

# Survey of Communication Study/Chapter 12 - Intercultural Communication

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## Chapter 12

### Intercultural Communication

**Chapter Objectives:**

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- Identify your own cultural identity.
- Understand how communication, identity, and culture are related.
- Describe research methodologies specific to the study of intercultural communication.
- Identify cultural representations in popular culture artifacts.

# I

In his effort to explain the world's population to young children, David J. Smith asks children to imagine the world as a small village so they can understand the vast population figures in a more comprehensible way. For example, by January, 2002, the world's population was 6,200,000,000 (Smith 7). Instead of talking about numbers of this magnitude he represents the world as 100 people; where 1 imaginary person represents 62,000,000 people from the real world. Using his model, we can more easily examine what nationalities make up the world's population, what languages they speak, how old they are, and how statistics regarding wealth and education.

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

- 61 are from Asia
- 13 are from Africa
- 12 are from Europe
- 8 are from South and Central America
- 5 are from the United States and Canada
- 1 is from Oceania

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

- 22 speak a Chinese dialect (18 speak Mandarin)
- 9 speak English
- 8 speak Hindi
- 7 speak Spanish
- 4 speak Arabic
- 4 speak Bengali
- 3 speak Portuguese
- 3 speak Russian

Although there are 38 school-aged villagers (5-24 years), only 31 of them go to school, and there is only one teacher. Of the 88 people old enough to read, 71 can read at least a little while 17 cannot read at all. Male villagers are taught to read more than females (Smith 21). Seventy-six villagers have electricity, 24 do not (Smith 25). Like literacy and electricity, access to money is disparate. If each villager earned a similar annual income, each one would have

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\$6,200 per year. Instead, 20 people in the village earn more than \$9,000 a year, another 20 villagers earn less than \$365 a year, while the remaining 60 earn somewhere in between. As the average annual cost of food and shelter in the village is between \$4,000-\$5,000, many people go without these basic necessities (Smith 22).

Moreover, it probably does not surprise you that the people with less money are also likely to have electricity and education. What may surprise you though is that these villagers are also more likely to be female and non-white? Besides simple cultural differences such as what language one speaks or the foods they prefer, cultural identity impacts individuals' accessibility to certain resources such as shelter, electricity, running water, health care, education, and political and legal systems.

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

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

The question of how this relates to communication is a complex one, and one that we will try to address throughout this chapter. For now, let us think about culture and communication as a reciprocal process: culture affects communication and communication affects culture. Both work together to shape how we identify as belonging to one culture or another, how we feel about belonging to a particular cultural group, how we communicate with other cultural groups, and how that group is regarded in the larger social system. In other words, what is the value and level of power afforded to various cultural groups? As you will see, this is often a reflection of the language used to refer to a particular group of people, or the relative value placed on their communication practices.

## What Do We Mean by Culture?

# B

efore going any further, let us spend some time discussing what we mean by culture. When you began reading this chapter what did you think we meant by the word culture? Your answer probably had something to do with people from different countries or of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. You are right—to a point. Culture does include race, nationality, and ethnicity, but goes beyond those identity markers as well. The following are various aspects of our individual identity that we use to create membership with others to form shared cultural identity: race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and class. In addition to explaining the above identities, we will also discuss ethnocentrism, privilege, advantage, disadvantage, power, whiteness, co-culture and political correctness as these terms are relevant to understanding the interplay between communication and culture.

When we talk about **culture** we are referring to *belief systems, values, and behaviors that support a particular ideology or social arrangement*. Culture guides language use, appropriate forms of dress, and views of the world. The concept is broad and encompasses many areas of our lives such as the role of the family, individual, educational systems, employment, and gender.

## Understanding Race

Race is often difficult to talk about, not because of the inherent complexity of the term itself, but because of the role that race plays in society. Race is what we call a loaded word because it can bring up strong emotions and connotations. Understandings of race fall into two camps: a biological versus a sociopolitical construction of what it means to belong to a particular racial group. A **biological construction of race** claims that *“pure” races existed and could be distinguished by such physical features as eye color and shape, skin color, and hair*. Moreover, these differences could be traced back to genetic differences. This theory has been debunked by numerous scientists and been replaced with the understanding that there are greater genetic differences within racial groups, not between them. In addition, there is no scientific connection with racial identity and cultural traits or behaviors. Instead of biology, we draw on a **sociopolitical** understanding of what it means to be of a particular race. This simply means that it is not a person’s DNA that places them into a particular racial grouping, but all of the other factors that create social relations—politics, geography, or migration. We can also examine the reality that the meanings of race have changed across time and space. Blacks were once considered property and counted as two-thirds of a person. This of course has changed and blacks are equally counted as U.S. citizens with access to property ownership and voting rights. As dramatized in the 2002 film, “Gangs of New York,” the Irish were once considered a minority with little social or political status. Now, being Irish in America is considered part of the general majority group, white or Caucasian. Noting the change from the biological to the sociopolitical understanding, we refer to race as a “largely social—yet powerful construction of human difference that has been used to classify human beings into separate value-based categories” (Orbe and Harris 6).

Related to race are three other distinct concepts: racial prejudice, racial discrimination, and racism. **Racial prejudice** refers to *the practice of holding false or negative beliefs of one racial group for the purpose of making another racial group (usually one’s own) appear superior or normative*. **Racial discrimination** is *the outward manifestation of racial prejudice: it is when people act upon their negative beliefs about other races when communicating or setting policy*. Note, it is possible to be prejudiced without acting upon those beliefs and that all races can discriminate against other races. The final concept, **racism**, combines racial prejudice with social power. Racism is institutional, rather than individual, meaning it *occurs in large institutional contexts such as the representations of particular groups within media or the fact that racial minorities do not have equal access to educational or legal opportunities* (Orbe and Harris 7). Racism often involves the unequal accessibility to resources and power.

## Where Do You Come From?

Two other concepts that are often confused with race are ethnicity and nationality. **Ethnicity** refers to *a person’s or people’s heritage and history, and involves shared cultural traditions and beliefs*. A person may identify as Asian-American racially while their ethnicity is Chinese. **Nationality** refers to *a person’s nation-state of residence or where he/she holds citizenship*. Most often nationality is derived from the country where one was born, but on occasion people give up their citizenship by birth and migrate to a new country where they claim national identity. One of your author’s father, for example, was born and raised in Canada, but eventually migrated to the United States and is now a U.S. citizen.

## Gender and Sexual Orientation

Are you male or female? Do you identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgendered? One’s gender and sexual orientation are two additional ways to think about culture. Gender is discussed in more detail in Chapter 13, but for now think of it as the recognition that one is male, female, or androgynous. **Gender** is part of culture in that every *society has particular gender roles and expectations for males and females*. In the United States, for example, the female gender is expected to wear make-up while it is most often considered inappropriate for a male to do so. However, in some Native American tribes it is customary for the males to adorn themselves with paint for

hunting and ceremonial rituals.

**Sexual orientation** refers to *a person's preference for sexual or romantic relationships; one may prefer a partner of the same sex, the opposite sex, or both*. Sexual orientation influences one's worldview or politics because while all societies include members who identify as gay or lesbian, these members do not always receive the same benefits as heterosexual couples. Currently in the United States, same sex couples are prohibited from obtaining a legal marriage. Thus, they are denied many of the benefits that come with a marriage license such as income tax breaks, eligibility for health care benefits, and the legal right to make medical decisions for their partner. On top of these specific benefits, those with a nondominant sexual orientation must also contend on a daily basis that in the eyes of mainstream culture, they are deviant or somehow less than heterosexual people and couples. This may result in strained family relationships or discrimination in the workplace.

### **The Role of Money**

You are probably familiar with the concept of class—what do the labels working class, middle-class, upper-class bring to mind? Money? Economic standing is only one variable that influences class or socioeconomic standing. As the label suggests, one's **socioeconomic status** is influenced by monetary and social factors. In essence, socioeconomic standing is *“your understanding of the world and where you fit in; it's composed of ideas, behaviors, attitudes, values, and language; class is how you think, feel, act, look, dress, talk, move, walk”* (Langston 101). Your authors, for example, grew up in middle-class homes where it was expected the children would go to college just as their parents and grandparents had done. Also expected was that the children would attend reasonably priced state colleges and universities as opposed to Ivy League Universities as may be the norm in upper-class families. Once in college and living on our own however, our earnings fell below the poverty line and in purely economic terms we had lost our middle-class standing. But because socioeconomic status goes beyond dollars, and our lifestyles, clothing preferences, goals, and worldview did not change drastically; we could still be labeled part of the middle-class. By now you are probably able to think of some other identity markers that shape a person's culture or worldview. How about spirituality or religion, profession, hobbies, political persuasion, age, abilities? These too are aspects of cultural identity. Spend some time thinking about how these aspects would influence a person's culture as we have done above.

### **Facilitating Discussions about Intercultural Communication Issues**

## **P**

Perhaps you may have noticed the theme of inequality as we have as we have discussed topics like “unequal access to resources and benefits,” racial discrimination, and racism. You may have also thought, “oh, my, this is going to be a touchy chapter to read and discuss in class” or “this is interesting and relevant, but I feel uncomfortable talking about this as I don't want to offend anyone.” These are very common and understandable reactions and ones we hear when we teach this subject matter. Hopefully, your instructor has set up a safe, open, and respectful classroom environment to facilitate such discussions. The fact that you are self-reflective of your feelings and how to express them to others is a great start! We too want you to be able to discuss this material both in and out of your class in a productive and self-reflective manner. To facilitate that goal we have included some additional concepts— privilege, ethnocentrism, whiteness, and political correctness—that are useful when considering your own cultural identity, your place in society, and your communication with others.

## Privilege

Hopefully, you have been thinking about your own cultural identity as you have been reading this chapter. If so, then you have been thinking about labels that define you culturally. Maybe you have defined yourself as female, Latina, and heterosexual. Or maybe you have labeled yourself as gay, white, working-class, and male. When we give ourselves labels such as these, often we ask ourselves, "Where do I fit in?" This is a good question to ask and demonstrates a recognition of the fact that you belong to more than one culture and that your cultures intersect in various ways. The most significant manifestation of these intersections is **power—the ability to influence others and control our lives**. From the statistics given earlier in the chapter and from your own experiences, you should realize that some groups have more power than others. These people are what we refer to as the **dominant group: white, male, Christian, middle-class, able-bodied, educated, and heterosexual**. People whose cultural identities do not conform to this model are the **nondominant groups and have less sociopolitical and economic power**.

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

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area that I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can deal with my hair.
10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
12. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color, who constitute the world's majority, without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge" I will be facing a person of my race.
19. If a traffic cop pulls me over, or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.

23. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.

24. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my race will not work against me.

25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.

26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color that more or less match my skin.

As you think about privilege and the resulting advantages that some groups have over others, you should also keep in mind two facts. One, privilege is a relative concept that varies according to context. In some situations we may be more privileged than others, and in order to access some of that privilege one may decide to highlight or conceal parts of their identity. For example, unless a person tells you, you have no way of knowing his/her sexual orientation. Thus, a gay man might decide to "pass" as straight at a family reunion to avoid conflict from a heterosexist family. The fact that he can choose to pass and a black man cannot make the choice to pass as white is another example of privilege. Two, we may have aspects of our identities that are simultaneously advantaged and disadvantaged. The gay, white, working-class, male above is advantaged by the fact that he has light skin and is male, and is disadvantaged by the fact that he is gay and working-class.

## Ethnocentrism

One of the first steps to communicating sensitively and productively about cultural identity is to be able to name and recognize one's identity and the relative privilege that it affords. Similarly important, is a recognition that one's cultural standpoint is not everyone's standpoint. Our views of the world, what we consider right and wrong, normal or weird, are largely influenced by our cultural position or standpoint: the intersections of all aspects of our identity. One common mistake that people from all cultures are guilty of is **ethnocentrism**—*placing one's own culture and the corresponding beliefs, values, and behaviors in the center; in a position where it is seen as normal and right, and evaluating all other cultural systems against it.*

Ethnocentrism shows up in small and large ways: the WWII Nazi's elevation of the Aryan race and the corresponding killing of Jews, Gypsies, gays and lesbians, and other non Aryan groups is one of the most horrific ethnocentric acts in history. However, ethnocentrism shows up in small and seemingly unconscious ways as well. If there is a world map hanging on the wall in your classroom look at it. Where is the United States? In the center, of course. When one of your authors was teaching in Beijing, China she noticed that the map in the classroom looked "different" compared to the map with which she was familiar. On closer examination she realized why: China was in the center and the United States was off to the side. Again, "of course," the United States is not the "center of the world" to the Chinese. Ethnocentrism is likely to show up in Literature classes as well as each culture decides on the "great works" to be read and studied. More often than not these works represent the given culture (i.e., reading French authors in France and Korean authors in Korea). This ethnocentric bias has received some challenge in United States' schools as teachers make efforts to create a multicultural classroom by incorporating books, short stories, and traditions from nondominant groups.

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

**Case In Point****The Greenland Problem**

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

Greenland is 0.8 million sq. miles and Africa is 11.6 million sq. miles, yet the often look roughly the same size on maps.

This was convenient, psychologically and practically, through the eras of colonial domination when most of the world powers were European. It suited them to maintain an image of the world with Europe at the center and looking much larger than it really was. Was this conscious or deliberate? Probably not, as most map users probably never realized the Eurocentric bias inherent in their world view. When there are so many other projections to choose from, why is it that today the Mercator projection is still such a widely recognized image used to represent the globe? The answer may be simply convention or habit. The inertia of habit is a powerful force.

**Whiteness**

If you are White, how would you describe your culture? When we ask this question to our students we find that White students are often uncomfortable with the question, feel guilty about self-identifying as White, or claim that White people do not have a culture. These sentiments are common in our society and have led an increasing amount of scholars in a variety of disciplines such as Sociology, Women's Studies, Anthropology, English, as well as Communication to study the concept of Whiteness. Orbe and Harris explain why exploring this concept is important. First, by studying Whiteness people create "an increased awareness of how race and racism shapes the lives of European Americans." Doing so, we can then

*view communication as a racialized process—meaning that our communication is structured by larger societal and racial dynamics. Second, understanding Whiteness sharpens our awareness of how racial categorization is used to reinforce old hierarchies in which some races are more superior than others. This helps us recognize how Whiteness can be used to signify dominance, privilege, and advantage in the United States. And, third, through studying and recognizing the effects of Whiteness, each person plays a role in race relations. White people can no longer sit on the sidelines and claim "it's a black problem" when discussing interracial conflict. (82-83)*

Overall, it removes the White race from the often-unidentified "normative" group and provides a context for studying, talking about, and hopefully improving race relations. The above discussion about privilege and Whiteness is not meant to suggest that those people with sociopolitical privilege should feel ashamed or guilty. This is often a trap that people fall into and it can shut down important thinking and conversations about intercultural communication. We want everyone to realize that they have a racial identity and thus are an important part of improving race relations. Race relations is not just a subject that concerns minorities—it concerns everyone as we all play a part and benefit whether consciously or unconsciously.

**Political Correctness**

Another claim or label that may be used to discount such difficult discussions is Political Correctness, or "PC" as it has been dubbed in the popular press. Opponents of multiculturalism and diversity studies try and dismiss such topics as "that's just PC." Luckily, some of the heated debate about PC have quieted in recent years but the history lingers. In short, **political correctness** refers to "*the elimination of speech that often works to exclude, oppress, demean, or harass certain groups*" (Orbe and Harris 48, Remar). The debate largely focused around competing interpretations of the First Amendment right to free speech and the Fourteenth Amendment's right to equal access to education. No matter what your position on this issue, we want to simply recognize two facts. One, that much of the PC debate and fury was largely misrepresented and hyped in the mainstream media by the use of extreme examples

and a slippery-slope argument. Rush Limbaugh, for example, became famous for claiming that an awareness and sensitivity of language choice would lead to the “thought Police” or “PC police.” Two, that words and labels have great power to create perceptions, realities and identities. Toward that aim, we will discuss the power of language in greater detail in the following section.

## Knowing Where We Belong

# A

t this point, you are probably aware of the cultural groups to which you belong (i.e., “I am a white, middle-class, (almost) college-educated male”). Do you remember the process of coming to awareness of your cultural identity—when did you know you were white and what that meant? Was it during childhood, as a teenager, or reading this chapter? Has your understanding, or acceptance, of your racial heritage changed during the course of your lifetime? For most people it does. Just as Piaget organized the growth of children according to various stages of development, cultural scholars have similarly organized racial awareness along models and stages. Before explaining the various models, let us make a couple general comments about models. One, a model is not the thing it represents. Is the model car you played with as a child the same as the actual automobile? What were the differences? Size, time, maneuverability, details? These same kinds of differences exist between the model of racial identity development and the actual personal process. But just like the car model gives a fairly accurate picture of the actual automobile so do the racial identity models. Two, these models are general and not meant to fit perfectly to every individual’s experience. With that said, let us examine the process of coming to an understanding of our racial identity.

To better understand this complex process, and in recognition of the above discussion regarding the distinctions in experiences for various cultural groups, we will present four racial identity models—Minority, Majority, Bi-racial, and Global Nomads.

### Minority Identity Development

Because people who identify as members of a minority group in the United States tend to stand out or get noticed as “other” or “different,” they also tend to become aware of their identity sooner than individuals who are part of the majority group. Since White is considered normative in the United States, White people may take their identity (and the corresponding privilege for granted). While we are using the following four stages of development to refer to racial and ethnic identity development, they may also be useful when considering other minority aspects of our identity such as gender, class, or sexual orientation (Ponterotto and Pendersen 1993). Moreover, there is no set age or time period that a person reaches or spends in a particular stage, and not everyone will reach the final stage.

- **Stage 1: Unexamined Identity.** As the name of this stage suggests, the person in stage 1 of Phinney’s model has little or no concern with ethnicity (1993). They may be too young to pay attention to such matters or just not see the relationship between racial identity and their own life. One may accept the values and beliefs of the majority culture even if they work against their own cultural group.
- **Stage 2: Conformity.** In stage two the individual moves from a passive acceptance of the dominant culture’s value system to a more active one. They consciously make choices to assimilate or fit in with the dominant culture even if this means putting down or denying their own heritage. They may remain at this stage until a precipitating event forces them to question their belief system.
- **Stage 3: Resistance and Separation.** The move from stage two to stage three can be a difficult process as it necessitates a certain level of critical thinking and self-reflexiveness. If you have ever tried to wrestle with aspects of your own belief system then you can imagine the struggle. The move may be triggered by a national event such

as the beating of Rodney King and the corresponding L.A. riots. Or, it may be fostered on a more individual scale such as enrolling in a Women's Studies class and learning about the specifics of women's history in America. Martin Luther King Jr. moved to this stage around age six after the mother of his White neighborhood friends told him that he could not play with her children anymore because he was Black. A person in this stage may simply reject all of their previously held beliefs and positive feelings about the dominant culture with those of their own group, or they may learn how to critically examine and hold beliefs from a variety of cultural perspective, which leads to stage four.

- **Stage 4: Integration.** The final stage is one where the individual reaches an achieved identity. They learn to value diversity; seeing race, gender, class, and ethnic relations as a complex process instead of an either/or dichotomy. Their aim is to end oppression against all groups, not just their own.

## Majority Identity Development

The following model was developed by Rita Hardiman in 1994 and contains some similarities with Phinney's minority identity development model.

- **Stage 1: Unexamined Identity.** This stage is the same for both minority and majority individuals. While White children may notice that some of their playmates have dark skin they do not fear or feel superior to them.
- **Stage 2: Acceptance.** The move to stage two signals a passive or active acceptance of the dominant ideology—either way the individual does not recognize that he or she has been socialized into accepting it. When a person goes the route of **passive acceptance** they have *no conscious awareness of being White although they may hold some subtly racist assumptions such as "People of color are culturally different, whereas Whites are individuals with no group identity, culture, or shared experience of racial privilege."* Or, White art forms are "classical" whereas works of art by people of color are considered "ethnic art," "folk art" or "crafts" (Martin and Nakayama 132). People in this stage may minimize contact with minorities or act in a "let me help you" fashion toward them. If a person in this stage follows the **active acceptance** path then they are *conscious of their White identity and may act in ways that highlight it.* Refusing to eat food from other cultures or watch foreign films, for example.
- **Stage 3: Resistance.** Just as the move from stage two to stage three in the minority development model required a great deal of critical thought, so does this juncture. Here the members of the majority group cease blaming the members of minority groups for their conditions and see socioeconomic realities as a result of an unjust and biased sociopolitical system. There is an overall move from seeing one's station in life as a purely individual event or responsibility to a more systemic issue. Here, people may feel guilty about being White and ashamed of some historical actions taken by some White people, they may try to associate with only people of color, or they may attempt to exorcise aspects of White privilege from their daily lives.
- **Stage 4: Redefinition.** In this stage, people attempt to redefine what it means to be White without the racist baggage. They are able to move beyond White guilt and recognize that White people and people of all cultures contain both racist and nonracist elements and that there are many historical and cultural events of which White people can be proud.
- **Stage 5: Integration.** In the last phase individuals are able to accept their Whiteness or other majority aspects of their identity and integrate it into other parts of their lives. There is a simultaneous self-acceptance and acceptance of others.

## Bi- or Multiracial Identity Development

Originally, people thought that bi-racial individuals followed the development model of minority individuals, but given that we now know that race and the meanings about race are socially constructed, it makes sense to realize that a person of mixed racial ancestry is likely to be viewed differently (from both the dominant culture and the individual's own culture) than a minority individual. Thus, they are likely to experience a social reality unique to their experience. The following five-stage model is derived from the work of W.S. Carlos Poston (1990).

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

## Global Nomads

People who move around a lot may develop a multicultural identity as a result of their extensive international travel. International teachers, business people, and military personnel are examples of global nomads (Martin and Nakayama 138). One of the earlier theories to describe this model of development was called the U-curve theory because the stages were thought to follow the pattern of the letter U. This model has since been revised in the form of a W, or a series of Ws as in WWWWW; this pattern is thought to better represent the up and down nature of this process.

- **Stage 1: Anticipation and Excitement.** If you have ever planned for an international trip, what were some of the things you did to prepare? Did you do something like buy a guide book to learn some of the native customs, figure out the local diet to see if you would need to make any special accommodations, or learn the language, or at least some handy phrases perhaps? All of these acts characterize stage one in which people are filled with positive feelings about their upcoming journey and try to ready themselves.
- **Stage 2: Culture Shock.** Once the excitement has worn off or you are confronted with an unexpected or unpleasant event you may experience culture shock. This is the move from the top of the U or W to the bottom. Culture shock can result from physical, psychological, or emotional causes often correlating with an unpleasant and unfamiliar event. When one of your authors was teaching in Beijing for the first time, she had planned her syllabus and class to begin on the day that she was told was the start of the semester. Upon arrival, she was told that the start of the semester was pushed back a few days for reasons that were unclear to her. Never having experienced the delay of a semester in the United States, not knowing why such an event would occur, on top of feeling a little anxious about teaching in a new country caused her to move from stage one into stage two.
- **Stage 3: Adaptation.** The final stage at the top of the U and W is a feeling of comfortableness: of being somewhat familiar with new cultural patterns and beliefs. Upon her second excursion to Beijing, for example,

your author was fully prepared for a delay in the semester both logistically and mentally. And when it did occur a second time she looked upon the event not as anxiety provoking, but as a gift of time to sight see.

After exploring the identity development models for minority, majority, bi-racial individuals, and global nomads, we hope you have some understanding that a person's identity development is a process, occurs in stages, and is specific to the individual and cultural groups. We also hope you noticed that identity development is a social process—it occurs within our relationships with other people and the larger society. Not surprisingly, language is a key factor in shaping our own self-perception as well as the attitudes and beliefs we hold about other cultural groups. In the next section, we will explore the role that language plays in intercultural communication.

## **Language Shapes Cultural Perception**

Saying that language plays a vital role in intercultural communication and relationships probably seems obvious to you at this point. But do you know how and why? Let us now turn to a more detailed explanation of the power of language. Specifically, we will discuss ascription and avowal, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, labels and stereotypes, and reclaiming.

As you have been reflecting on your own identity, do you think it matches up with how others see you? The way a person presents her- or himself is referred to as the avowal process. The opposite of that is ascription, how others see us: the qualities or attributes that are ascribed to us. Part of your avowed identity is probably that of college student and you hope that others see you this way too. Perhaps one of your hobbies is fashion and you enjoy paying attention to your clothes. You may then see yourself as fashionable and stylish. But do others? Might some of your classmates think you trendy, superficial, or fiscally irresponsible? The qualities that others may ascribe to you based on your fashion sense may in turn affect how you see yourself. This is yet another way that identity is shaped through communication in a social context. In Part I of this book you were introduced to the idea that language shapes reality; the vocabulary we use to discuss an idea or person influences how we think about our subject. Likewise, if we have no words for a phenomenon then we are discouraged from talking about it or bringing it into our reality. Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf believed that the structure of language was a necessary component for producing thought. You have probably heard that Eskimos have numerous words for snow. How many do you have? Snow. Ice. If you ski or snowboard then you probably have a few more. Powder. Moguls. Depending on the extent of your snow vocabulary you can look at the frozen water and perceive it in numerous ways. But if your vocabulary is limited then so is the way you can think and talk about snow. If you have studied languages such as Spanish or French then you are familiar with the concepts of a formal and informal “you.” Depending on the relationship between you and your audience you will use a different word for “you” and consequently conjugate your verbs accordingly. If you are talking with a child, for example, you would use the informal version, but if you were speaking with someone of higher social status such as your Professor you would use the formal “you.” As you speak and write, this language structure demands that you be consciously aware of social relations. This awareness then becomes part of your social reality. If you have ever been on the receiving end of a stereotype or derogatory label in reference to your culture, religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, or other aspect of your identity, then you are acutely aware of the power of language. You know that such language is not a neutral conveyor of ideas, but is designed to hurt and shape the way the audience thinks about a particular person or group. Think about the list of terms that historically have been used to refer to persons of African descent—African, Colored, Negro, Black, Afro-American, African American, and the harshest, Nigger. When you read each term, what are the different images or connotations connected with them? Do they bring up different historical periods, varying degrees of sociopolitical power, a variety of relationships to the dominant group? The range of emotions and images that each of these terms produces is further testament to the subjectivity of language as well as its temporal nature. A more recent linguistic strategy among historically oppressed groups is called reclaiming. When a group reclaims a word they are attempting to take it back from the dominant group. If the dominant group has used a word or phrase as an insult then the oppressed group reclaims it for their own, positive meaning. Can you think of some examples? How about “bitch,” “queer,” “nigga,” or “cunt”? Hopefully, you are thinking, “hey, those words may still be insulting to some people; they’re not necessarily

positive.” True. Part of the process in reclaiming is that only certain people can use them in a reclaimed fashion, most simply, the members of the oppressed groups at which the term was designed to hurt. If a woman is walking down the street and a man yells out, “Hey Bitch, watch where you’re going!” that is not reclaiming as the term is used as an insult. But the magazine, *BITCH: A Feminist Response to Popular Culture*, is reclaiming this term. The books, *Cunt* and *Nigger*, provide histories of these traditionally derogatory terms and attempt to reclaim them.

## How Scholars Study Intercultural Communication: Theoretical Approaches and Concepts

# B

y now you should be familiar with the three general research approaches—social science, interpretive, and critical. Thus, this chapter will highlight a few specific approaches within these three general categories that have particular relevance to the study of intercultural communication.

### Social Science

Describe and predict behavior. These are the goals of the social scientist. One particular theory useful for this kind of research is **communication accommodation theory (CAT)** that was developed by Giles and his colleagues. This model focuses on the **'ways in which individuals adjust their communication with others.** *When you tell the story of a college party to a friend or to a parent do you tell it the same way? Do you leave out or highlight certain details? The kinds of decisions you make when telling a story reflect the ways in which you accommodate your communication to your specific audience. In general, there are two types of accommodation: convergence and divergence. When we converge our communication we make it more like the person or persons with whom we are speaking. We attempt to show our similarity with them through our speech patterns. When we diverge, we attempt to create distance between our audience and ourselves. Here, we want to stress our difference from others or our uniqueness. Using social scientific approaches as applied to communication accommodation theory, researchers may attempt to define, describe and predict what sorts of verbal and nonverbal acts can produce the desired convergent or divergent effects.*

### Interpretive

Like the social scientists, interpretive scholars want to describe behavior, but because of the importance of the individual context, they do not assume accurate and generalizable predictions can be made. As they are particularly relevant to intercultural communication research, we will discuss the following two methodologies in this section—ethnography and co-cultural research. Since interpretivists believe in the subjective experience of each cultural group, it makes sense that they would select to study intercultural communication as used in particular speech communities. A **speech community**, according to Hymes is a **“community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety”** (54). This method is also referred to ethnography. A prolific ethnographer, Gerry Philipsen has identified four assumptions of this method:

1. Members of speech communities create meanings.
2. Each distinct culture possesses a unique speech code.
3. The rules for interpreting actions and meanings are limited to a given culture and cannot be universally applied.
4. Within each speech community there are specific procedures and sources for assigning meaning.

Using ethnography guided by these four assumptions, researchers are able to understand the culture, its participants, and its communication on its own terms.

## Critical Cultural

Originating in the legal arena, **Critical Race Theory** explores *the role of race in questions of justice, equal access, and opportunity*. Borrowing from the work of Matsuda et.al, Orbe and Harris summarize six key assumptions helpful for understanding critical race theory (125-6).

1. Critical race theory recognizes that racism is an integral part of the United States.
2. Critical race theory rejects dominant legal and social claims of neutrality, objectivity, and color blindness.
3. Critical race theory rejects a purely historical approach for studying race for a contextual/historical one to study interracial communication.
4. Critical race theory recognizes the importance of perspectives that arise from co-cultural standpoints.
5. Critical race theory is interdisciplinary and borrows from Marxism, feminism, critical/cultural studies, and postmodernism.
6. Critical race theory is actively focused on the elimination of the interlocking nature of oppression based on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation.

As this methodology is inherently complex and multifaceted it lends itself to producing a rich understanding of interracial and intercultural communication. A method focused solely on the interests of Africans is referred to as Afrocentricity. The foremost scholar in this field is Molefi Kete Asante and this functions as an interdisciplinary approach to questions of race relations. Instead of assuming a Eurocentric frame as normative for understanding the world and its people, this perspective embraces “African ways of knowing and interpreting the world” (Orbe and Harris 127). Similarly, there are also Asiatic frameworks for understanding intercultural communication.

## Important Concepts for Understanding Intercultural Communication

### I

If you decide to take a class on intercultural communication you will learn a great deal about the similarities and differences across cultural groups. Since this chapter is meant to give you an overview or taste of this exciting field of study we will discuss four important concepts for understanding communication practices among cultures.

### High and Low context

Think about someone you are very close to—a best friend, romantic partner, or sibling. Have there been times when you began a sentence and the other person knew exactly what you were going to say before you said it? When this occurs between Dr. Hahn and her sister, the sister exclaims, “Get off!” short for “get off my wavelength.” This phenomenon of being on someone’s wavelength is similar to what Hall describes as high context. In high context communication the meaning is in the people, or more specifically, the relationship between the people as opposed to just the words. When we have to rely on the translation of the words to decipher a person’s meaning then this is said to be low context communication. The American legal system, for example, relies on low context communication. While some cultures are low or high context, in general terms, there can also be individual or contextual differences within cultures. In the above illustration between Dr. Hahn and her sister, they are using high context communication, however, America is considered a low context culture. Countries such as Germany and Sweden are also low context while Japan and China are high context.

## Speech Styles

Other variations in communication can be described using Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's four communication styles. We find it is helpful to think about these descriptors as a continuum rather than polar opposites because it allows us to imagine more communicative options for speakers. They are not fixed into one style or another but instead, people can make choices about where to be on the continuum according to the context in which they find themselves.

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

Remember the fairy tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears? As Goldilocks tasted their porridge, she exclaimed, "this is too hot, this one is too cold, but this one is just right." This next continuum of communication styles can be thought of this way as well. The elaborate style uses more words, phrases, or metaphors to express an idea than the other two styles. It may be described as descriptive, poetic or too wordy depending on your view. Commenting on a flower garden an American (Exact/Succinct) speaker may say, "Wow, look at all the color variations. That's beautiful." An Egyptian (Elaborate) speaker may go into much more detail about the specific varieties and colors of the blossoms, "This garden invokes so many memories for me. The deep purple irises remind me of my maternal grandmother as those are her favorite flowers. Those pink roses are similar to the ones I sent to my first love." The succinct style in contrast values simplicity and silence. As Dr. Hahn's mother used to tell her as a child, "If you can't say anything nice, then don't say anything at all." Cultures such as Buddhism and the Amish value this form. The exact style is the one for Goldilocks as it falls between the other two and would be in her words, "just right." It is not overly descriptive or too vague to be of use.

Remember when we were talking about the French and Spanish languages and the fact that they have a formal and informal "you" depending on the relationship between the speaker and the audience? This example also helps explain the third communication style: the personal and contextual. The contextual style is one where there are structural linguistic devices used to mark the relationship between the speaker and the listener. If this sounds a bit unfamiliar, that is because the English language has no such linguistic distinctions; it is an example of the personal style that enhances the sense of "I." While the English language does allow us to show respect for our audience such as the choice to eliminate slang or the use of titles such as Sir, Madame, President, Congressperson, or Professor, they do not inherently change the structure of the language. The final continuum, instrumental/affective, refers to who holds the responsibility for effectively conveying a message: the speaker or the audience? The instrumental style is goal- or sender-orientated, meaning it is the burden of the speaker to make him or herself understood. The affective style is more receiver-orientated thus, places more responsibility on the listener. Here, the listener should pay attention to verbal, nonverbal, and relationship clues in an attempt to understand the message. Asian cultures such as China and Japan and many Native American tribes are affective cultures. The United States is more instrumental. Think about sitting in your college classroom listening to your Professor lecture. If you do not understand the material where does the responsibility reside. Usually it is given to the professor as in statements such as "My Math Prof. isn't very well organized." Or "By the end of the Econ. lecture all that was on the board were lines, circles, and a bunch of numbers. I didn't know what was important and what wasn't." These statements suggest that it is up to the professor to communicate the material to the students. As your authors were raised in the American educational system they too

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

### **Collectivist versus Individualistic**

In addition to the four speaking styles that characterize cultures so do value systems. One of particular importance to intercultural communication is whether the culture has a collectivist or individualistic orientation. When a person or culture has a collective orientation they place the needs and interests of the group above individual desires or motivations. In contrast, the self or one’s own personal goals motivate those cultures with individualistic orientations. Thus, each person is viewed as responsible for his or her own success or failure in life. From years of research, Geert Hofstede organized 52 countries in terms of their orientation to individualism. His results are displayed in Table 10.1. Are you surprised at the ranking of the United States?

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

## **Where Intercultural Communication Occurs**

# **T**

hus far, we have shared with you a bit about what intercultural communication is, some important concepts, and how scholars study this phenomenon. Now we want to spend the final part of the chapter looking at a major context for intercultural communication—the media. There are other contexts as well, such as interpersonal relationships and organizations, but we will leave these to your own investigation or in a class devoted to intercultural communication.

### **Media**

Looking at texts or media artifacts (these are specific television shows, films, books, magazines, musical artists, etc.) is both a fun and important area of study for intercultural communication. Since most people spend much of their free time taking in some form of media, such as going to the movies with friends or turning on the T.V. at the end of a stressful day, it is an arena that has a great deal of influence and impact over its audience. As you also remember, the media is also the location and source for much of the critical cultural research. Specifically, what critical theorists tend to look at are the artifacts of popular, or pop culture? At the time of this writing, bands such as Creed and Wilco; the television programs Friends, West Wing, and Sex and the City; and the films Bowling for Columbine and The Two Towers were all pop culture artifacts. **Popular culture** is defined as *“those systems or artifacts that most people share and that most people know about”* (Brummett 21). So, while you may not listen to or watch the

examples listed, chances are that you are at least aware of them and have a basic idea of the plot or content. Popular culture is distinct from high culture, which includes events such as the ballet or opera, visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Louvre, or listening to classical music at the symphony. These activities, unlike the artifacts mentioned earlier all require something to have access. Namely money. Attending the ballet or opera takes considerably more money than playing the latest Creed CD. Moreover, one must live in or have access to an urban area where these events are typically held. For example, if Dr. Hahn and Dr. Paynton want to go to the Opera, they have to travel nearly 300 miles. This requires both a lot of time and money. Because most people do not have an abundance of either, these events or artifacts tend to be associated with the elite. The fact that most of us participate to some degree in consuming popular culture is one reason to study it. Another is that it is an area of struggle for representation—specifically about cultural identity issues. By looking at the numbers and characterizations of ethnic minorities in television and film we can see the dominant culture's attitudes about them. This is because the dominant culture is the group in control of media outlets and represents groups in particular ways. **Representation** refers to *the portrayal, depiction, or characterization of particular cultural groups*. A related term is that of **symbolic annihilation** which refers to *the fact that "women and minorities are underrepresented in media content and that when they are represented they are marginalized, trivialized, or victimized"* (Valdiva 243).

Let us walk through an analysis of a scene in the 2001 film, *Spiderman*, to illustrate these concepts. The female character, Mary Jane, is walking home from work one dark and rainy night. She has neither an umbrella nor proper rain gear so her white shirt and clothes are drenched and cling to her. (Prior to this scene she has been portrayed as the "girl next door" with little or no sexuality.) Her path home takes her through an alleyway where she is quickly surrounded by a group of men of color. One of the men pulls a knife and there is the threat of rape or other violent attack. She does not attempt to fight back but is frozen with fear. But as is the case with superheroes, Spiderman arrives just in the nick of time to save the damsel in distress. After he saves her, she and Spiderman, who, while hanging upside down from a building, share their first kiss. So, what is going on in this scene? Can you identify examples of representation or symbolic annihilation? There are issues concerning both gender and race in this scene. First, she is portrayed as weak, unable to take care of herself, and in need of a man to save her. This is characteristic of images of women in film. Second, in terms of race, the "good guys" or "innocent victims" are White and the potential attackers are nonwhite. This too represents a stereotyped portrayal of young men of color as criminals or gang members. Finally, and perhaps the most dangerous message in this scene, is the equation of female sexuality, violence, and romance. As her white shirt clings to her, her breasts are revealed in a sexual manner, next she is almost attacked, and then she is sweetly and romantically kissing Spiderman. If you were nearly raped by a group of strangers would you be feeling romantic? Thus, this short scene illustrates how images (we did not even discuss the dialogue) work to unfairly and inaccurately portray groups of people. By looking to the media scholars can discover what images of various cultural groups are prevalent in a society and the stories that are told about various cultures. As active citizens we can make choices about what media images we decide to consume, accept, or reject. As knowledgeable communicators we can critique the images we see rather than accept constructed and artificial media images as normative or "just the way things are." For as you learned in the first section of the book, language, symbols, and images are not neutral, but are subjective interpretations of a person's or group of people's interpretation of reality.

## Summary

# A

After reading this chapter, you should have a greater understanding about how culture influences communication. We began with an overview and description of the various aspects of personal identity and how they work together to determine a person's and co-cultures relative power and privilege. Next, we traced the process of coming to an understanding of one's individual identity through the use of the identity models for minorities, Bi-racial individuals, Majority members, and those whom identify as global nomads. Turning to specific communication styles we discussed the differences between high and low context cultures and the continuums of direct/indirect, elaborate/exact/succinct, personal/contextual, and instrumental/affective styles. Finally, we examined a particular site for intercultural communication—the media. We hope this chapter has increased your knowledge base as well as your enthusiasm and interest in this exciting area of the Communication discipline. Moreover, we encourage you to think about the importance of culture when studying the other subdisciplines of communication such as gender, organizational, interpersonal, rhetorical theory and criticism and health communication.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are some ways that you see to support Hofstede's claim that the U.S. is the most individualistic society? Are there ways in which we display attributes of collectivism?
2. Describe a situation in which you attempted to diverge or converge you communication with others? What did you do? What were you attempting to accomplish by doing so? What was the result?
3. What are some examples of representation and symbolic annihilation can you locate and analyze in contemporary texts of popular culture?

## Key Terms

- Afrocentricity
  - Critical race theory
  - Collectivism/Individualism
  - Communication Styles
  - Culture
  - Ethnicity
  - Ethnocentrism
  - Gender
  - High and low context
  - Identity
  - Popular Culture
  - Privilege
  - Race
  - Representation
  - Symbolic Annihilation
  - Whiteness
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