it very clear that the poor often lead lives of quiet desperation and must find ways of coping with the fact of being poor. In these books, the consequences of poverty acquire a human face, and readers learn in great detail what it is like to live in poverty on a daily basis.

Some classic journalistic accounts by authors not trained in the social sciences also present eloquent descriptions of poor people's lives (Bagdikian, 1964; Harrington, 1962). Writing in this tradition, a newspaper columnist who grew up in poverty recently recalled, "I know the feel of thick calluses on the bottom of shoeless feet. I know the bite of the cold breeze that slithers through a drafty house. I know the weight of constant worry over not having enough to fill a belly or fight an illness...Poverty is brutal, consuming, and unforgiving. It strikes at the soul" (Blow, 2011).



Figure 6.2.3: Sociological accounts of the poor provide a vivid portrait of what it is like to live in poverty on a daily basis. Pixabay – CC0 public domain.

On a more lighthearted note, examples of the symbolic interactionist framework are also seen in the many literary works and films that portray the difficulties that the rich and poor have in interacting on the relatively few occasions when they do interact. For example, in the film *Pretty Woman*, Richard Gere plays a rich businessman who hires a prostitute, played by Julia Roberts, to accompany him to swank parties and other affairs. Roberts has to buy a new wardrobe and learn how to dine and behave in these social settings, and much of the film's humor and poignancy come from her awkwardness in learning the lifestyle of the rich.

Specific Explanations of Poverty

The functionalist and conflict views focus broadly on social stratification but only indirectly on poverty. When poverty finally attracted national attention during the 1960s, scholars began to try specifically to understand why poor people become poor and remain poor. Two competing explanations developed, with the basic debate turning on whether poverty arises from problems either within the poor themselves or in the society in which they live (Rank, 2011). The first type of explanation follows logically from the functional theory of stratification and may be considered an individualistic explanation. The second type of explanation follows from conflict theory and is a structural explanation that focuses on problems in American society that produce poverty. Table 6.2.2 "Explanations of Poverty" summarizes these explanations.

Table 6.2.2 Explanations of Poverty

Explanation	Major assumptions
Individualistic	Poverty results from the fact that poor people lack the motivation to work and have certain beliefs and values that contribute to their poverty.
Structural	Poverty results from problems in society that lead to a lack of opportunity and a lack of jobs.

It is critical to determine which explanation makes more sense because, as sociologist Theresa C. Davidson (Davidson, 2009) observes, “beliefs about the causes of poverty shape attitudes toward the poor.” To be more precise, the particular explanation that people favor affects their view of government efforts to help the poor. Those who attribute poverty to problems in the larger society are much more likely than those who attribute it to deficiencies among the poor to believe that the government should do more to help the poor (Bradley & Cole, 2002). The explanation for poverty we favor presumably affects the amount of sympathy we have for the poor, and our sympathy, or lack of sympathy, in turn affects our views about the government’s role in helping the poor. With this backdrop in mind, what do the individualistic and structural explanations of poverty say?

Individualistic Explanation

According to the individualistic explanation, the poor have personal problems and deficiencies that are responsible for their poverty. In the past, the poor were thought to be biologically inferior, a view that has not entirely faded, but today the much more common belief is that they lack the ambition and motivation to work hard and to achieve success. According to survey evidence, the majority of Americans share this belief (Davidson, 2009). A more sophisticated version of this type of explanation is called the *culture of poverty* theory (Banfield, 1974; Lewis, 1966; Murray, 2012). According to this theory, the poor generally have beliefs and values that differ from those of the nonpoor and that doom them to continued poverty. For example, they are said to be impulsive and to live for the present rather than the future.

Regardless of which version one might hold, the individualistic explanation is a blaming-the-victim approach. Critics say this explanation ignores discrimination and other problems in American society and exaggerates the degree to which the poor and nonpoor do in fact hold different values (Ehrenreich, 2012; Holland, 2011; Schmidt, 2012). Regarding the latter point, they note that poor employed adults work more hours per week than wealthier adults and that poor parents interviewed in surveys value education for their children at least as much as wealthier parents. These and other similarities in values and beliefs lead critics of the individualistic explanation to conclude that poor people’s poverty cannot reasonably be said to result from a culture of poverty.

Structural Explanation

According to the second, structural explanation, which is a blaming-the-system approach, US poverty stems from problems in American society that lead to a lack of equal opportunity and a lack of jobs. These problems include (a) racial, ethnic, gender, and age discrimination; (b) lack of good schooling and adequate health care; and (c) structural changes in the American economic system, such as the departure of manufacturing companies from American cities in the 1980s and 1990s that led to the loss of thousands of jobs. These problems help create a vicious cycle of poverty in which children of the poor are often fated to end up in poverty or near poverty themselves as adults.

As Rank (Rank, 2011) summarizes this view, “American poverty is largely the result of failings at the economic and political levels, rather than at the individual level...In contrast to [the individualistic] perspective, the basic problem lies in a shortage of viable opportunities for all Americans.” Rank points out that the US economy during the past few decades has created more low-paying and part-time jobs and jobs without benefits, meaning that Americans increasingly find themselves in jobs that barely lift them out of poverty, if at all. Sociologist Fred Block and colleagues share this critique of the individualistic perspective: “Most of our policies incorrectly assume that people can avoid or overcome poverty through hard work alone. Yet this assumption ignores the realities of our failing urban schools, increasing employment insecurities, and the lack of affordable housing, health care, and child care. It ignores the fact that the American Dream is rapidly becoming unattainable for an increasing number of Americans, whether employed or not” (Block, et. al., 2006).

Most sociologists favor the structural explanation. Racial and ethnic discrimination, lack of adequate schooling and health care, and other problems make it difficult to rise out of poverty. On the other hand, some ethnographic research supports the individualistic explanation by showing that the poor do have certain values and follow certain practices that augment their plight (Small, et. al., 2010). For example, the poor have higher rates of cigarette smoking (34 percent of people with annual incomes between \$6,000 and \$11,999 smoke, compared to only 13 percent of those with incomes \$90,000 or greater [Goszkowski, 2008]), which helps cause them to have more serious health problems.

Adopting an integrated perspective, some researchers say these values and practices are ultimately the result of poverty itself (Small et, al., 2010). These scholars concede a culture of poverty does exist, but they also say it exists because it helps the poor cope daily with the structural effects of being poor. If these effects lead to a culture of poverty, they add, poverty then becomes self-perpetuating. If poverty is both cultural and structural in origin, these scholars say, efforts to improve the lives of people in the “other America” must involve increased structural opportunities for the poor and changes in some of their values and practices.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- According to the functionalist view, stratification is a necessary and inevitable consequence of the need to use the promise of financial reward to encourage talented people to pursue important jobs and careers.
- According to conflict theory, stratification results from lack of opportunity and discrimination against the poor and people of color.
- According to symbolic interactionism, social class affects how people interact in everyday life and how *they view certain aspects of the social world*.
- The individualistic view attributes poverty to individual failings of poor people themselves, while the structural view attributes poverty to problems in the larger society.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. In explaining poverty in the United States, which view, individualist or structural, makes more sense to you? Why?
2. Suppose you could wave a magic wand and invent a society where everyone had about the same income no matter which job he or she performed. Do you think it would be difficult to persuade enough people to become physicians or to pursue other important careers? Explain your answer.

6.3: Prejudice

Learning Objectives

- Define *prejudice*, *racism*, and *stereotypes*.
- Discuss the major social-psychological and sociological theories of prejudice.
- Describe how the nature of prejudice has changed.

Prejudice and *discrimination* are often confused, but the basic difference between them is this: Prejudice is the attitude, while discrimination is the behavior. More specifically, racial and ethnic prejudice refers to a set of negative attitudes, beliefs, and judgments about whole categories of people, and about individual members of those categories, because of their perceived race and/or ethnicity. A closely related concept is racism, or the belief that certain racial or ethnic groups are inferior to one's own. Prejudice and racism are often based on racial and ethnic stereotypes, or simplified, mistaken generalizations about people because of their race and/or ethnicity. While cultural and other differences do exist among the various American racial and ethnic groups, many of the views we have of such groups are unfounded and hence are stereotypes. An example of the stereotypes that white people have of other groups appears in Figure 6.3.1, in which white respondents in the General Social Survey (GSS), a recurring survey of a random sample of the US population, are less likely to think blacks are intelligent than they are to think whites are intelligent.

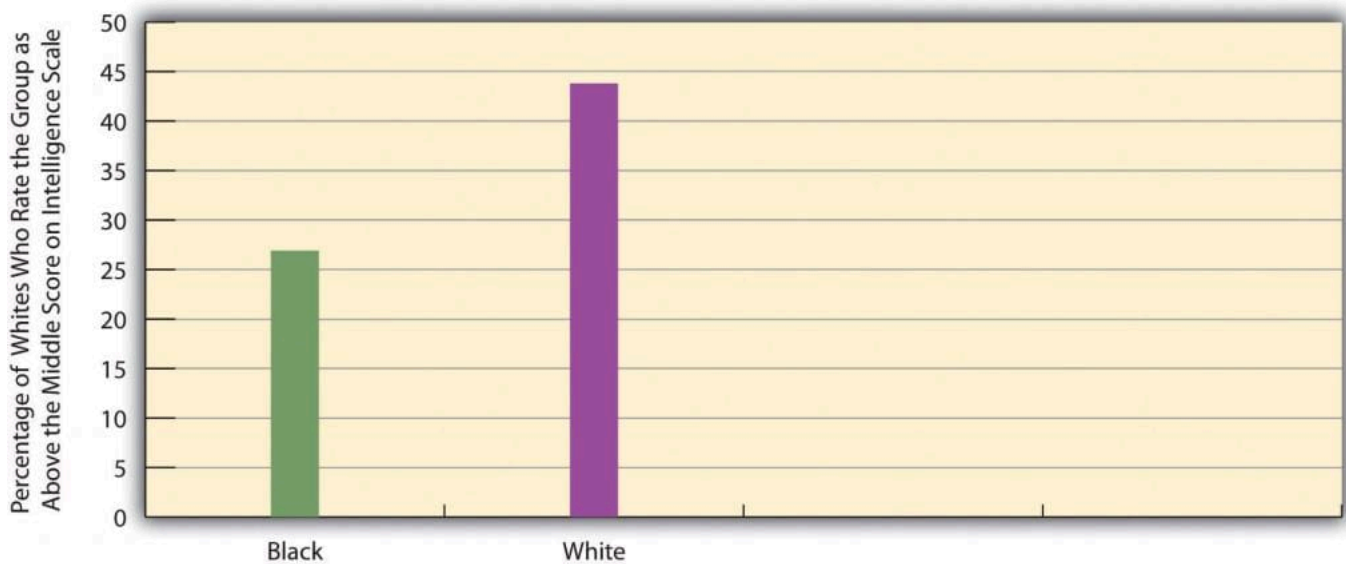


Figure 6.3.1: Perceptions by Non-Latino White Respondents of the Intelligence of White and Black Americans. Source: Data from General Social Survey. (2010). Retrieved from <http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10>.

6.4: Ingroup Favoritism and Prejudice

Learning Objectives

- Review the causes and outcomes of ingroup favoritism.
- Summarize the results of Henri Tajfel's research on minimal groups.
- Outline the personality and cultural variables that influence ingroup favoritism.

We have now seen that social categorization occurs whenever we think about others in terms of their category memberships rather than on the basis of other, more personal information about the individual. And we have seen that social categorization can have a variety of negative consequences for the people who are the targets of our stereotypes. But social categorization becomes even more important, and has even more powerful effects on our reactions to others, when the categorization becomes more emotionally involving, and particularly when the categorization involves categorization into liked ingroups and potentially disliked outgroups (Amodio & Devine, 2006).

Because our ancestors lived in small social groups that were frequently in conflict with other groups, it was evolutionarily functional for them to view members of other groups as different and potentially dangerous (Brewer & Caporael, 2006; Navarrete, Kurzban, Fessler, & Kirkpatrick, 2004). Differentiating between “us” and “them” probably helped keep us safe and free from disease, and as a result, the human brain became very efficient in making these distinctions (Mahajan et al., 2011; Phelps et al., 2000; Van Vugt & Schaller, 2008; Zaraté, Stoeber, MacLin, & Arms-Chavez, 2008). The problem is that these naturally occurring tendencies may lead us to prefer people who are like us, and in some cases even to unfairly reject people from outgroups.

Liking “Us” More Than “Them”: Ingroup Favoritism

In his important research on group perceptions, Henri Tajfel and his colleagues (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971) demonstrated how incredibly powerful the role of self-concern is in group perceptions. He found that just dividing people into arbitrary groups produces **ingroup favoritism**—*the tendency to respond more positively to people from our ingroups than we do to people from outgroups*.

In Tajfel's research, small groups of high school students came to his laboratory for a study supposedly concerning “artistic tastes.” The students were first shown a series of paintings by two contemporary artists, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky. Supposedly on the basis of their preferences for each painting, the students were divided into two groups (they were called the X group and the Y group). Each boy was told which group he had been assigned to and that different boys were assigned to different groups. But none of them were told the group memberships of any of the other boys.

The boys were then given a chance to allocate points to other boys in their own group and to boys in the other group (but never to themselves) using a series of payoff matrices, such as those shown in Figure 6.4.1. The charts divided a given number of rewards between two boys, and the boys thought that the rewards would be used to determine how much each boy would be paid for his participation. In some cases, the division was between two boys in the boy's own group (the ingroup); in other cases, the division was between two boys who had been assigned to the other group (the outgroup); and in still other cases, the division was between a boy in the ingroup and a boy in the outgroup. Tajfel then examined the goals that the boys used when they divided up the points.

Ingroup	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7
Outgroup	1	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	31	23	25
Ingroup	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11
Outgroup	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	21	23	25	27	29
Ingroup	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Outgroup	1	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	21	23	25
Ingroup	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Outgroup	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	21	23	25	27	29

Figure 6.4.1: Examples of Matrices Used in the Minimal Intergroup Studies of Tajfel and His Colleagues. From Tajfel (1970).

A comparison of the boys' choices in the different matrices showed that they allocated points between two boys in the ingroup or between two boys in the outgroup in an essentially fair way, so that each boy got the same amount. However, fairness was not the predominant approach when dividing points between ingroup and outgroup. In this case, rather than exhibiting fairness, the boys displayed ingroup favoritism, such that they gave more points to other members of their own group in relationship to boys in the other group. For instance, the boys might assign 8 points to the ingroup boy and only 3 points to the outgroup boy, even though the matrix also contained a choice in which they could give the ingroup and the outgroup boys 13 points each. In short, the boys preferred to maximize the gains of the other boys in their own group in comparison with the boys in the outgroup, even if doing so meant giving their own group members fewer points than they could otherwise have received.

Perhaps the most striking part of Tajfel's results is that ingroup favoritism was found to occur on the basis of such arbitrary and unimportant groupings. In fact, ingroup favoritism occurs even when the assignment to groups is on such trivial things as whether people "overestimate" or "underestimate" the number of dots shown on a display, or on the basis of a completely random coin toss (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Locksley, Ortiz, & Hepburn, 1980). Tajfel's research, as well as other research demonstrating ingroup favoritism, provides a powerful demonstration of a very important social psychological process: groups exist simply because individuals perceive those groups as existing. Even in a case where there really is no group (at least no meaningful group in any real sense), we still perceive groups and still demonstrate ingroup favoritism.

The Outcomes of Ingroup Favoritism

The tendency to favor their ingroup develops quickly in young children, increasing up to about six years of age, and almost immediately begins to influence their behavior (Aboud, 2003; Aboud & Amato, 2001). Young children show greater liking for peers of their own sex and race and typically play with same-sex others after the age of three. And there is a norm that we should favor our ingroups: people like people who express ingroup favoritism better than those who are more egalitarian (Castelli & Carraro, 2010). Amazingly, even infants as young as nine months old prefer those who treat similar others well and dissimilar others poorly (Hamlin, Mahajan, Liberman, & Wynn, 2013). Ingroup favoritism is found for many different types of social groups, in many different settings, on many different dimensions, and in many different cultures (Bennett et al., 2004; Pinter & Greenwald, 2011). Ingroup favoritism also occurs on trait ratings, such that ingroup members are rated as having more positive characteristics than are outgroup members (Hewstone, 1990). People also take credit for the successes of other ingroup members, remember more positive than negative information about ingroups, are more critical of the performance of outgroup than of ingroup members, and believe that their own groups are less prejudiced than are outgroups (Shelton & Richeson, 2005).

People also talk differently about their ingroups than their outgroups, such that they describe the ingroup and its members as having broad positive traits ("We are *generous* and *friendly*") but describe negative ingroup behaviors in terms of the specific behaviors of single group members ("Our group member, Bill, hit someone") (Maass & Arcuri, 1996; Maass, Ceccarielli, & Rudin, 1996; von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1997). These actions allow us to spread positive characteristics to all members of our ingroup but reserve negative aspects for individual group members, thereby protecting the group's image.

People also make *trait attributions* in ways that benefit their ingroups, just as they make *trait attributions* that benefit themselves. As we saw in Chapter 5, this general tendency, known as the **group-serving bias** (or **ultimate attribution error**), results in the tendency for each of the competing groups to perceive the other group extremely and unrealistically negatively (Hewstone, 1990). When an ingroup member engages in a positive behavior, we tend to see it as a stable internal characteristic of the group as a whole. Similarly, negative behaviors on the part of the outgroup are seen as caused by stable negative group characteristics. On the other hand, negative behaviors from the ingroup and positive behaviors from the outgroup are more likely to be seen as caused by temporary situational variables or by behaviors of specific individuals and are less likely to be attributed to the group.

Ingroup Favoritism Has Many Causes

Ingroup favoritism has a number of causes. For one, it is a natural part of social categorization; we categorize into ingroups and outgroups because it helps us simplify and structure our environment. It is easy, and perhaps even natural, to believe in the simple idea that “we are better than they are.” People who report that they have strong needs for simplifying their environments also show more ingroup favoritism (Stangor & Leary, 2006).

Ingroup favoritism also occurs at least in part because we belong to the ingroup and not the outgroup (Cadinu & Rothbart, 1996). We like people who are similar to ourselves, and we perceive other ingroup members as similar to us. This also leads us to favor other members of our ingroup, particularly when we can clearly differentiate them from members of outgroups. We may also prefer ingroups because they are more familiar to us (Zebrowitz, Bronstad, & Lee, 2007).

But the most important determinant of ingroup favoritism is simple self-enhancement. We want to feel good about ourselves, and seeing our ingroups positively helps us do so (Brewer, 1979). Being a member of a group that has positive characteristics provides us with the **feelings of social identity**—*the positive self-esteem that we get from our group memberships*. When we can identify ourselves as a member of a meaningful social group (even if it is a relatively trivial one), we can feel better about ourselves.

We are particularly likely to show ingroup favoritism when we are threatened or otherwise worried about our self-concept (Maner et al., 2005; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2000). And people express higher self-esteem after they have been given the opportunity to derogate outgroups, suggesting that ingroup favoritism does make us feel good (Lemay & Smith, 1985; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Furthermore, when individuals feel that the value of their ingroup is being threatened, they respond as if they are trying to regain their own self-worth—by expressing more positive attitudes toward ingroups and more negative attitudes toward outgroups (Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). Fein and Spencer (1997) found that participants expressed less prejudice after they had been given the opportunity to affirm and make salient an important and positive part of their own self-concept. In short, when our group seems to be good, we feel good; when our group seems to be bad, we feel bad.

In some cases, we may be able to feel good about our group memberships even when our own individual outcomes are not so positive. Schmitt, Silvia, and Branscombe (2000) had groups of female college students perform a creativity task and then gave them feedback indicating that although they themselves had performed very poorly, another woman in their group had performed very well. Furthermore, in some experimental conditions, the women were told that the research was comparing the scores of men and women (which was designed to increase categorization by gender). In these conditions, rather than being saddened by the upward comparison with the other woman, participants used the successful performance of the other woman to feel good about themselves, as women.

When Ingroup Favoritism Does Not Occur

Although people have a general tendency to show ingroup favoritism, there are at least some cases in which it does not occur. One situation in which ingroup favoritism is unlikely is when the members of the ingroup are clearly inferior to other groups on an important dimension. The players on a baseball team that has not won a single game all season are unlikely to be able to feel very good about themselves as a team and are pretty much forced to concede that the outgroups are better, at least as far as playing baseball is concerned. Members of low-status groups show less ingroup favoritism than do members of high-status groups and may even display outgroup favoritism, in which they admit that the other groups are better than they are (Clark & Clark, 1947).

Another case in which people judge other members of the ingroup very negatively occurs when a member of one's own group behaves in a way that threatens the positive image of the ingroup. A student who behaves in a way unbecoming to university students, or a teammate who does not seem to value the importance of the team, is disparaged by the other group members, often more than the same behavior from an outgroup member would be. *The strong devaluation of ingroup members who threaten the positive image and identity of the ingroup* is known as the **black sheep effect** (Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2010).

Personality and Cultural Determinants of Ingroup Favoritism

To this point, we have considered ingroup favoritism as a natural part of everyday life. Because the tendency to favor the ingroup is a normal byproduct of self-concern, most people do, by and large, prefer their ingroups over outgroups. And yet not everyone is equally ingroup-favoring in all situations. There are a number of individual difference measures that predict prejudice, and these differences are particularly likely to show up under circumstances in which the desire to protect the self becomes important (Guimond, Dambrun, Michinov, & Duarte, 2003).

Some people are more likely than others to show ingroup favoritism because they are particularly likely to rely on their group memberships to create a positive social identity. These differences in group identification can be measured through self-report measures such as the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The scale assesses the extent to which the individual values his or her memberships in groups in public and private ways, as well as the extent to which he or she gains social identity from those groups. People who score higher on the scale show more ingroup favoritism in comparison with those who score lower on it (Stangor & Thompson, 2002). The scale, from Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) is shown in Table 6.4.1.

Table 6.4.1 The Collective Self-Esteem Scale

Membership	I am a worthy member of the social groups I belong to.
	I feel I don't have much to offer to the social groups I belong to [R].
	I am a cooperative participant in the social groups I belong to.
	I often feel I'm an unclean member of my social group [R].
Private	I often regret that I belong to some of the social groups I do [R].
	In general, I'm glad to be a member of the social groups I belong to.
	Overall, I often feel that the social groups of which I am a member are not worthwhile [R].
	I feel good about the social groups I belong to.
Public	Overall, my social groups are considered good by others.
	Most people consider my social groups, on the average, to be more ineffective than other s
	In general, others respect the social groups that I am a member of.
	In general, others think that the social groups I am a member of are unworthy [R].
Identity	Overall, my group memberships have very little to do with how I feel about myself [R].
	The social groups I belong to are an important reflection of who I am.
	The social groups I belong to are unimportant in my sense of what kind of a person I am [R]
	In general, belonging to social groups is an important part of my self-image.
[R] = Item is reversed before scoring.	

Another personality dimension that relates to the desires to protect and enhance the self and the ingroup and thus also relates to greater ingroup favoritism, and in some cases prejudice toward outgroups, is the personality dimension of authoritarianism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1988). **Authoritarianism** is a personality dimension that characterizes people who prefer things to be simple rather than complex and who tend to hold traditional and conventional values. Authoritarians are ingroup-favoring in part because they have a need to self-enhance and in part because they prefer simplicity and thus find it easy to think simply: "We are all good and they are all less good." Political conservatives tend to show more ingroup favoritism than do political liberals, perhaps because the former are more concerned with protecting the ingroup from threats posed by others (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Stangor & Leary, 2006).

People with strong goals toward other-concern display less ingroup favoritism and less prejudice. People who view it as particularly important to connect with and respect other people—those who are more focused on tolerance and fairness toward others—are less ingroup-favoring and more positive toward the members of groups other than their own. The desire to be fair and to accept others can be assessed by individual difference measures such as desire to control one's prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998) and humanism (Katz & Hass, 1988).

Social dominance orientation (SDO) is a personality variable that refers to the tendency to see and to accept inequality among different groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1995). People who score high on measures of SDO believe that there are and should be status differences among social groups, and they do not see these as wrong. High SDO individuals agree with statements such as “Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups,” “In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups,” and “It’s OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others.” Those who are low on SDO, on the other hand, believe that all groups are relatively equal in status and tend to disagree with these statements. People who score higher on SDO also show greater ingroup favoritism.

Stereotyping and prejudice also varies across cultures. Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, Hamilton, Peng, and Wang (2007) tested the hypothesis that Chinese participants, because of their collectivistic orientation, would find social groups more important than would Americans (who are more individualistic) and that as a result, they would be more likely to infer personality traits on the basis of group membership—that is, to stereotype. Supporting the hypothesis, they found that Chinese participants made stronger stereotypical trait inferences than Americans did on the basis of a target’s membership in a fictitious group.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Ingroup favoritism is a fundamental and evolutionarily functional aspect of human perception, and it occurs even in groups that are not particularly meaningful.
- Ingroup favoritism is caused by a variety of variables, but particularly important is self-concern: we experience positive social identity as a result of our membership in valued social groups.
- Ingroup favoritism develops early in children and influences our behavior toward ingroup and outgroup members in a variety of ways.
- Personality dimensions that relate to ingroup favoritism include authoritarianism and social dominance orientation—dimensions that relate to less ingroup favoritism include a desire to control one’s prejudice and humanism.
- There are at least some cultural differences in the tendency to show ingroup favoritism and to stereotype others.

EXERCISES AND CRITICAL THINKING

1. Visit the website <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html> and complete one of the tests posted there. Write a brief reflection on your results.
2. Describe a time when the members of one of your important social groups behaved in a way that increased group identity (e.g., showing the black sheep effect). What was the outcome of the actions?

6.5: Discrimination

Learning Objectives

- Discuss Merton's views on whether prejudice and discrimination always coincide.
- Distinguish between individual discrimination and institutional discrimination.
- Provide two examples of institutional discrimination.

Often racial and ethnic prejudice lead to discrimination against the subordinate racial and ethnic groups in a given society. Discrimination in this context refers to the arbitrary denial of rights, privileges, and opportunities to members of these groups. The use of the word *arbitrary* emphasizes that these groups are being treated unequally not because of their lack of merit but because of their race and ethnicity.

Usually, prejudice and discrimination go hand-in-hand, but Robert Merton (1949) stressed this is not always so. Sometimes we can be prejudiced and not discriminate, and sometimes we might not be prejudiced and still discriminate. Table 6.5.1 “The Relationship between Prejudice and Discrimination” illustrates his perspective. The top-left cell and bottom-right cell consist of people who behave in ways we would normally expect. The top-left one consists of “active bigots,” in Merton’s terminology, people who are both prejudiced and discriminatory. An example of such a person is the white owner of an apartment building who dislikes people of color and refuses to rent to them. The bottom-right cell consists of “all-weather liberals,” as Merton called them, people who are neither prejudiced nor discriminatory. An example would be someone who holds no stereotypes about the various racial and ethnic groups and treats everyone the same regardless of her or his background.

Table 6.5.1 The Relationship between Prejudice and Discrimination

	Prejudiced?	
	Yes	No
Discriminates?		
Yes	Active bigots	Fair-weather liberals
No	Timid bigots	All-weather liberals

Source: Adapted from Merton, R. K. (1949). Discrimination and the American creed. In R. M. MacIver (Ed.), *Discrimination and national welfare* (pp. 99–126). New York, NY: Institute for Religious Studies.

6.6: Understanding Sex and Gender

Learning Objectives

- Define sex, gender, femininity, and masculinity.
- Critically assess the evidence on biology, culture and socialization, and gender.
- Discuss agents of gender socialization.

Although the terms *sex* and *gender* are sometimes used interchangeably and do complement each other, they nonetheless refer to different aspects of what it means to be a woman or man in any society.

Sex refers to the anatomical and other biological differences between females and males that are determined at the moment of conception and develop in the womb and throughout childhood and adolescence. Females, of course, have two X chromosomes, while males have one X chromosome and one Y chromosome. From this basic genetic difference spring other biological differences. The first to appear are the genitals that boys and girls develop in the womb and that the doctor (or midwife) and parents look for when a baby is born (assuming the baby's sex is not already known from ultrasound or other techniques) so that the momentous announcement, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" can be made. The genitalia are called primary sex characteristics, while the other differences that develop during puberty are called secondary sex characteristics and stem from hormonal differences between the two sexes. Boys generally acquire deeper voices, more body hair, and more muscles from their flowing testosterone. Girls develop breasts and wider hips and begin menstruating as nature prepares them for possible pregnancy and childbirth. For better or worse, these basic biological differences between the sexes affect many people's perceptions of what it means to be female or male, as we next discuss.



Figure 6.6.1: Babies are born with anatomical and other biological differences that are determined at the moment of conception. These biological differences define the baby's sex. Abby Bischoff – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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INDEX

A

achieved status

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

American Sign Language

2.1: Foundations of Culture and Identity

antimiscegenation laws

2.4: Intercultural Communication

ascribed status

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

B

beliefs

1.2: Elements of Culture

Bricolage

3.3: Digital Culture and Social Media

C

control

1.2: Elements of Culture

D

diversity training

2.1: Foundations of Culture and Identity

F

folkways

1.2: Elements of Culture

formal norms

1.2: Elements of Culture

H

habitualization

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

I

ideal culture

1.2: Elements of Culture

informal norms

1.2: Elements of Culture

institutionalization

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

L

language

1.2: Elements of Culture

M

mores

1.2: Elements of Culture

N

norms

1.2: Elements of Culture

R

real culture

1.2: Elements of Culture

role conflict

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

role performance

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

role strain

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

roles

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

S

Sanctions

1.2: Elements of Culture

social control

1.2: Elements of Culture

status

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

T

Thomas theorem

1.3: Social Constructions of Reality

V

values

1.2: Elements of Culture

GLOSSARY

S

Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

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 - 2: Intercultural Communication Competence - *Undeclared*
 - 2.1: Foundations of Culture and Identity - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 2.2: Exploring Specific Cultural Identities - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 2.3: Cross-Cultural Teaching - Values - *Undeclared*
 - 2.4: Intercultural Communication - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 2.5: Intercultural Communication Competence - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 3: Media and Culture - *Undeclared*
 - 3.1: Co-Cultural Theory (Mark Orbe) - *Undeclared*
 - 3.2: Media, Society, Culture and You - CC BY 4.0
 - 3.3: Digital Culture and Social Media - CC BY 4.0
 - 4: Culture and Gender - *Undeclared*
 - 4.1: Culture - CC BY-NC 4.0
 - 4.2: Gender - CC BY-NC 4.0
 - 5: Workplace Diversity - *Undeclared*
 - 5.1: Skills for Change - Diversity at Work - *Undeclared*
 - 5.2: Managing a Diverse Workforce - *Undeclared*
 - 5.3: Generational Diversity - *Undeclared*
 - 6: Social Problems - *Undeclared*
 - 6.1: What is a Social Problem? - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.2: Explaining Poverty - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.3: Prejudice - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.4: Ingroup Favoritism and Prejudice - *Undeclared*
 - 6.5: Discrimination - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - 6.6: Understanding Sex and Gender - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
 - Back Matter - *Undeclared*
 - Index - *Undeclared*
 - Glossary - *Undeclared*
 - Detailed Licensing - *Undeclared*