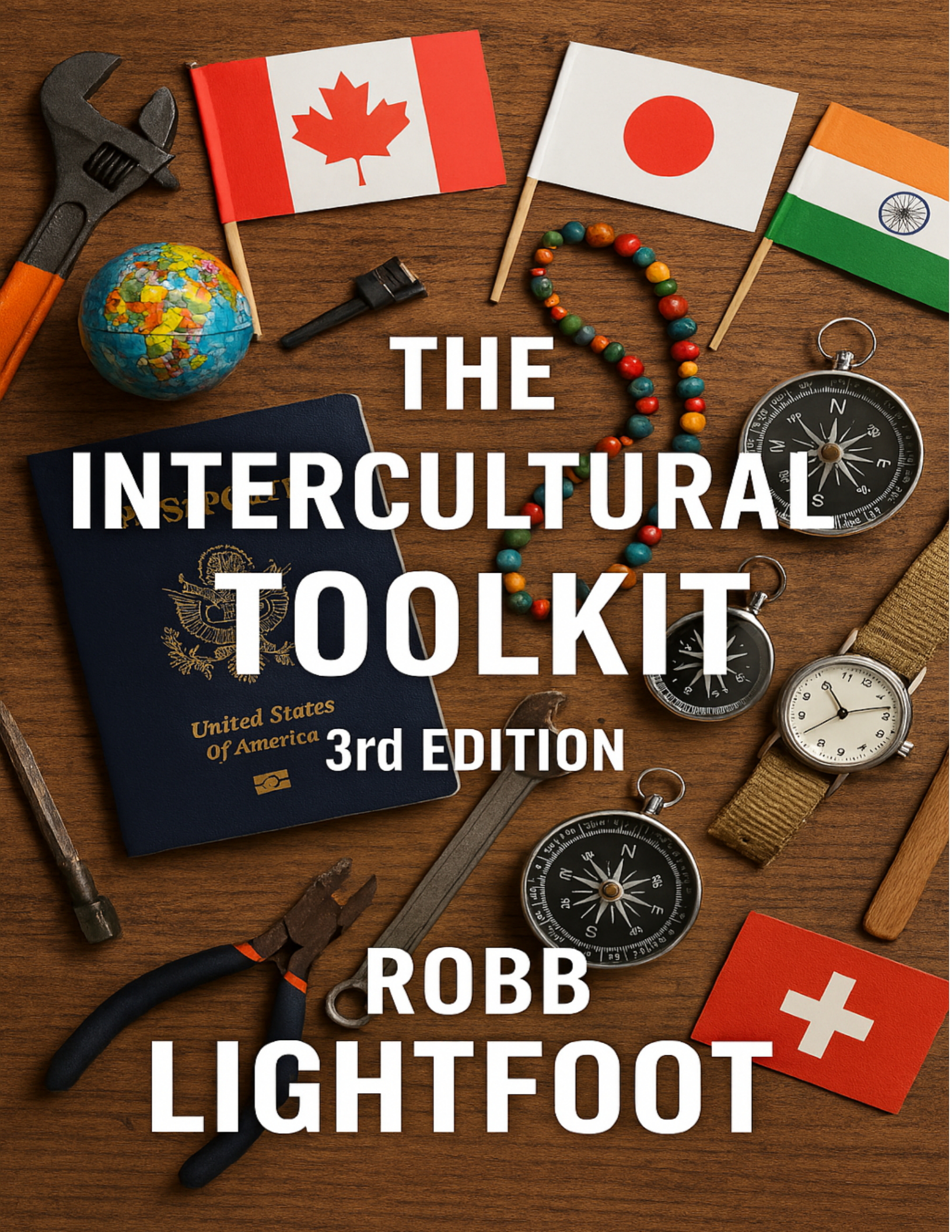
THE
INTERCULTURAL
TOOLKIT
3rd EDITION
United States
Of America
ROBB
LIGHTFOOT

Intercultural Communication Toolkit

www.interculturaltoolkit.com

3rd Edition, February 2026

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Licensing

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Notes To Fellow Faculty

Why This Book?

There are a number of excellent books available on the topic of Intercultural Communication, but after 30 years of teaching the subject, I felt that each one lacked something. I continually found it necessary to supplement the material rather than having the convenience of a one-stop-shop. The case studies I wanted to include often required students to buy yet another book, and the ever and rapidly-changing course of world events caused examples to be rapidly outdated.

LibreTexts solve many of these problems. I am thrilled to see the OER community flourish and the offerings expand daily. The ease of editing allows me to bring into play years of experience as both a teacher and an author of nonfiction and readable popular books.

So, my goal here is to be comprehensive, current, and, yes, entertaining.

Possible Objections to This Book

Yes, there are things you may not like about this book. I include a good deal of interpersonal communication, some ideas from debate, and plenty of fundamentals, models, principles, and so on. It's quite possible that students who have taken other classes may already know this material. But the reason I've done this is that, in my experience, this may well be the only communication class a particular student takes. Assuming that students already knows this robs them of the chance to more fully appreciate how intercultural communication connects with the discipline-at-large.

This, then, may make the book longer that some would like, and if so, then skip what seems too basic. The test banks available are chapter-specific, so there should be no problem in omitting materials.

There are also chapters on Value Theory, and the next edition will be even larger with a chapter on Theories of Attitude Change and Principles of Negotiation. These are key business concepts that are of immense practical value. In addition to teaching intercultural these many years, I've also taught and coached Argumentation & Debate, and applying methods from those areas to Intercultural Communication is a promising addition to the toolkit.

Ancillary Materials

I have available QTI formatted test banks for each chapter of this book. You can reach to me, and I'll provide them once you've documented your status as faculty at a accredited institution. I also will be continuing to obtain and create photos, decorative graphics, and infographics to help convey concepts. You may find many of these on the website, www.interculturaltoolkit.com.

The Path Ahead

Finally, I expect to build the book out to an area of advanced studies suitable for graduate research and even applicability to journalism. Before I became a community-college Instructor, I was trained as a journalist. I have concerns about the state of that aspect of communication especially as regards to reporting and free speech around the world.

So, as you can see, this text will eventually expand to include things not often seen in a standard undergraduate class, and I think this speaks to the possibilities of this field of study within the larger discipline. There are downsides to having a huge, omnibus volume, primarily cost and awkwardness. But given that specific chapters can be omitted or included simply by using--or not--their URL, the more robust offering need not be a problem. Likewise, there are no cost factors to expanding the content.

I hope, then, that you will find this text helpful and its ancillary materials useful. There is a companion website, www.interculturaltoolkit.com, that you can visit to offer feedback ot even participate in contributing stories or ideas. You also can reach me at either admin@interculturaltoolkit.com or robb@robblightfoot.com.

Thanks for adopting this book. I'm honored to be in your company, and I wish you and your students a thrilling and rewarding term.

Robb Lightfoot, Shasta College, February 2026.

1: How We Will Learn Together

Hello and Welcome

My first order of business to express gratitude to the many other educators and researchers that have shared their expertise to make this book possible. Their contributions are noted through proper research citations and references to articles, books, and journals that were used to create this text. It is mostly a collection of their work that I am curating, with periodic side-bars and chapters that I have contributed.

I also had help from wonderful people who have helped my at every step of my academic career. This includes my mother, who insisted I went do college, my father, who once loaned me money to go even when we were barely speaking to one another at the time, my wonderful teachers, especially Dr. Mary Copelin of Bakersfield College, Dr. Stephen Weiss of CSU Bakersfield, and Dr. Bill Freeman of CSU Northridge, as well as my many supervisors at various jobs in the fields of journalism, public relations, and finally academia. I could list dozens more, but I will spare you save one last shout-out to my wife of 40+ years, Dr. Karin Lightfoot. She has been a source of inspiration as I struggled to find my way into and through a career in the field of communications until I found a perfect fit in the community college system. I owe her everything, and any student I have ever helped has benefited because of her steady support as I changed careers and went back to school not once but twice, leaving her to be the sole support of our family. She rocks.

All right, now a bit about me.

I'm Robb Lightfoot, and I have been a college educator for 40-plus years. Before that I was a journalist and worked in public relations for a history museum. I hold advanced degrees both in communication and recreation administration with coursework in ethical and sustainable tourism. I've also worked in the travel industry. I mention this to give you a perspective on how I approach learning--notice I don't say teaching. Every time I engage with students, I come away with a deeper understanding of this thrilling experience we call learning. And after all these years, I still bring enthusiasm, joy, respect for diversity, and a sense of wonder to my work. I hope too instill these feelings in you, too.

You will me a part of that process this semester!

My passion is travel, but I also love humor. I am a generalist in communication, and have taught augmentation, public speaking, interpersonal communication small group communication, mass communication, journalism, and multi-media production. I'll be bringing in pertinent and helpful ideas from each of those areas. I invite you to bring your life-experiences and insights to our discussions, too.

This class begins with this textbook as a source of shared information. It has statistics gained from research, theories that help us understand, and case studies and stories, too.

Stories Are A Pathway To Understanding

In my experience, stories are the most compelling and memorable "way-in" to understanding others and unpacking culture. This is my perspective, and could be said to be a bias of sorts. Stories can be weak in that a single story does not "prove" a theory. The world in full of competing stories and anecdotes that support contradictory ideas. I've taught and coached debate, and there is an idea called the hierarchy of evidence, which is its power to prove. A single example is weak proof. A series of facts, carefully collected with valid research methods, often points to patterns. These are often expressed in the form of statistics, which are a more powerful form of proof. Likewise, a single study is more powerful than a single expert's opinion, but a consensus of expert opinion is on the same level as a study. A consensus of studies is better still.

Another pertinent concept is the cogency of evidence, or the degree to which it proves what the person sharing it thinks it proves. Simply put, some evidence is weak because it is irrelevant, inaccurate, or outdated. So, research is an ongoing effort in every field of study.

All this research typically takes time. Lots of it. In my work as a daily journalist, I came across a variety of people with stories to tell, and frankly, some of them were fabricated or seen through biases that had to be noted in my narrative. This is what led me, for my first graduate degree, to study "competing narratives." My thesis looked at the competing stories of the Navajo and Hopi tribes as they sought to gain control over disputed lands. The theory I applied was The Narrative Paradigm by Walter Fisher. In his 1978 work, he advanced the idea that we understand our world by arranging our experiences and perceptions into stories, and, in turn, express our understanding of the world in stories. We try to win others over by telling stories and urging others to see the world as we do. This is a core belief for me, but in saying this, I will admit that it has weaknesses--as noted above--and that there are competing theories of understanding that are newer, more empirically based, and specifically focused on intercultural communication.

Theory & Practice

We will see many of those theories here, as we should.

But before we wrap up this brief chapter, let me call attention to the title I have chosen for this text: The Intercultural Toolkit. The word "toolkit" is a deliberate choice and not just a cute affectation. It's here to remind you that this book has a variety of ideas that may fit you better than others, or describe some situations more aptly. Unlike mathematics, work in the social sciences often, perhaps usually, has more than one answer. Some answers are more useful and compelling than others, but there are multiple ways of "being in the world" and seeing it through the many world-views we'll discuss here.

I hope you find this material helpful and understandable. I've edited much of what is here to have it be readable and--dare I say it--fun. This is my training as a journalist as well as an educator. I don't dumb-down the work, but I do realize that a text for college undergraduates does not need to dwell on the peer-to-peer discussions of experts. The goal here is to have a working understanding of this topic and, I hope, kindle an interest that will encourage you to persist and learn for yourself. You'll notice that many of the assignments ask you to go out and search and then bring back material to share with the class. I expect you will find treasures, and probably some trash, too. That's OK. We can learn from material that is flawed so long as we give it a critical examination.

And we will do exactly that--apply critical thinking and the many useful tools that are contained in these pages.

The Design of This Book

One of the challenges of teaching a class in intercultural communication is that for some students, this will be their one-and-only class. Yet, for others, even those who are not communication majors, it may be one of several classes.

What to do?

The approach I've taken in this textbook is to split the text into two parts. The initial chapters are foundational, looking at communication in a general sense, often leaning into a Western world-view, and then offer a second section that deals more specifically with what is unique to intercultural communication.

I have done this to make sure that a student new to this field can get all the important foundational work, while those that are ready to jump into the areas that are unique to intercultural and really take off.

If you are a student in one of my classes, you'll see that I let students take and retake quizzes on the basic material repeatedly so they can quickly get up to speed, but that most of the lecture-videos, discussions, and assignments all focus on the topics that apply intercultural concepts to scenarios and situation in their lives or circumstances they are likely to encounter.

How To Use This Book

I've been teaching for decades, and I am honored to have worked within the California Community College system of higher education, the largest in the world. I have taken scores of training in subjects ranging from technololgy to student success. So, I'm concerned with offering material that is appropriate, interesting, and effective.

This book has many chapters, and you may find that some of them may be skipped over or only covered in quizzes. This is because there are many foundational chapters, and if you are a communications major, you may have already mastered this material. Good for you! In that case, take the quiz and move on to material that is new and probably more challenging.

Each chapter contains a "Key Terms" section that has words that are, well, key to understanding. These words have concise definitions, and it may be helpful for you to go to the end of the chapter, review the terms, and then read the chapter. You also may want to go to the index of subjects in back of the book in the "Back Matter," a bland but accurate description if there ever was one. Often a topic is treated in more than one place, and you can find links to the places that idea occurs in this text. Usually the later treatments are more in-depth or look sideways to related ideas. It's worth poking around if you find something intriguing.

You'll see, too, that there are References for Further Reading." These are resources that underpin and substantiate the assertions and ideas in the chapter. The list may also include additional reading for advanced study.

Tips for Upper Division & Graduate Students

This is offered for those who are in upper division or even graduate work. If that describes you, then I have a suggestion: Find out how to gain access to the **Social Science Citation Inde**x. This is a tool for what I would describe as "lateral" research on a topic. All too often students simply Google a term or use a library card catalog to find "stuff." Then, if you're like me when I was an undergrad (before the Internet), you'll give a sigh of relief and grab the material so you can knock out a report. But if you are looking to advance to an expert level, then you should know about the SSI. It allows you to look up a source and see where it is referenced by others--a good sign--or refuted and challenged. That's also good to know but may temper how much you lean on it as a resource. The bad news is that not all college libraries have access to this expensive resource, but the California State University and University of California do. If you live in another state, chances are that your premier universities do. Many of this will allow you to use this source, but with an inconvenient catch-you have to show up with a current student ID. Given this, this may be a source you use when you are in your upper division studies. But it is still good to know that it exists and to "play with it" if you get the chance.

Two other tips for advanced research. If you find yourself with a book in hand and it's giving you wonderful material, look to the front part of the book, just after the title page, and you'll find the "CIP," or **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data block**. It has not only the author and title, which you'd expect, but something called "tracings." Tracings are an old-school way of listing the subject headings under which the book is cross referenced by, ahem, subject. In this day and age of the net, these are equivalent to "tags." It's helpful to know what subjects or tags are pertinent because you might not have thought to search under those terms, and knowing them can take you into new and interesting territory.

Finally, a tip on how to use an Encyclopedia, which is a Latin term for "circle of knowledge." Some teachers discourage the use of an encyclopedia because they fear it will be a one-stop shop. That can happen, but a good encyclopedia is actually an excellent place to start. Most give a quick overview and key terms that will, again, get you going. They also usually have a nugget of gold hidden in plain sight: the list of authors. Think about it. The publisher, say Britannica, had to decide who is best to write their authoritative entry. So, they go to the world's leading authorities, and now you have their names. This gives you something else to search on and rise above the clutter of a search. So, even if you end up at Google Scholar, you have a name that will take you in the direction of better, vetted, material.

One last tip on academic research, again looking encyclopedias. Look for specialized encyclopedias in your chosen subject. There is, for example, an Encyclopedia of Philosphy. You can look up a famous philosopher, such as Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle, and not only will it give you their bios-spoiler alert, they're all dead--it also will give you outlined summaries of their major works and the criticisms or responses that later philosophers had. It's Cliff Notes for free!

If you haven't gathered by now. I love research. I love to dig in. My thanks to the late, great Mona McCormick, a reference librarian at UCLA who taught me all the above when I was taking a class in "Rapid Research for Journalists." I used these tips extensively when I coached my debate teams in state and national competition. I owe her a great deal. She made academic research fun, a combination treasure hunt under and mystery to be solved before the time ran out. I only hope that you are lucky enough to have a librarian such as her in your life. I still do in the friendship I have with one of my college's librarian, Cheryl Cruse. If you haven't done so already, go strike up a friendship with a librarian. I'm serious about this. They are without exception, well-read and

interesting people. Every time I've had a challenge tracking down a rare or out of print book, or finding quality information--not BS or fake garbage--they've helped me. I could list more than a dozen names. But these two top the list. So, I'll leave it at that.

Stories, Again!

Finally, let me encourage you to be a student journalist/reporter to your own life and history in the making. Keep a journal. Take notes. Record your impressions and take photos. Then, bring all this to class! You'll find that your experience may confirm, contradict, or somehow expand upon the ideas in this book. You will become a part of the Academic community!

Let's Begin!

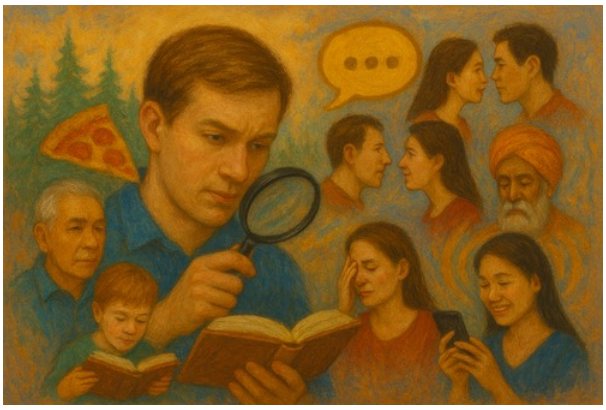
I am glad you on board for this journey, and you'll notice that I encourage you to consider, too, many non-academic sources such as novels, movies, songs, and short video clips. Pay attention to anything that lights you up. It also can be in other areas such as food or travel and first-hand experiences. Keep your eyes open. Take notes. Bring back to our "tribe" the fruits of your cultural expeditions. And remember that the goal is to be a more compassionate and effective communicator. This begins, as it must always, with assuming that other people have what they believe to be valid reasons for being the way they are, even if it is initially baffling and disturbing to you. This book will allow you the room to chose your way of being in the world as it also seeks to build bridges of understanding.

And, yes, we have our work cut out for us. But let's have fun doing it. And do reach out to me, at my email address, Email: Robb Lightfoot, if you have comments, corrections, or suggestions. Note: Some of the images and graphics in this text have been generated with AI, but **none** of the chapter narratives in my portions has used generative AI.

2: Why Study Communication?

Reasons to Study Communication

Most people think they are great communicators. However, very few people are “naturally” good. Communication takes time, skill, and practice. To be a great communicator, you must also be a great listener. It requires some proficiency and competence. Think about someone you know that is not a good communicator. Why is that person not good? Do they say things that are inappropriate, rude, or hostile? This text is designed to give you the skills to be a better communicator.

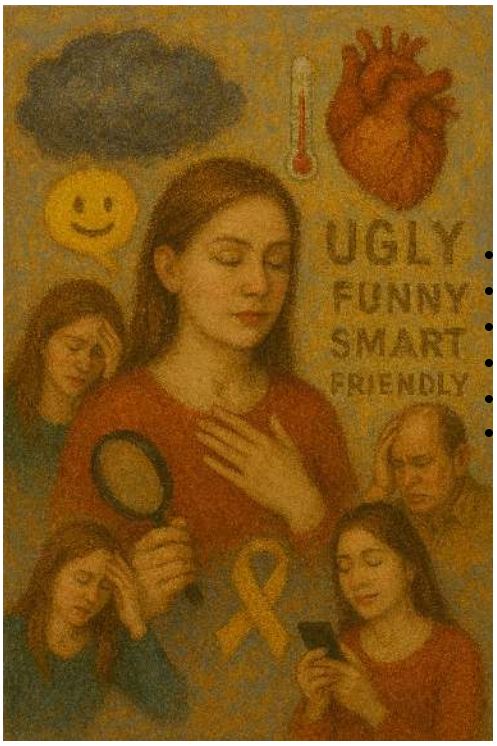


We need to study communication for a variety of reasons. First, it gives us a new perspective on something we take for granted every day. As stated earlier, most people think they are excellent communicators. However, most people never ask another person if they are great communicators. Besides being in a public speaking class or listening to your friends’ opinions, you probably do not get a lot of feedback on the quality of your communication. In this book, we will learn all about communication from different perspectives. As the saying goes, “You can’t see the forest for the trees.” In other words, you won’t be able to see the impact of your communication behaviors, if you don’t focus on certain communication aspects. The second reason we study communication is based on the quantity of our time that is devoted to that activity. Think about your daily routine; I am sure that it involves communicating with others (via face-to-face, texting, electronic media, etc.). Because we spend so much of our time communicating with others, we should make that time worthwhile. We need to learn how to communicate and communicate better because a large amount of our time is allotted to communicating with others. The last reason why we study communication is to increase our effectiveness. Marriages and relationships often fail for several reasons. The most popular reason is that people don’t know how to communicate with each other, which leads to irreconcilable differences. People often do not know how to work through problems, and it creates anger, hostility, and possibly violence. In these cases, communication needs to be effective for the relationship to work and be satisfying. Think about all the relationships that you have with friends, family, coworkers, and significant others. This course could possibly make you more successful in those relationships.

We all have specific and general reasons why we communicate with others. They vary from person to person. We know that we spend a large amount of our time communicating. Also, every individual will communicate with other people. Most people do not realize the value and importance of communication. Sherry Morreale and Judy Pearson believe that there are three main reasons why we need to study communication.[3] First of all, when you study communication behaviors, it gives you a new perspective on something you probably take for granted. Some people never realize the important physiological functions until they take a class on anatomy or biology. In the same fashion, some people never understand how to communicate and why they communicate until they take a communication studies course. Second, we need to study communication because we spend a large portion of our time communicating with other people. Gina Chen found that many people communicate online every day, and Twitter subscribers fulfill their needs of camaraderie by tweeting with others.[4] Hence, we all need to communicate with others. Third, the most important reason is to become a better communicator. Research has shown that we need to learn to communicate better with others because none of us are very good at it.

Communication Needs

Think for a minute of all the problematic communication behaviors that you have experienced in your life: personally or professionally. You will probably notice that there are areas that could use improvement. In this book, we will learn about better ways to communicate. To improve your communication behaviors, you must first understand the needs for communicating with others.



Physical

Studies show that there is a link between mental health and physical health. In other words, people who encounter negative experiences, but are also willing to communicate those experiences are more likely to have better mental and physical health.[5] Ronald Adler, Lawrence Rosenfeld, and Russell Proctor found that communication has been beneficial to avoiding or decreasing:[6]

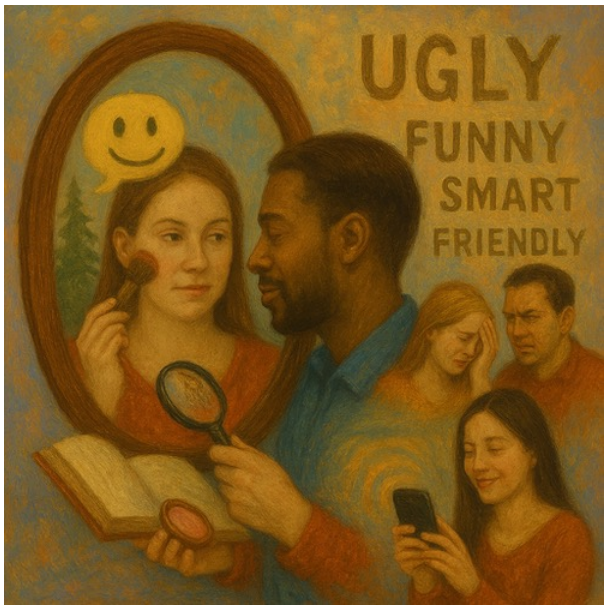
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Cancer
- Coronary problems
- Common Cold

Research clearly illustrates that communication is vital for our physical health. Because many health problems are stress-induced, communication offers a way to relieve this tension and alleviate some of the physical symptoms. It is vital for people to share what they feel, because if they keep it bottled up, then they are more likely to suffer emotionally, mentally, and physically.

Identity

Communication is not only essential for us to thrive and live. It is also important to discover who we are. From a very young age, you were probably told a variety of characteristics about your physical appearance and your personality. You might have been told that you are funny, smart, pretty, friendly, talented, or insightful. All of these comments probably came from someone else.

For instance, Sally went to a store without any makeup and saw one of her close friends. Sally's friend to her that she looked horrible without any makeup. So, from that day forward, she never walked out of the house without her cosmetics. You can see that this one comment affected Sally's behavior but also her perceptions about herself. Just one comment can influence how you think, act, and feel. Think about all the comments that you have been told in your life. Were they hurtful comments or helpful comments? Did they make you stronger or weaker? You are who you are based on what others have told you about yourself and how you responded to these comments. In another opposite example, Mark's parents told him that he wasn't very smart and that he would probably amount to nothing. Mark used these comments to make himself better. He studied harder and worked harder because he believed that he was more than his parents' comments. In this situation, you can see that the comments helped shaped his identity differently in a positive manner.



Social

Other than using words to identify who we are, we use communication to establish relationships. Relationships exist because of communication. Each time we talk to others, we are sharing a part of ourselves with others. We know people have strong relationships with others due to the conversations that they have with others. Think about all the relationships that you are involved with and how communication differs in those relationships. If you stopped talking to the people you care about, your relationships might suffer. The only way relationships can grow is when communication occurs between individuals. Joy Koesten analyzed family communication patterns and communication competence. She found that people who grew up in more conversation oriented families were also more likely to have better relationships than people who grew up in lower conversation-oriented families.[7]

Practical

Communication is a key ingredient in our life. We need it to operate and do our daily tasks. Communication is the means to tell the barista what coffee you prefer, inform your physician about what hurts, and advise others that you might need help.

We know that communication helps in the business setting. Katherine Kinnick and Sabrena Parton maintained that communication is important in workplace settings. They found that the ability to persuade effectively was very important. Moreover, females are evaluated more on their interpersonal skills than males, and males were evaluated more on their leadership skills than interpersonal skills.[8] Overall, we know that to do well in the business setting, one must learn to be a competent communicator.

Moreover, we know that communication is not only crucial in professional settings but in personal settings. Daniel Canary, Laura Stafford, and Beth Semic found that communication behaviors are essential in marriages because communication is essential for marriage longevity and success.[9] In another study, Laura Stafford and Daniel Canary illustrated the importance of communication in dating relationships.[10] All in all, communication is needed for people to relate to others, build connections, and help our relationships exist.

Key Terms

- **Communication competence** – the skill and proficiency required to communicate effectively.
- **Feedback** – input from others that helps assess and improve communication quality.
- **Perspective-taking** – gaining insight into communication by studying it intentionally.
- **Time spent communicating** – recognizing how much of daily life involves communication.
- **Effectiveness in relationships** – the role communication plays in maintaining healthy personal and professional relationships.
- **Physical health benefits** – how expressing emotions through communication can reduce stress-related illnesses.
- **Identity formation** – how communication shapes self-perception and personal development.
- **Social connection** – using communication to build and sustain relationships.
- **Practical utility** – communication as a tool for accomplishing everyday tasks and workplace goals.
- **Cultural variation in communication** – understanding that communication norms and expectations differ across cultures.

References for Further Reading

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2.2: Communication Principles

Don't be misled by the brevity of this chapter. Good thing often come in small packages, and these ideas are some of the most foundational of all. Do re-read this chapter and commit these core principles to memory. They will help you through this course and remind you why different people think--and communicate--differently!

The Nature of Communication

As we develop our understanding of not only communication as a whole, but more specifically interpersonal communication, there are some basic principles of communication that will lay the groundwork for our exploration in the chapters ahead. In this section we will discuss how communication is learned and then we will focus on the continuous, unrepeatable, irreversible nature of communication.

Communication Is Learned

While we are born with the capacity to communicate, communication is not innate to humans, rather it is learned. We have already talked about how communication is symbolic and dependent on the culture and context in which it takes place. How we make meaning from the symbols that we use is learned both formally and informally. When babies move from being vocal to verbal they begin the process of connecting symbols to items and ideas. This happens both formally when parents and caregivers teach children specific words and phrases, and informally as they observe what is happening around them and incorporate that knowledge. For example, one of the first things we taught our son when he was learning to use some simple words was the difference between “all done” and “more” so that he could express his desire when playing, eating, etc. There is nothing inherent about the letters m-o-r-e that means "I would like to continue." Instead, this shared understanding of the word is learned when we are given additional helpings of food or allowed to extend our play time.

In addition to formal teaching, communication is also learned informally through observation and engagement with the world around us. Once a child is in school they are learning communication not just in the classroom but from their peers. This communication is no less valid than what they learn from their teachers. Both illustrate the fundamental principle that communication is learned.

Communication Is Continuous

In addition to being learned, communication is also continuous. We are always communicating. In fact, we cannot *not* communicate. While much of our communication is intentional, a lot of communication is unintentional. Whether or not communication has occurred is not always up to the person doing the communicating. When a student is sitting in our classroom and they yawn, they are probably not sending us a specific message. But if we see the yawn and start to think that they are bored and uninterested in what we am talking about, communication has occurred. In fact, our very existence communicates. What we wear, how we style our hair, our posture, where we are in the environment—all of these things are communicating to those around us. This shows us how communication is always happening, whether we intend to or not. Communication is continuous.

Figure 2.2.1: Yawn, Miikka Luotio, Unsplash

Communication Is Unrepeatable

Communication is also unrepeatable. When we say that communication is unrepeatable, what we mean is that we can never reproduce the same exact communication twice. Even if we deliver the same message, other aspects—such as our tone, the environment we are in, or the context in which we are speaking—will be different, so the communication will be different. Heraclitus, an ancient Greek philosopher, said that no man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man. Communication is the same way, because we are always communicating—and the context, our emotional state, even internal factors like hunger or fatigue are contending with our words. These various aspects of communication are constantly flowing like the river, so even if we wanted to repeat a communication event we could not, just like we could not step in the same river twice. There will always be variation in our communication.

Communication Is Irreversible

Finally, in addition to being continuous and unrepeatable, communication is also irreversible. If you have ever watched *Law and Order* or another similar show you may have heard a judge say, “the jury will disregard.” In non-lawyer terms what the judge is doing is telling the jury to forget about the evidence they just heard because it is inadmissible. we don’t know about you, but this has always struck me as odd. Obviously the jury doesn’t just forget what they heard. Now that they know it, there is no way for them to "unknow" it. Once we communicate, we cannot undo it; what was communicated is permanently out in the world. This principle is particularly important when it comes to self-disclosure, or the sharing of personal or private information with another person that includes expression of your observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs in relationships. Once you share information about yourself you cannot take it back. If you tell a friend that you have romantic feelings for them and they don’t reciprocate those feelings, you can’t just go back to the way things were before you share that information. The communication is permanent, and in this case it has altered your relationship in an irreversible way. This permanence has taken on even more importance with the growth of communication technology. When we send a text, direct message (DM), or email, not only is the communication irreversible in the sense that we can’t take it back, but it is also literally permanent because there are saved copies of it. That communication can be shared over and over again beyond our initial communication; even if we delete the original, it is never completely gone. This isn’t meant to scare you, but to help you understand the impact that language can have. To fully understand intercultural communication and its impact on our lives, we will consider many different communication models and theories during this term. Some will fit better than others.

Key Terms

- **Communication** – The process of sharing meaning through verbal and nonverbal symbols in context.
- **Interpersonal Communication** – Direct, person-to-person interaction that builds relationships and shared understanding.
- **Communication Is Learned** – We acquire communication skills through formal teaching and informal observation.
- **Symbolic Communication** – Using agreed-upon signs, words, or gestures to represent ideas or objects.
- **Cultural Influence** – Culture shapes how symbols are used and interpreted in communication.
- **Contextual Meaning** – The meaning of a message depends on the situation, environment, and relationship.
- **Communication Is Continuous** – We are always communicating, even through posture, silence, or appearance.

- **Nonverbal Communication** – Messages conveyed without words, such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone.
- **Unintentional Communication** – Messages may be sent and interpreted even without deliberate intent.
- **Communication Is Unrepeatable** – No message can be exactly duplicated due to changing context and emotional states.
- **Heraclitus Principle** – Like stepping into a river, communication is always changing and cannot be repeated identically.
- **Communication Is Irreversible** – Once a message is shared, it cannot be taken back or "unheard."
- **Self-Disclosure** – Sharing personal information that can permanently alter relationships.
- **Digital Permanence** – Messages sent via technology can be saved, shared, and never fully deleted.
- **Impact of Language** – Words have lasting effects and shape relationships, perceptions, and outcomes.

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3: Why is Intercultural Communication Different?

The good news is that intercultural communication isn't completely different. If you have had a class in communication, some of this material should be familiar. If so, you can speed through the quizzes and focus on the lectures and assignments, which are all keyed to how all these ideas apply and play out in an intercultural communication context.

The study of intercultural communication emerged in the 1970s, and one of the first textbooks was written by Larry Samovar in 1977. You will no doubt notice that some of the theories we apply come from other fields and some reach back decades earlier into the first days of communication as its own academic discipline. Research tends to build on research and many academics and journalists work their entire lives to add "their piece of the puzzle" to deepen our understanding.

> Edward T. Hall was an American Anthropologist who did some of the most import early work in the field of **Cultural Anthropology**.
>
> 
>
> His books looked at how different cultures see and operate in their very different understandings of time and space. He introduced the field of **proxemics**, the use of personal space, and **polychroni**c and **monochronic** times.
>
> He also pioneered the study of **low-context** and **high-context cultures**.
>
> We'll be doing dep-dives into all those topics and more.

The chapters ahead will prepare us to take a deeper dive into the complexities of communication that can't be fully explained by looking at "the number of people in the room" or their purpose(s) in being there. We will develop an understanding of the basics, including models of communication, mindfulness, and ethics, and will then be in a much better position to grapple with and unpack the additional complexities and nuances of intercultural communication.

Anyone who consumes any kind of media, or wanders into their town, can se that we live in a rapidly changing world with larger forces driving us to interact with others who are culturally different from ourselves. National disasters, technology, business and educational opportunities are some of the many forces that lead to intercultural interaction. It would be easy to be overcome by the complexities of the things that you do not know or understand about another culture, but regardless of who we are communicating with, one fact is important to remember: *the communication choices we make determine the personal, national, and international outcomes that follow.* When we communicate well, we create happy memories, satisfying relationships, and desired outcomes. When we communicate poorly, we can create conflict, bitterness or frustration. By studying intercultural communication, you can acquire knowledge and skills to boost your communication competence, while improving your quality of life.

Figure **3.1**: Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon meets with Mr. Lassina Zerbo, Executive Secretary, Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization.

This book is combines aspects of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and small-group communication. We'll move quickly through these areas, but even a basic understanding will provide a better framework for understanding--and applying--communication tactics and strategies.

The foundational chapters include the basic principles that underlie the communication process and building blocks of culture. The element chapters explore the parts or elements that must be considered when understanding the bigger picture of intercultural communication.

The context chapters show us how specific contexts or environments are impacted by the foundations and elements. These occur later in the text, but you may want to jump ahead and take a peek. Sometimes, the best comes last, and my cultural background says it is OK to "Eat dessert first!"

As you encounter people from different cultures, an understanding of the foundations, elements, and contexts of intercultural communication studies will prove to be invaluable to your success and happiness when communicating cross-culturally.

What is your reason for studying intercultural communication? Maybe it was a requirement on the road to achieving your major, and you dutifully signed up without having given it much thought. Maybe you've spent time overseas or enjoyed spending time with an exchange student at your high school. Martin & Nakayama (2011) believe that all our varied reasons can fall into six categories that they call **imperatives.** For our purposes, an **imperative** *will be an important or compelling reason.* Martin & Nakayama (2011) identify the six **imperative** categories as peace, demographic, economic, technological, self-awareness, and ethical.

Human civilization is familiar with conflict. History is full of conflict over politics, religion, language, resources, and more. The bottom line for the **peace imperative** is a question. Can individuals of different races, ethnicities, language, and cultures co-exist on this planet? It would be naïve to assume that simply understanding intercultural communication issues would end war and conflict, but this question does underscore the need for all of us to learn more about cultural groups other than our own.

The term demographics means the **characteristics of a population**, *as classified by race, ethnicity, age, sex, income, and more.* U.S. demographics, as well as those around the world, are changing dramatically. According to the Population Reference Bureau (2019), which computes a "diversity index," the states in the US south, southwest, and west will see the biggest impact from immigration. Many of those immigrants will be economic refugees directly impacted by climate change. They will come searching for new ways to support themselves and their families. Others will be victims of violence and political instability.

The United States has an interesting history in relationship to its' immigrants. A commonly used metaphor called **the melting pot** assumes that immigrants and cultural minorities are assimilated into the US majority culture, losing their original cultures. Most

researchers believe that **the melting pot** is a myth, and a better metaphor would be the **tossed salad** or rather the diversity of immigrants and minorities is still apparent, but part of a nourishing whole.

Vocabulary important to the **demographic imperative** are **heterogeneous** and **homogeneous.** If a population is considered **heterogeneous,** there are *differences in the group, culture, or population.* If a population is considered **homogeneous,** there are *similarities in the group, culture, or population.* **Diversity** is the *quality of being different.* A **nativistic** group is *extremely patriotic to the point of being anti-immigrant.*

The **demographic imperative** is not only about immigration though, it's also about an aging workforce, and economic pressure. Most families need two incomes to live what is consider a middle-class existence or to generate savings enough to retire on. As the demographics change, culture changes.

The recent trend toward **globalization** or *the creation of a world market in goods, services, labor, capital, and technology* is dramatic. To be effective in this new global market, we must understand how business is conducted in other countries and cultures because more and more of our domestic economic growth depends on global success. An accurate understanding of the economies around the world is also crucial to compete on the world stage. The bottom line when considering the **economic imperative** is the ultimate impact of globalization on the average person.

In 1967, a futurist named Marshall McLuhan coined the iconoclastic term, **global village,** which has become the vanguard for the **technology imperative.** The term *refers to a world in which communication technology unites people in remote parts of the world.* As you know, it was decades later before personal computing came into existence, but today new technology is introduced almost daily. Technology has made communication easier. Information is so easy to access and manipulate, that we are now confronted with the impact of **fake news** and purposeful **disinformation.**

Technology is not just about ease of use though, it's also about increasing contact with others. We can increase contact with people who are different than us, but we can also increase contact with people who are the same as us. In fact, research tells us that humans prefer to use technology to contact those who are **homogeneous. Diasporic groups,***ethnic and/or national groups that are geographically dispersed throughout the world*, are using technology to maintain contact as they disperse from refugee camps to host nations. Technology is also an **identity management** tool. Individuals use technology to make sense of their multiple images concerning their sense of self in different social contexts.

Communication technology has become so important and so intertwined with the economic imperative that the term, **digital divide,** has come into being. **Digital natives**, or *people who grew up using technology*, are often citizens of wealthy nations that live lives of privilege and have better economic prospects because of their technological access. People who grew up in poorer nations without technological skills and access, often have fewer economic opportunities. At the end of the last century, this idea was captured in the statement, "they live on the other side of the tracks." The other side of the train tracks referred to a less desirable location. In today's world, the "tracks" have been replaced by technology, and the **digital divide.**

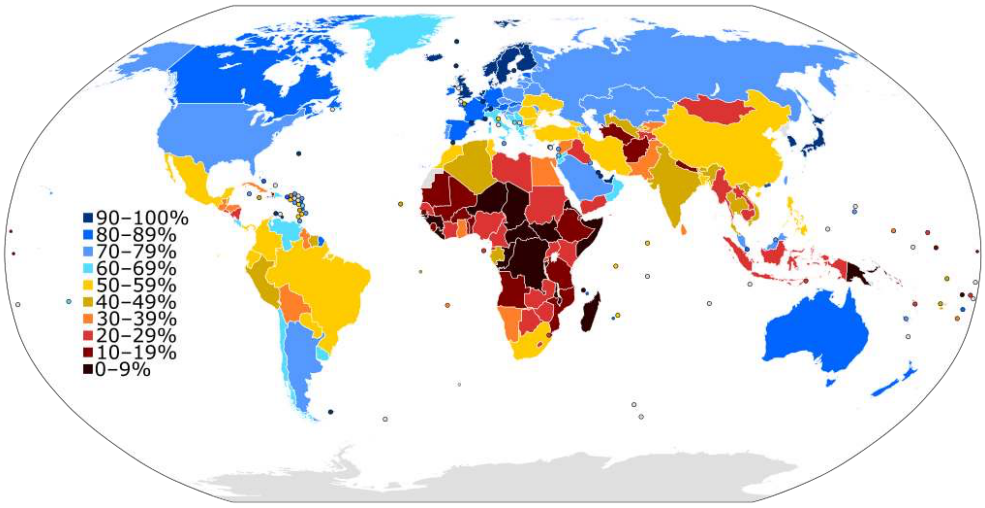

Figure **3.2**: A world map colored to show the level of Internet penetration as of 2016

Does the digital divide lead you to ponder ethical issues of privilege and wealth? Ethics, *the principles of conduct that help govern behaviors of individuals and groups*, often create cultural questions that lead to our understanding of the **ethical imperative.** Ethical principles often arise from community consensus of what is good or bad, right or wrong, and what "ought" to be as opposed to what "is." Some ethical issues are **explicit** or clearly stated within a culture, while other are **implicit** or not clearly stated.

When pondering ethical situations and cultural mores, there are two ways humans view the situation, relativistically or universally**.** If you are a **relativist,** you believe that *no cultural pattern is inherently right or wrong, everything depends on perspective.* In other words, you might not make the same choice yourself, but are willing to understand why others would make that choice. If you are a **universalist,** you believe that *cultural differences are only superficial, and that fundamental notions of right and wrong are universal*. In other words, everyone should be making the same choices for the same reasons. Although **universalism** and **relativism** are thought of as an either/or choice (non-dualistic), realistically most people are a combination of both (dualistic). There are some issues you might hold strict opinions about while other issues you are willing to be more open about.

One of the most important reasons for studying intercultural communication is the awareness it raises of our own cultural identity and background. The **self-awareness imperative** helps us to gain insights into our own culture along with our intercultural experiences. All cultures are **ethnocentric** by their very natures. **Ethnocentrism** is a *tendency to think that our own culture is superior to other cultures.* Most of us don't even realize that we think this way, but we do. Sure, we might admit that our culture isn't perfect, yet we still think that we're doing better than that culture to the north or south of us. Ethnocentrism can lead to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. It will be discussed in greater depth in coming chapters.

The opposite of ethnocentrism is **self-reflexivity** and **mindful-communication** or the *process of learning to understand oneself and one's position in society.* Learning about others helps us to understand ourselves. Real people with real lives struggle with decisions just like you do. They have values, and beliefs that govern their choices. Listening to the voices of people who are different can lead to different ways of seeing the world. Developing self-awareness may also lead to an increased awareness of being caught up in the political, economic, and historical systems that are not associated with an individual's choice.

As you ponder your reasons for studying intercultural communication, it is hoped that you make a conscious effort to become more aware of the communication practices of yourself and others. Much of the communication principles and theories that you learn about in this book occur at a subconscious level. As you learn more, challenge yourself to develop observation skills so you can "see" more. As you learn more, become more flexible in your interpretation of the messages that you are receiving from others. As you learn more, begin to create meaning "with" others and avoid dictating "to" others. The study of intercultural communication is the study of the variation of your story within the human story. Let's get started.

Key Terms

- **Intercultural Communication** – The study of how culture influences communication behaviors and interpretations.
- **Proxemics** – Edward T. Hall's concept describing how people use personal space.
- **High-Context Culture** – Cultures where meaning is derived heavily from context, relationships, and nonverbal cues.

- **Low-Context Culture** – Cultures where meaning is conveyed primarily through explicit verbal messages.
- **Monochronic Time** – A cultural orientation that values doing one task at a time and adhering to schedules.
- **Polychronic Time** – A cultural orientation that values multitasking and flexible time use.
- **Imperatives** – Six compelling reasons to study intercultural communication: peace, demographic, economic, technological, ethical, and self-awareness.
- **Peace Imperative** – The need to understand cultural differences to reduce conflict and improve coexistence.
- **Demographic Imperative** – The impact of changing population patterns, immigration, and diversity on communication.
- **Economic Imperative** – The need to understand global markets and cultural differences to function in a globalized economy.
- **Technological Imperative** – How technology increases global contact and shapes identity, access, and communication patterns.
- **Ethical Imperative** – The need to understand cultural values and moral frameworks when making decisions across cultures.
- **Self-Awareness Imperative** – Understanding one's own cultural identity and biases to communicate more effectively.
- **Ethnocentrism** – The belief that one's own culture is superior to others.
- **Self-Reflexivity** – The process of examining one's own cultural assumptions and social position.
- **Heterogeneous** – A population or group characterized by cultural differences.
- **Homogeneous** – A population or group characterized by cultural similarities.
- **Melting Pot** – A metaphor suggesting immigrants assimilate into a dominant culture (considered a myth by most researchers).
- **Tossed Salad** – A metaphor suggesting cultural groups retain distinct identities while contributing to a larger whole.
- **Diasporic Groups** – Ethnic or national groups dispersed across different countries who maintain cultural connections through communication.

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2.3: Types of Human Communication

Intercultural communication's theories and practice sit atop a body of earlier work in the field. This chapter offers an overview of these concepts and frameworks. As you review them, think ahead to the future chapters by asking yourself: "How might this situation or scenario be changed if there were cultural differences?"

Figure **2.3.1**: Levels of Communication

Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication refers to communication phenomena that exist within or occur because of an individual's self or mind. Some forms of intrapersonal communication can resemble a conversation one has with one's self. This "self-talk" often is used as a way to help us make decisions or make sense of the world around us. Maybe you've gone to the grocery store, and you're repeating your grocery list over and over in your head to make sure you don't forget anything. Maybe at the end of the day, you keep a diary or journal where you keep track of everything that has happened that day. Or perhaps you're having a debate inside your head on what major you should pick. You keep weighing the pros and cons of different majors, and you use this internal debate to help you flesh out your thoughts and feelings on the subject. All three of these examples help illustrate some of what is covered by the term "intrapersonal communication."

Today scholars view the term "intrapersonal communication" a little more broadly than just the internal self-talk we engage in. Communication scholar Samuel Riccillo primarily discusses intrapersonal communication as a factor of biology.[14] Under this perspective, we must think about the biological underpinnings of how we can communicate. The human brain is probably the single most crucial physiological part of human interactions. We know that how people communicate can be greatly impacted by their brains. As such, our definition of intrapersonal communication is broad enough to include both traditional discussions of self-talk and more modern examinations of how the human body helps or hinders our ability to communicate effectively.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication, which is what this book is all about, focuses on the exchange of messages between two people. Our days are full of interpersonal communication.

You wake up, roll over, and say good morning to your significant other, then you've had your first interpersonal interaction of the day. You meet your best friend for coffee before work and discuss the ins and outs of children's lives; you're engaging in interpersonal communication again. You go to work and collaborate with a coworker on a project; once again, you're engaging in interpersonal communication. You then shoot off an email to your babysitter, reminding him to drop by the house at seven so you and your partner can have a night out. Yep, this is interpersonal communication, too. You drop by your doctor's office for your annual physical, and the two of you talk about any health issues; this is also a form of interpersonal communication. You text your child to remind him that he has play practice at 5:00 pm and then needs to come home immediately afterward; you've engaged in interpersonal interaction. Hopefully, you're beginning to realize that our days are filled with tons of interpersonal interactions.

Some scholars also refer to interpersonal communication as dyadic communication because it involves two people or a dyad. As you saw above, the type of dyad can range from intimate partners, to coworkers, to doctor-patient, to friends, to parent-child, and many other dyadic partnerships. We can engage in these interactions through verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and mediated communication. When we use words during our interaction to convey specific meaning, then we're engaging in verbal communication. Nonverbal communication, on the other hand, refers to a range of other factors that can impact how we understand each other—for example, the facial expressions you have. You could be talking to your best friend over coffee about a coworker and "his problems" while rolling your eyes to emphasize how overly dramatic and nonsensical you find the person. A

great deal of how we interpret the verbal message of someone is based on the nonverbal messages sent at the same time. Lastly, we engage in interpersonal interactions using mediated technologies like the cellphone, emailing, texts, Facebook posts, Tweets, etc. Your average professional spends a great deal of her day responding to emails that come from one person, so the email exchange is a form of interpersonal communication.

Small Group Communication

The next type of communication studied by communication scholars is **small group communication**. Although different scholars will differ on the exact number of people that make a group, we can say that a **group** is at least three people interacting with a common goal. Sometimes these groups could be as large as 15, but larger groups become much harder to manage and end up with more problems. One of the hallmarks of a small group is the ability for all the group members to engage in interpersonal interactions with all the other group members.

We engage in small groups throughout our lives. Chances are you've engaged in some kind of group project for a grade while you've been in school. This experience may have been a great one or a horrible one, depending on the personalities within the group, the ability of the group to accomplish the goal, the in-fighting of group members, and many other factors. Whether you like group work or not, you will engage in many groups (some effective and some ineffective) over your lifespan. We're all born into a family, which is a specific type of group relationship. When you were younger, you may have been in play-groups. As you grew older, you had groups of friends you did things with. As you enter into the professional world, you will probably be on some kind of work "team," which is just a specialized type of group. In other words, group communication is a part of life.

Public Communication

The next category of communication is called **public communication**. Public communication occurs when an individual or group of individuals sends a specific message to an audience. This one-to-many way of communicating is often necessary when groups become too large to maintain interactions with all group members. One of the most common forms of public communication is public speaking. As I am writing this chapter, we are right in the middle of the primary season for the 2020 Presidential election. People of all political stripes have been attending candidate speeches in record-breaking numbers this year.

The size of the audience one speaks to will impact how someone delivers a speech. If you're giving a speech to ten people, you'll have the ability to watch all of your audience members and receive real-time feedback as people nod their heads in agreement or disagreement. On the other hand, if you're speaking to 10,000+ people at once, a speaker cannot watch all of their audience members and get feedback. With a smaller audience, a speaker can adapt their message on the fly as they interpret audience feedback.

With a larger audience, a speaker is more likely to deliver a very prepared speech that does not alter based on individual audience members' feedback. Although this book is not a public speaking book, we would recommend that anyone take a public speaking class, because it's such an essential and valuable skill in the 21st Century. As we are bombarded with more and more messages, being an effective speaker is more important today than ever before.

Mediated Communication

The final type of communication is **mediated communication**, or the use of some form of technology to facilitate information between two or more people. We already mentioned a few forms of mediated communication when we talked about interpersonal communication: phone calls, emails, text messaging, etc. In each of these cases, mediated technology is utilized to facilitate the share of information between two people.

Most mediated communication occurs because technology functions as the link between someone sending information and someone receiving information. For example, you go online and look up the statistics from last night's baseball game. The website you choose is the link between you and the reporter who authored the information. In the same way, if you looked up these same results in a newspaper, the newspaper would be the link between you and the reporter who wrote the article. The technology may have changed from print to electronic journalism, but the basic concept is still very much alive.

Today we are surrounded by a ton of different media options. Some common examples include cable, satellite television, the World Wide Web, content streaming services (i.e., Netflix, Hulu, etc.), social media, magazines, voice over internet protocol (VoIP – Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.), and many others. We have more forms of mediated communication today than we have ever had before in history. Most of us will only experience and use a fraction of the mediated communication technologies that are available for us today.

Key Terms

- **Intrapersonal Communication** – Communication processes that occur within an individual's own mind, including reflection, decision-making, and internal dialogue.
- **Self-Talk** – The internal conversation people have with themselves to guide decisions, process experiences, or organize thoughts.
- **Biological Underpinnings of Communication** – The physiological and neurological factors (especially brain function) that enable or shape communication abilities.
- **Interpersonal Communication** – The exchange of messages between two people in everyday interactions.
- **Dyadic Communication** – A form of interpersonal communication that occurs specifically between two individuals (a dyad).
- **Verbal Communication** – The use of spoken or written words to convey meaning during interactions.
- **Nonverbal Communication** – Communication expressed through facial expressions, gestures, tone, posture, and other non-linguistic cues.
- **Mediated Communication** – Communication that occurs through technology such as phones, email, texting, or social media platforms.
- **Small Group Communication** – Interaction among at least three people working toward a shared goal, where members can still engage interpersonally.
- **Group Dynamics** – The behaviors, roles, and interaction patterns that influence how a group functions and achieves goals.
- **Common Goal (in groups)** – The shared objective that unites group members and guides their collaborative communication.
- **Public Communication** – One-to-many communication in which a speaker or group addresses a larger audience.
- **One-to-Many Communication** – A communication format where a single sender delivers a message to a large audience, often without direct feedback.
- **Audience Feedback** – The verbal or nonverbal responses from listeners that help a speaker adjust or evaluate their message.
- **Communication Technologies** – Tools and platforms (e.g., VoIP, streaming services, social media) that facilitate mediated communication.

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2.4: Basic Principles of Human Communication

Communication Is Symbolic

The origin of the word **communication** can be traced back to the Latin word *communico*, which is translated to mean "to join or unite," "to connect," "to participate in" or "to share with all." This root word is the same one from which we get not only the word *communicate*, but also *common*, *commune*, *communion*, and *community*. Thus, we can define communication as a process by which we share ideas or information with other people. We commonly think of communication as talking, but it is much broader than just speech. Other characteristics of voice communicate messages, and we communicate, as well, with eyes, facial expressions, hand gestures, body position, and movement. Let us examine some basic principles about how we communicate with one another.

The goal of this class and textbook is to improve your skills and point you towards mastery of the core ideas in intercultural communication.

But as anyone who has mastered a skill or subject, the fundamentals come first and always inform even the most esoteric levels of knowledge. World-class musicians still have to practice to retain their skills, and so it is that we, too, must be well grounded in the foundational concepts and vocabulary of communication.

Later chapters will pull all this together when we consider the specific contexts of education, business, and medicine. But you can anticipate these areas by thinking about your experiences in those specific contexts, especially interactions that involved people you found mysterious and behavior that seemed puzzling. Keep track of these thoughts and bring them to our class discussions.

Have you ever noticed that we can hear or look at something like the word "cat" and immediately know what those three letters mean? From the moment you enter grade school, you are taught how to recognize sequences of letters that form words that help us understand the world. With these words, we can create sentences, paragraphs, and books like this one. The letters used to create the word "cat" and then the word itself is what communication scholars call symbols. A **symbol** is a mark, object, or sign that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention.

Let's think about one of the most important words commonly tossed around, love. The four letters that make of the word "l," "o," "v," and "e," are visual symbols that, when combined, form the word "love," which is a symbol associated with intense regard or liking. For example, I can "love" chocolate. However, the same four-letter word has other meanings attached to it as well. For example, "love" can represent a deeply intimate relationship or a romantic/sexual attachment. In the first case, we could love our parents/guardians and friends, but in the second case, we experience love as a factor of a deep romantic/sexual relationship. So these are just three associations we have with the same symbol, love. In Figure 1.2.1, we see American Sign Language (ASL) letters for the word "love." In this case, the hands themselves represent symbols for English letters, which is an agreed upon convention of users of ASL to represent "love."

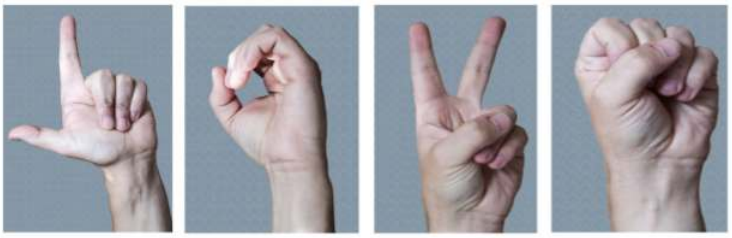

Figure **2.4.1**: Child Using ASL to Sign Love

Symbols can also be visual representations of ideas and concepts. For example, look at the symbols in Figure 1.2.2 of various social media icons. In this image, you see symbols for a range of different social media sites, including Facebook (lowercase "f"), Twitter (the bird), Snap Chat (the ghost image), and many others. Admittedly, the icon for YouTube uses its name.

The Symbol is Not the Thing

Now that we've explained what symbols are, we should probably offer a few very important guides. First, the symbol is not the thing that it is representing. For example, the word "dog" is not a member of the canine family that greets you when you come home every night. If we look back at those symbols listed in Figure 1.2.1, those symbols are not the organizations themselves. The "p" with a circle around it is not Pinterest. The actual thing that is "Pinterest" is a series of computer code that exists on the World Wide Web that allows us, people, to interact.

Figure **2.4.2**: Social Media Icons

Arbitrariness of Symbols

How we assign symbols is entirely arbitrary. For example, in Figure 1.2.3, we see two animals that are categorized under the symbols "dog" and "cat." In this image, the "dog" is on the left side, and the "cat" is on the right side. The words we associate with these animals only exist because we have said it's so for many, many years. Back when humans were labeling these animals, we could just have easily called the one on the left "cat" and the one on the right "dog," but we didn't. If we called the animal on the left "cat," would that change the nature of what that animal is? Not really. The only thing that would change is the symbol we have associated with that animal.

Figure **2.4.3**: Dog and Cat

Let's look at another symbolic example you are probably familiar with – :). The "smiley" face or the two pieces of punctuation (colon followed by closed parentheses) is probably the most notable symbol used in Internet communication. This symbol may seem like it's everywhere today, but it's only existed since September 1982. In early September 1982, a joke was posted on an electronic bulletin board about a fake chemical spill at Carnegie Mellon University. At the time, there was no easy way to distinguish between serious versus non-serious information. A computer scientist named Scott E. Fahlman entered the debate with the following message:

The Original Emoticons

I propose that [sic] the following character sequence for joke markers:

:-)

> Read it sideways. Actually, it is probably more economical to mark things that are NOT jokes, given current trends. For this, use:
>
> :-(

Thus the first emoticon, a sequence of keyboard characters used to represent facial expressions or emotions, was born. Even the universal symbol for happiness, the yellow circle with the smiling face, had only existed since 1963 when graphic artist Harvey Ross Ball created it. The happy face was created as a way to raise employee morale at State Mutual Life Assurance Company of Worcester, Massachusetts. Of course, when you merge the happy face with emoticons, we eventually ended up with emojis (Figure 1.2.4). Of course, many people today just take emojis for granted without ever knowing their origin at all.

Figure **2.4.4**: Emojis

Communication Is Shared Meaning

Hopefully, in our previous discussion about symbols, you noticed that although the assignment of symbols to real things and ideas is arbitrary, our understanding of them exists because we agree to their meaning. If we were talking and I said, “it’s time for tea,” you may think that I’m going to put on some boiling water and pull out the oolong tea. However, if I said, “it’s time for tea” in the United Kingdom, you would assume that we were getting ready for our evening meal. Same word, but two very different meanings depending on the culture within which one uses the term. In the United Kingdom, high tea (or meat tea) is the evening meal. Dinner, on the other hand, would represent the large meal of the day, which is usually eaten in the middle of the day. Of course, in the United States, we refer to the middle of the day meal as lunch and often refer to the evening meal as dinner (or supper).

Let’s imagine that you were recently at a party. Two of your friends had recently attended the same Broadway play together. You ask them “how the play was,” and here’s how the first friend responded:

> So, we got to the theatre 20 minutes early to ensure we were able to get comfortable and could do some people watching before the show started. The person sitting in front of us had the worst comb-over I had ever seen. Halfway through Act 1, the hair was flopping back in our laps like the legs of a spider. I mean, those strands of hair had to be 8 to 9 inches long and came down on us like it was pleading with us to rescue it. Oh, and this one woman who was sitting to our right was wearing this huge fur hat-turban thing on her head. It looked like some kind of furry animal crawled up on her head and died. I felt horrible for the poor guy that was sitting behind her because I’m sure he couldn’t see anything over or around that thing.

Here’s is how your second friend described the experience:

> I thought the play was good enough. It had some guy from the UK who tried to have a Brooklyn accent that came in and out. The set was pretty cool though. At one point, the set turned from a boring looking office building into a giant tree. That was pretty darn cool. As for the overall story, it was good, I guess. The show just wasn’t something I would normally see.

In this case, you have the same experience described by two different people. We are only talking about the experience each person had in an abstract sense. In both cases, you had friends reporting on the same experience but from their perceptions of the experience. With your first friend, you learn more about what was going on around your friend in the theater but not about the show itself. The second friend provided you with more details about her perception of the play, the acting, the scenery, and the story. Did we learn anything about the content of the “play” through either conversation? Not really.

Many of our conversations resemble this type of experience recall. In both cases, we have two individuals who are attempting to share with us through communication specific ideas and meanings. However, sharing meaning is not always very easy. In both cases, you asked your friends, “how the play was.” In the first case, your friend interpreted this phrase as being asked about their experience at the theater itself. In the second case, your friend interpreted your phrase as being a request for her opinion or critique of the play. As you can see in this example, it’s easy to get very different responses based on how people interpret what you are asking.

Communication scholars often say that “meanings aren’t in words, they’re in people” because of this issue related to interpretation. Yes, there are dictionary definitions of words. Earlier in this chapter, we provided three different dictionary-type definitions for the word “love:” 1) intense regard or liking, 2) a deeply intimate relationship, or 3) a romantic/sexual attachment. These types of definitions we often call denotative definitions. However, it’s important to understand that in addition to **denotative definitions**, there are also **connotative definitions**, or the emotions or associations a person makes when exposed to a symbol. For example, how one personally understands or experiences the word “love” is connotative. The warm feeling you get, the memories of experiencing love, all come together to give you a general, personalized understanding of the word itself. One of the biggest problems that occur is when one person’s denotative meaning conflicts with another person’s connotative meaning. For example, when I write the word “dog,” many of you think of four-legged furry family members. If you’ve never been a dog owner, you may just generally think about these animals as members of the canine family. If, however, you’ve had a bad experience with a dog in the past, you may have very negative feelings that could lead you to feel anxious or experience dread when you hear the word “dog.” As another example, think about clowns. Some people see clowns as cheery characters associated with the circus and birthday parties. Other people are genuinely terrified by clowns. Both the dog and clown cases illustrate how we can have symbols that have different meanings to different people.

Communication Involves Intentionality

One area that often involves a bit of controversy in the field of communication is what is called intentionality. Intentionality asks whether an individual purposefully intends to interact with another person and attempt shared meaning. Each time you communicate with others, there is intentionality involved. You may want to offer your opinions or thoughts on a certain topic. However, intentionality is an important concept in communication.

Think about times where you might have talked aloud without realizing another person could hear you. Communication can occur at any time. When there is intent among the parties to converse with each other, then it makes the communication more effective.

Others argue that you “cannot, not communicate.” This idea notes that we are always communicating with those around us. As we’ll talk more about later in this book, communication can be both verbal (the words we speak) and nonverbal (gestures, use of space, facial expressions, how we say words, etc.). From this perspective, our bodies are always in a state of nonverbal communication, whether it’s intended or not. Maybe you’ve walked past someone’s office and saw them hunched over at their desk, staring at a computer screen. Based on the posture of the other person, you decide not to say “hi” because the person looks like they are deep in thought and probably busy. In this case, we interpret the person’s nonverbal communication as saying, “I’m busy.” In reality, that person could just as easily be looking at Facebook and killing time until someone drops by and says, “hi.”

Dimensions of Communication

When we communicate with other people, we must always remember that our communication is interpreted at multiple levels. Two common dimensions used to ascertain meaning during communication are relational and content

Relational Dimension

Every time we communicate with others, there is a relational dimension. You can communicate in a tone of friendship, love, hatred, and so forth. This is indicated in how you communicate with your receiver. Think about the phrase, “You are crazy!” It means different things depending on the source of the message. For instance, if your boss said it, you might take it harsher than if your close friend said it to you. You are more likely to receive a message more accurately when you can define the type of relationship

that you have with this person. Hence, your relationship with the person determines how you are more likely to interpret the message. Take another example of the words “I want to see you now!” These same words might mean different things if it comes from your boss or if it comes from your lover. You will know that if your boss wants to see you, then it is probably an urgent matter that needs your immediate attention. However, if your lover said it, then you might think that they miss you and can’t bear the thought of being without you for too long.

Content Dimension

In the same fashion, every time we speak, we have a content dimension. The content dimension is the information that is stated explicitly in the message. When people focus on the content of a message, then ignore the relationship dimension. They are focused on the specific words that were used to convey the message. For instance, if you ran into an ex-lover who said “I’m happy for you” about your new relationship. You might wonder what that phrase means. Did it mean that your ex was truly happy for you, or that they were happy to see you in a new relationship, or that your ex thinks that you are happy? One will ponder many interpretations of the message, especially if a relationship is not truly defined.

Another example might be a new acquaintance who talks about how your appearance looks “interesting.” You might be wondering if your new friend is sarcastic, or if they just didn’t know a nicer way of expressing their opinion. Because your relationship is so new, you might think about why they decided to pick that term over another term. Hence, the content of a message impacts how it is received.

Communication Is a Process

The word “process” refers to the idea that something is ongoing, dynamic, and changing with a purpose or towards some end. A communication scholar named David K. Berlo was the first to discuss human communication as a process back in 1960.[11] We’ll examine Berlo’s ideas in more detail in Chapter 2, but for now, it’s important to understand the basic concept of communication as a process. From Berlo’s perspective, communication is a series of ongoing interactions that change over time. For example, think about the number of “inside jokes” you may have with your best friend. Sometimes you can get to the point where all you say is one word, and both of you can crack up laughing. This level of familiarity and short-hand communication didn’t exist when you first met but has developed over time. Ultimately, the more interaction you have with someone, the more your relationship with that person will evolve.

Communication Is Culturally Determined

The word culture refers to a “group of people who through a process of learning can share perceptions of the world that influences their beliefs, values, norms, and rules, which eventually affect behavior.”[12] Let’s breakdown this definition. First, it’s essential to recognize that culture is something we learn. From the moment we are born, we start to learn about our culture. We learn culture from our families, our schools, our peers, and many other sources as we age. Specifically, we learn perceptions of the world. We learn about morality. We learn about our relationship with our surroundings. We learn about our places in a greater society. These perceptions ultimately influence what we believe, what we value, what we consider “normal,” and what rules we live by. For example, many of us have beliefs, values, norms, and rules that are directly related to the religion in which we were raised. As an institution, religion is often one of the dominant factors of culture around the world.

Let’s start by looking at how religion can impact beliefs. Your faith can impact what you believe about the nature of life and death. For some, depending on how you live, you’ll either go to a happy place (Heaven, Nirvana, Elysium, etc.) or a negative place (Hell, Samsara, Tartarus, etc.). We should mention that Samsara is less a “place” and more the process of reincarnation as well as one’s actions and consequences from the past, present, and future.

Religion can also impact what you value. Cherokee are taught to value the earth and the importance of keep balance with the earth. Judaic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc.), on the other hand, teach that humans have been placed on earth to dominate and control the earth. As such, the value is more on what the earth can provide than on ensuring harmony with nature.

Example 2.4.1

Culture's influence on interpreting meaning can be seen in this story

The “Yes” That Didn’t Mean Yes

A classic intercultural communication anecdote from business scholar Roger Axtell

Roger Axtell, an expert on international business etiquette, recounts a well-known story about an American engineering team working with Japanese partners on a joint project. During a technical meeting, the American lead asked the Japanese team whether a proposed design change was acceptable. Several Japanese engineers nodded politely and said “yes.”

The Americans took this as agreement and moved forward.

Weeks later, they discovered that the Japanese team had *not* agreed at all. The nodding and the word “yes” had meant something entirely different:

- **“Yes, we hear you.”**
- **“Yes, we acknowledge your question.”**
- **Not** “Yes, we agree.”

In Japanese communication norms, open disagreement in a formal meeting—especially with partners or superiors—is considered rude and disruptive. Instead, disagreement is expressed indirectly, often through silence, hesitation, or follow-up conversations.

The Americans interpreted the symbol “yes” through their own cultural lens (direct, explicit agreement). The Japanese engineers used the same symbol to convey something else entirely (polite acknowledgment).

The result? A costly misunderstanding rooted not in incompetence, but in **different cultural meanings assigned to the same symbol**.

Axtell, R. E. (1998).

Religion can also impact what you view as “normal.” Many adherents to Islam stress the importance of female modesty, so it is normal for women to cover their heads when in public or completely cover their entire bodies from head to toe. On the other hand, one branch of Raëlianism promotes a pro-sex feminist stance where nudity and sex work are normal and even celebrated.

Different religions have different rules that get created and handed down. For most Western readers, the most famous set of rules is probably the Judaic Tradition’s Ten Commandments. Conversely, Hindus have a text of religious laws transmitted in the Vedas. Most major religions have, at some point or another, had religious texts that became enshrined laws within those societies.

Finally, these beliefs, values, norms, and rules ultimately impact how all of us interact and behave with others. For example, because of the Islamic rules on and norms about female modesty, in many Islamic countries, women cannot speak with men unless they are directly related to them by birth or marriage. The critical part to remember about these actual behaviors is that we often have no idea how (and to what degree) our culture influences our communicative behavior until we are interacting with someone from a culture that differs from ours. We’ll talk more about issues of intercultural interpersonal interactions later in this text.

Communication Occurs in a Context

Another factor that influences how we understand others is the context, the circumstance, environment, setting, and/or situation surrounding an interaction. Most people learning about context are generally exposed during elementary school when you are trying to figure out the meaning of a specific word. You may have seen a complicated word and been told to use “context clues” to understand what the word means. In the same vein, when we analyze how people are communicating, we must understand the context of that communication.

Imagine you’re hanging out at your local restaurant, and you hear someone at the next table say, “I can’t believe that guy. He’s always out in left field!” As an American idiom, we know that “out in left field” generally refers to something unexpected or unusual. The term stems out of baseball because the player who hangs out in left field has the farthest to throw to get a baseball back to the first baseman in an attempt to tag out a runner. However, if you were listening to this conversation in farmland, you could be hearing someone describe a specific geographic location (e.g., “He was out in left field chasing after a goat who stumbled that way”). In this case, context does matter.

Communication Is Purposeful

We communicate for different reasons. We communicate in an attempt to persuade people. We communicate to get people to like us. We communicate to express our liking of other people. We could list different reasons why we communicate with other people. Often we may not even be aware of the specific reason or need we have for communicating with others.

Key Terms

- **Communication** – The process of sharing ideas or information through verbal and nonverbal means.
- **Symbol** – A mark, object, or sign that represents something else by association or convention.
- **Denotative Meaning** – The dictionary definition of a word or symbol.
- **Connotative Meaning** – The personal or emotional associations tied to a word or symbol.
- **Intentionality** – The purposeful act of trying to share meaning through communication.
- **Nonverbal Communication** – Communication without words, using gestures, facial expressions, posture, etc.
- **Verbal Communication** – Communication using spoken or written language.
- **Shared Meaning** – Mutual understanding created when communicators agree on the meaning of symbols.
- **Relational Dimension** – The emotional tone or relationship context that influences message interpretation.
- **Content Dimension** – The explicit information conveyed in a message.
- **Process** – Communication as an ongoing, dynamic interaction that evolves over time.
- **Culture** – A learned system of shared perceptions, values, norms, and behaviors within a group.
- **Context** – The environment, situation, or setting that shapes how communication is interpreted.
- **Arbitrariness of Symbols** – The idea that symbols have meaning only because we assign it to them.
- **Emoticon** – A sequence of keyboard characters used to represent facial expressions or emotions.
- **Emoji** – A digital image or icon used to express ideas or emotions in electronic communication.
- **Intercultural Communication** – The exchange of information between people from different cultural backgrounds.
- **Community** – A group united by shared communication, values, or goals.
- **Perception** – The way individuals interpret and make sense of symbols and messages.
- **Purposeful Communication** – Communication driven by specific goals like persuasion, connection, or expression.

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2.5: Models of Communication

Complex and abstract ideas are often best understood by using models. Models usually are associated with a theory, and as we've seen, models and theories often build on one another. This usually results in a more nuanced--and complex--view of the process being studied. Notice when reading about the models below how they have more components and take into account more variables. Since intercultural communication is more nuanced and complex, you can expect more detailed models as we move forward. Even so, the simple models have value in getting us going on looking into how communication unfolds.

Linear Model

There are many models of communication, and there are many components within these models that will be discussed in detail throughout this chapter.

One of the earliest models of communication in the Western world was the **linear model of communication**, which shows that a communication event took place. It contains one sender of the message and the message itself being sent to one receiver, as shown in Figure **2.5.1**. The message is encoded (created) by the sender and sent out via the channel, then received by the receiver. This model does not include the concept of feedback as an integral component. One of the criticisms of the linear model is that it lacks the component feedback and the idea that meaning is created amongst communicators.

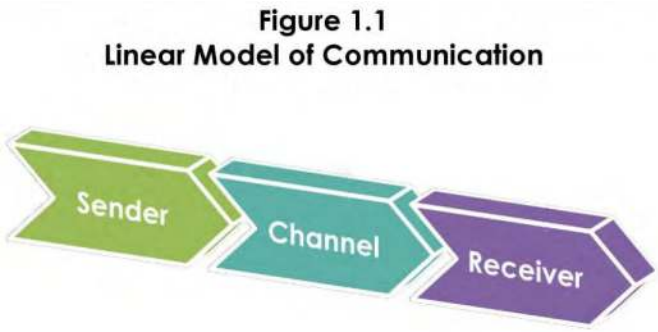


Figure **2.5.1**: Linear Model of Communication on Public Speaking Project is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

Interactional Model

Over time the linear model has evolved into the **interactional model of communication**. This newer model takes into account that for there to be a sender of communication, there needs to be a receiver who takes an active role in the communication event. The interactional model of communication, as shown in Figure **2.5.2**, has both the sender and receiver actively using feedback so that communication is no longer seen as simply linear. However, this model lacks the co-creation of meaning that takes place in true communication interactions.

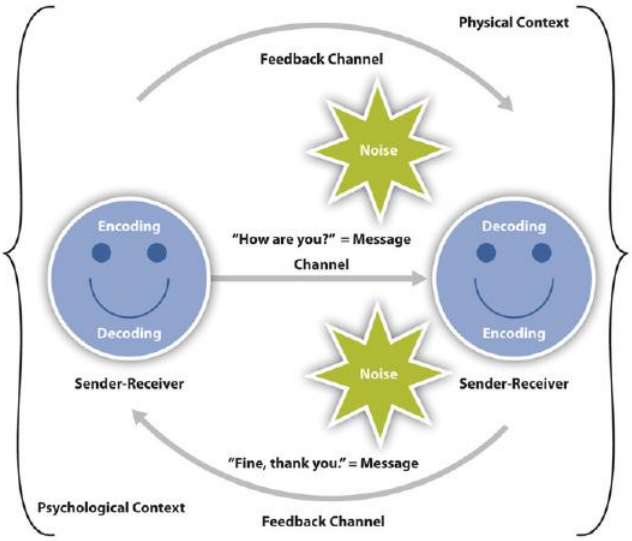


Figure 2.5.2: Interactional Model of Communication on Survey of Human Communication is licensed under CC BY 3.0

When a pilot is getting ready to take off, they must listen to Air Traffic Control (ATC) on their radio to hear what is happening on the runway. When they are ready to take off, they will press a button inside the cockpit to send a request to ATC for clearance. When they are done, they have to release the button so they can hear the response from ATC. If they continue to hold down the button, they won't be able to receive a message and ATC won't be able to hear any other messages. The communication between pilots and ATC is linear; it can only go one way. You can either send or receive a message; you cannot do both. For a long time this is how we thought about human communication. There is a **sender** (the pilot), who encodes a **message** ("request takeoff") and sends it via a **channel** (radio) to the **receiver** (ATC), who then decodes the message. While this might be an accurate way to describe a two-way radio conversation, it is not an accurate reflection of human communication in general. When the pilot is sending a message to ATC, the pilot is also receiving messages simultaneously from a co-pilot or other crew. Likewise, the ATC contact is managing a number of different aircraft as well as coworkers in the tower. Communication is not linear. We are simultaneously sending and receiving, encoding and decoding, and managing several channels across contexts, all while we try to block out noise. Today, we have moved past this linear model of communication to embrace a transactional model.

Transactional Model

The current **transactional model of communication** was created to showcase the entirety of what humans experience when we communicate with one another, as shown in Figure 2.5.3.

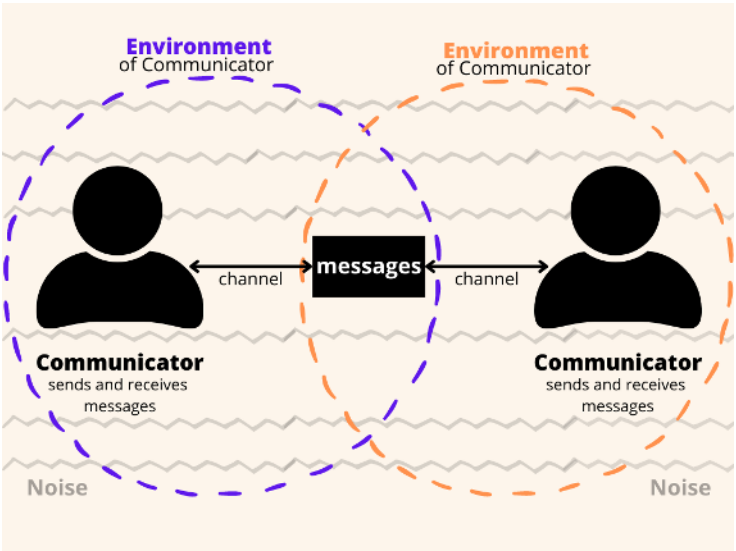


Figure 2.5.3: Transactional Model of Communication by Elizabeth Encarnacion is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

The transactional model better acknowledges the complex nature of communication. Let's take some time to break down the individual parts. First, rather than identifying the individual parties as sender and receiver, the transactional model simply refers to the parties involved as **communicators**.

Communicators

The communicators are simultaneously encoding and decoding throughout the exchange. **Encoding** occurs when an individual constructs a message using symbols; **decoding** happens when someone attempts to interpret the message. We create messages in our heads and then decide how to share those messages with others. Simultaneously, we are taking in messages from our communication partners, and trying to derive meaning from their feedback. The concepts of noise and feedback must taken into account as this occurs. The transactional model shows how meaning is co-created and feedback is at the core of shared meaning as all communicators are acting as senders and receivers in a synchronized manner.

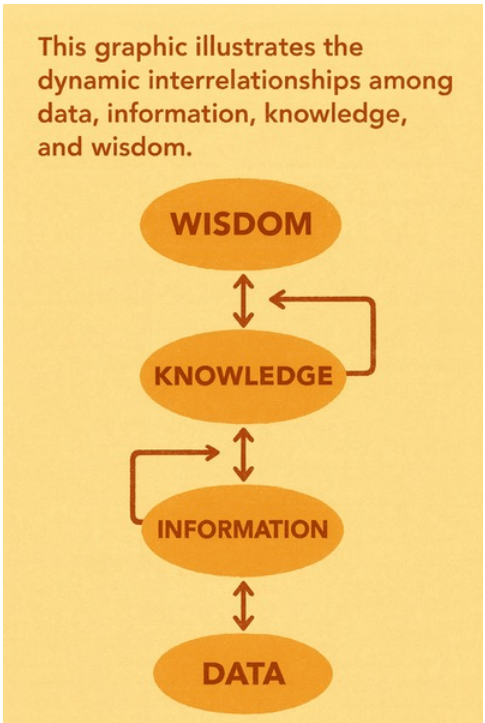
Take for instance a scenario where you have come home from work and your roommate is home. You are tired but the monthly bills will be late if they are not paid. You make eye contact with your roommate and verbally ask your roommate if they have a minute. You have already begun the transaction of communication. In this scenario you are both communicators. You use verbal and nonverbal means of communicating. You knew it was imperative to discuss the bills and your mind started to create or **encode** messages. While you made eye contact and verbalized a message, your roommate was actively communicating with you. Did they make eye contact? What did this say to you? We are actively decoding and encoding simultaneously. **Decoding** in this scenario may be lack of eye contact or focused eye contact. We are attempting to make meaning from messages we receive while creating messages or responses. The feedback we give can be verbal and nonverbal. Perhaps your roommate had a tone that you interpret as irritated, which then changes how you respond. This message negotiation helps us co-create meaning. Understanding how each role in the model affects communication can help us to understand our communication and how to become behaviorally flexible and thereby competent communicators.

Message

The **message** is the meaning or content that one communicator is attempting to get the other to understand. The message can be verbal or nonverbal. A Verbal message is one that uses language. When a customer walks into a coffee shop and the barista says "good morning," they are using language to express their message. Verbal messages can be spoken or written. If the message is nonverbal then there is an absence of language. When the customer walks into the coffee shop and the barista waves their hand, they have conveyed a similar message nonverbally because no language was used. Often the message contains both: for example, if they wave and say "good morning," the message is both verbal and nonverbal.

Channel

In order for a communicator to send a message they must use a channel. The **channel** is how a message moves from one communicator to another, through different mediums of communication that extend the richness or leanness of the message. In the previous example the channel is face-to-face. This channel is the richest because it allows for all kinds of messages. We can hear, see, smell, touch, etc. so we can send all kinds of different messages. Every other channel limits the kinds of messages that we can send. For example, you could place a coffee order online through an app on your phone. In this case, you won't talk to the barista or see them wave or smile, but they will still get your specific order. Technology has vastly expanded the number of different channels that we have to communicate with one another. For instance, after you pick up your coffee you can snap a picture and post it on Instagram or text a friend to show them how your name was misspelled. Each of these channels influences the kinds of messages and the potential communicators. The relationship between these different components of communication will be something we return to as we learn more about interpersonal communication.



Feedback

Feedback is a large part of how we co-create understanding by negotiating meaning, clarifying messages, and adding to our messages. We do this verbally and nonverbally. This occurs in face-to-face communication and in computer-mediated communication, or communication via electronic means. That may sound odd at first, but let's say that you sent an important text message to your roommate about getting their share of the rent transferred today to avoid the rent being late. Your normally responsive roommate does not respond for hours. How might you interpret this feedback? In Chapter 5, you will learn about the nonverbal elements of communication, and more in-depth examples will show how feedback plays a crucial role in interpersonal communication.

Context

Communication requires communicators, at least one message, and a channel—but to limit the complexities of communication to just these three aspects would not give us a complete understanding of what communication truly is. Communication does not take place in a vacuum. Every time we communicate, we do so within larger contexts while also managing noise. We cannot separate the message and the channel from the larger contexts that the communicators are in. Each communication encounter is situated in a relational, environmental, and cultural **context** that impacts not only the individual people, but the communication itself.

Relational Context

When we communicate, there is a relational component involved that affects various aspects of the interaction, such as the message we send, the way we send it, and how the other person receives and interprets the message. The **relational context** is the relationship between the communicators that influences the other aspects of communication. While not all communication may seem to have a relational component involved, even a lack of relationship is part of the relational context and impacts the way we will communicate.

Relational contexts impact our communication in various ways. For example, If you miss a day of class, you might reach out to a classmate via text: “Hey, did I miss anything?” That same communication with your instructor would be very different because of the relationship between a student and professor. When you reach out to your professor, you might do so face-to-face or via email, and you might start by referring to them by name rather than “hey.” Because of the contextual nature of these relationships, peer-to-peer versus student-to-professor, we tend to treat the message differently because of the social norms and rules we have been taught growing up. For instance, we may show a small amount of respect to the instructor, including more detailed descriptions of why we missed class, and ask permission to turn in work late — as compared to texting our peers, where we might not feel the same level of responsibility to give that much detail.

While the relationship influences communication, the relational context will also be different for each communicator. Again, this will influence not only the content of the message, but also how the message is delivered. For example, one of the authors, as a teenager often used curse words at home when talking to their mother, because it was seen as acceptable in their relationship and within their family. However, a lot of their peers were shocked when they found this out. They would never dare use curse words with their parents. While the relational communication with the author's mother was different than other peers had with their parental relationships, it doesn’t mean one version of the communication was “wrong” and one was “right.” They were different given the different and varying relational contexts involved.

While there are some generalities regarding what may be socially acceptable for certain relationships and relational context, our individual relationships are unique and therefore so is the communication they have.

Environmental Context

Where we communicate also influences our communication. The **environmental context** includes the setting, the circumstance, the situation, etc. that influence communication. Since this context can include a variety of situational factors, it has an impact upon the complex nature in which our communication takes place. The environmental context affects the communication interaction by helping or hindering the communicators effectiveness in creating and responding to the messages.

If you wanted to have a serious conversation with a friend or significant other, it wouldn’t make sense to invite them out to a loud restaurant with live music. That kind of conversation would be better suited in a quiet and more intimate setting. This way the two of you could discuss the serious matter in private, where you wouldn’t have to worry about people overhearing, and you could be

more forthcoming. You could hear each other well and make sure you are paying attention, invested in the conversation, and not distracted by what's around you.

The circumstance of the communication encounter also dictates the appropriate nonverbal communication that is used. Take, for example, the appropriate attire one might wear to a funeral. In Western cultures like in the United States, family and friends in mourning will typically wear dark colors such as black, whereas, in East Asian cultures such as in Cambodia, white is the appropriate color worn to celebrate the reincarnation and circle of life of the person who has passed. Wearing white to a Western funeral or wearing black to an East Asian funeral would not be expected given the cultural norms of this type of event. The attire we wear and our appearance work as tools within our nonverbal communication to create meaning.

Cultural Context

Throughout the various relational contexts we may find ourselves in, and the various environments those relationships are happening in, the **cultural context** is always influencing our communication as well. **Culture** is defined as a group of people who share values, beliefs, norms, and a common language. Due to this shared way of thinking and behaving, people from the same culture often share similar perspectives on the world. Cultural context includes these learned perceptions of the world. What we find effective and/or appropriate in a given situation is greatly influenced by and influenced from our culture and cultural identity.

Some of the most basic understandings of culture and cultural context can be found in research conducted by Professor Geert Hofstede on cultural dimensions, which showcase six ways in which a culture's values, needs, and social behaviors are analyzed (Cho et. al, 2019). The six value dimensions that Hofstede established from their research are Collectivism versus Individualism, Nurturing versus Achievement, Power Distance (high or low), Uncertainty Avoidance (high or low), Time Orientation (long-term versus short-term), and Indulgence versus Restraint. The six value dimensions are explained in more detail in the sidebar titled "Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions."

Hofstede proposed that to understand how a particular culture utilizes communication, it is important to understand where its social behaviors lie on these dimensions. With regard to our understanding of interpersonal communication, these cultural dimensions are important building blocks in understanding the cultural context we may face when interacting within our relationships.

Cultural dimensions can be important in romantic relationships, where couples from two different cultures may have to learn each other's cultural norms in order to understand the ways their partner's family dynamics function as compared to their own. They can be also found in friendships, where each friend must respect and accept certain boundaries in the relationship because of their cultural differences, and in family relationships, where elder family members expect a certain level of respect and honor from younger generations. In order to promote understanding of our interpersonal relationships, fundamental understanding of our cultural differences is key.

Through dissecting the interpersonal scenarios that happen in our everyday life, we will explore the intersection between the relational context, environmental context, and most importantly, the cultural context to showcase the complex ways in which we communicate with others. While becoming a competent communicator includes a high amount of awareness, understanding, knowledge, and skill, it can help us build confidence and help to strengthen our relationships.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

The cultural dimensions are an excellent tool in beginning to analyze the different identity and cultural perspectives through a communicative lens. They allow us a small glimpse into the unique characteristics that make up the values, traditions, rituals, and practices of various cultures around the world. But just like each person is unique, so too is our understanding of cultural identity. It is difficult to place absolutes on human behavior, and therefore impossible to put absolutes on how someone's cultural identity will be displayed. While Hofstede's cultural dimensions are a beginning step in understanding interpersonal communication through a cultural lens, there are many more exciting steps to take along our learning journey.

Collectivism versus Individualism

The level of individual or group needs practiced within a culture. Collectivistic cultures are guided by collaborative support, interdependence, tight-knit large family structures, and a "we" identity. Individualistic cultures are guided by independence, autonomy, individuality, and the prioritization of immediate family structures over extended family structures.

Nurturing versus Achievement

The level of cooperation or competition practiced within a culture. Nurturing-based cultures are guided by concern for people and their well-being, emphasizing relationships and support. Achievement-based cultures are guided by markers of success such as material gain or status, and emphasize personal responsibility and stereotypical gender roles.

Power Distance (High or Low)

The level of, or distribution of, resources within a culture and the acceptance of those patterns of distribution from members of the culture. A high-power- distance culture emphasizes and accepts differences in status, title, hierarchy and authority. Cultures with low power distance have more equal divisions of power and do not put significance in titles, status, hierarchies, or authority.

Uncertainty Avoidance (High or Low)

The level to which a culture expects and accepts predictability, rules, regulations, and guidelines. A culture with high uncertainty avoidance will emphasize the need for rules and regulations. These cultures will find confidence in following guidelines and erring on the side of caution. A culture with low uncertainty avoidance will be more comfortable with variability, vagueness in rules or guidelines, riskiness, and adventure.

Time Orientation (Long-Term versus Short-Term)

The positionality of a culture's understanding of time being future-oriented or present-oriented. A culture with long-term orientation will be focused on instilling value in generational wisdom of elders, long-term relationships, and persistence as important to goal achievement. A culture with short-term time orientation focuses on short-term goals, having high respect for past traditions, and creating quick and efficient results.

Indulgence versus Restraint

The level to which a culture embodies the goals and virtues of personal happiness. A culture that is indulgent will be focused on individual satisfaction through leisure and personal freedom. A culture that values restraint emphasizes self-control and strict social norms, and individual freedoms like leisure are not valued as much as hard work and dedication.

Discussion Questions

1. Can you identify where you think you might fall within any of these cultural dimensions? Name the dimension and explain why.
2. Do you think having multiple cultural identities (for example, identifying as a Mexican American) will impact where you are in any one of these dimensions? Explain.
3. Have you had an instance where you can now see how a cultural dimension might have impacted your communication with someone in your life? Share your experience and the outcome of that interaction.

Noise

Figure 2.5.4: Loud by Elyas Pasban, Unsplash

Noise is the last part of the communication model. Noise is interesting because we do not need noise to communicate, but we cannot communicate without it. Noise is always present. **Noise** refers to anything that interrupts the communication process and prevents the message getting from one communicator to the other.

Physical Noise

Physical noise is anything in our environment that is loud enough to prevent one communicator from hearing the other. If you are at a large sporting event there is going to be a lot of physical noise that will interfere with your communication with the friend sitting next to you. In this case you will probably have to raise your voice to make sure they can hear you over the roar of the crowd, or the noise of the buzzer, etc. However, if you are texting with someone who is not with you, the loud noise wouldn't necessarily interfere with your conversation. Physical noise can interfere with the communication differently depending on the channel.

Psychological Noise

When we communicate, we not only have to manage the interference from cognitive noise, but we also have to keep from being distracted by our own internal noise. **Psychological noise** is noise within ourselves. For example, if you are reading a book but at the same time you are thinking about where you are going to meet up with friends later that night, your communication is being affected by psychological noise. You can physically read the whole page but not really decode the message within the page's content because you are distracted by your thoughts. Another example could be when you are walking into class and you receive a text message from a friend that you haven't heard from in a while. But because you are in class, you can't check your phone right away. So instead of being able to concentrate on the lecture, you are just thinking about what the text message could say. That message has now created psychological noise.

Physiological Noise

We also have physiological noise. This relates to our bodies on a physical level. Sometimes our bodies speak to us and that can be distracting. For instance, have you ever slept in a way that when you woke up your back or neck hurt? That discomfort may stay with us for hours and that prevents us from active listening or even taking in messages from other communicators. Maybe we have a cast on a broken bone and the itchy nature of that cast is consistently distracting. Any physical distraction that prevents us from taking in our communication partners' messages is considered **physiological noise**. Similarly, if you are sitting in class while the instructor is speaking but you are hungry because you didn't eat breakfast, your body's needs create thoughts that interfere with your ability to receive the message—and once again noise has impeded communication. This example shows both psychological and physiological noise both interfering with communication being received and understood.

Cultural Noise

Lastly, we have cultural noise. **Cultural noise** includes the barriers that exist among people from different cultural groups. This can range from speaking different languages, differences in meaning of nonverbal cues, or differences in cultural dimensions that create misunderstanding within relationships. Cultural noise creates obstacles in meaning that can become problematic in receiving

messages accurately and appropriately. One of the most difficult aspects of cultural noise is when we are unaware that it is impacting our ability to be competent in our communication, or when we are unaware that the cultural noise is present within the environment. For example, an American individual is interviewing for a company where the boss conducting the interview is Filipino. While the company resides in the United States, the boss identifies as collectivistic and finds value in creating a team that focuses on collaboration and group goal setting. The American interviewing for the company identifies as individualistic, and sees their greatest strengths as their self-reliance, freethinking, and having strong initiative. The individualistic person interviewing with the collectivistic boss may not understand the cultural noise that is being created within this situation by highlighting aspects of their work ethic and ability to do the job in ways that are not culturally valued by the person they are speaking to. This cultural noise creates miscommunication between the interviewer and interviewee in a way that would have negative outcomes of them not feeling this job was the right fit, while the interviewee doesn't get a chance to explain their ability and eagerness for teamwork.

Noise is always present in communication, but different types of noise interact with various channels and messages differently. No matter what noise is present, we must learn to manage it if we are going to communicate effectively. Now that you have a better understanding of the individual components of communication, we can turn our attention to the principles of communication.

Key Terms

1. **Linear Model of Communication** – A one-way communication model in which a sender encodes a message and transmits it through a channel to a receiver, without feedback.
2. **Interactional Model of Communication** – A two-way model where senders and receivers alternate roles and use feedback, but still do not co-create meaning simultaneously.
3. **Transactional Model of Communication** – A simultaneous, co-created communication process where all parties encode, decode, and provide feedback at the same time.
4. **Communicators** – Individuals in the transactional model who encode and decode messages simultaneously during interaction.
5. **Encoding** – The process of constructing a message using symbols before sending it to another communicator.
6. **Decoding** – The process of interpreting or making meaning from a received message.
7. **Message** – The content or meaning one communicator intends another to understand, expressed verbally or nonverbally.
8. **Verbal Message** – A message that uses spoken or written language to convey meaning.
9. **Nonverbal Message** – A message conveyed without language, such as through gestures, facial expressions, or tone.
10. **Channel** – The medium through which a message travels from one communicator to another (e.g., face-to-face, text, social media).
11. **Feedback** – Verbal or nonverbal responses that help communicators negotiate meaning and clarify messages.
12. **Context** – The relational, environmental, and cultural conditions surrounding a communication event that shape meaning.
13. **Relational Context** – The type of relationship between communicators that influences how messages are sent, interpreted, and received.
14. **Environmental Context** – The physical setting or situation that affects how communication occurs and how messages are interpreted.
15. **Cultural Context** – The shared values, beliefs, norms, and language of a cultural group that influence communication behaviors.
16. **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions** – A framework describing six cultural value dimensions that influence communication across cultures.
17. **Collectivism vs. Individualism** – A cultural dimension describing whether a culture prioritizes group needs or individual autonomy.
18. **Power Distance** – A cultural dimension describing how much inequality in power and hierarchy is accepted within a culture.
19. **Uncertainty Avoidance** – A cultural dimension describing how strongly a culture values predictability, rules, and structure.
20. **Noise** – Any interference that disrupts message transmission or interpretation, including physical, psychological, physiological, or cultural noise.

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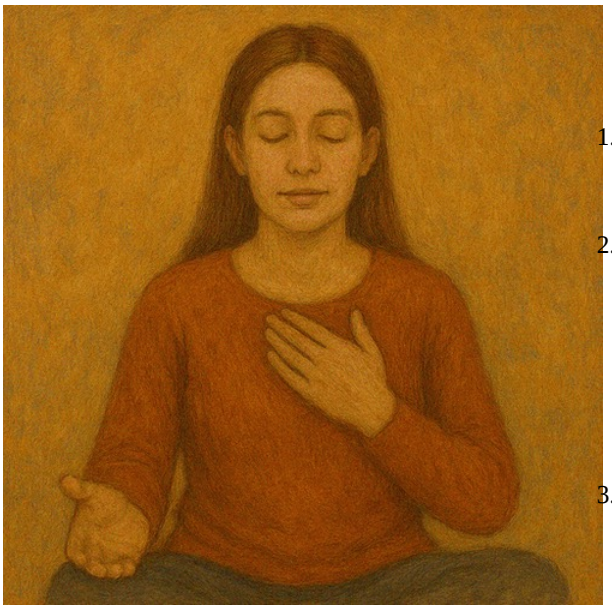
2.6: Understanding Mindful Communication

One of the most-desired outcomes of studying intercultural communication is to increase your awareness of the many layers of culture, world-view, age, and life-experience that may act as filters--causing distortion--between you and those with whom you are trying to communicate. The goal is to increase your self-awareness and point you in the direction of more attentive and "mindful" behaviors.

Defining Mindfulness

The words “mindful,” “mindfulness,” and “mindlessness” have received a lot of attention both within academic circles and outside of them. Many people hear the word “mindful” and picture a yogi sitting on a mountain peak in lotus position meditating while listening to the wind. And for some people, that form of mindfulness is perfectly fine, but it’s not necessarily beneficial for the rest of us. Instead, mindfulness has become a tool that can be used to improve all facets of an individual’s life. In this section, we’re going to explore what mindfulness is and develop an understanding of what we will call in this book “mindful communication.”



Several different definitions have appeared trying to explain what these terms mean. Let’s look at just a small handful of definitions that have been put forward for the term “mindfulness.”

1. “[M]indfulness as a particular type of social practice that leads the practitioner to an ethically minded awareness, intentionally situated in the here and now.”[15]
2. “[D]eliberate, open-minded awareness of moment-to-moment perceptible experience that ordinarily requires gradual refinement by means of systematic practice; is characterized by a nondiscursive, nonanalytic investigation of ongoing experience; is fundamentally sustained by such attitudes as kindness, tolerance, patience, and courage; and is markedly different from everyday modes of awareness.”[16]
3. “[T]he process of drawing novel distinctions… The process of drawing novel distinctions can lead to a number of diverse consequences, including (1) a greater sensitivity to one’s environment, (2) more openness to new information, (3) the creation of new categories for structuring perception, and (4) enhanced awareness of multiple perspectives in problem solving.” [17]
4. “Mindfulness is a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context, with an open, nonjudgmental orientation to experience.” [18]
5. “[F]ocusing one’s attention in a nonjudgmental or accepting way on the experience occurring in the present moment [and] can be contrasted with states of mind in which attention is focused elsewhere, including preoccupation with memories, fantasies, plans, or worries, and behaving automatically without awareness of one’s actions.” [19]
6. “[T]he focus of a person’s attention is opened to admit whatever enters experience, while at the same time, a stance of kindly curiosity allows the person to investigate whatever appears, without falling prey to automatic judgment or reactivity.” [20]
7. “Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” [21]
8. “Mindfulness is the practice of returning to being centered in this living moment right now and right here, being openly and kindly present to our own immediate mental, emotional, and bodily experiencing, and without judgment.” [22]
9. “[A]wareness of one’s internal states and surroundings. The concept has been applied to various therapeutic interventions—for example, mindfulness-based cognitive behavior therapy, mindfulnessbased stress reduction, and mindfulness meditation—to help people avoid destructive or automatic habits and responses by learning to observe their thoughts, emotions, and other present-moment experiences without judging or reacting to them.” [23]
10. “[A] multifaceted construct that includes paying attention to present-moment experiences, labeling them with words, acting with awareness, avoiding automatic pilot, and bringing an attitude of openness, acceptance, willingness, allowing, nonjudging, kindness, friendliness, and curiosity to all observed experiences.”[24]

What we generally see within these definitions of the term “mindfulness” is a spectrum of ideas ranging from more traditional Eastern perspectives on mindfulness (usually stemming out of Buddhism) to more Western perspectives on mindfulness arising out of the pioneering research conducted by Ellen Langer.[25]

Towards a Mindfulness Model

Shauna Shapiro and Linda Carlson take the notion of mindfulness a step farther and try to differentiate between mindful awareness and mindful practice:

> (a) Mindful awareness, an abiding presence or awareness, a deep knowing that contributes to freedom of the mind (e.g. freedom from reflexive conditioning and delusion) and (b) mindful practice, the systematic practice of intentionally attending in an open, caring, and discerning way, which involves both knowing and shaping the mind. To capture both aspects we define the construct of mindfulness as “the awareness that arises through intentionally attending in an open, caring, and discerning way.”[26]

The importance of this perspective is that Shapiro and Carlson recognize that mindfulness is a cognitive, behavioral, and affective process. So, let’s look at each of these characteristics.

Mindful Awareness

First, we have the notion of mindful awareness. Most of **mindful awareness** is attending to what’s going on around you at a deeper level. Let’s start by thinking about awareness as a general concept. According to the American Psychological Association’s dictionary, awareness is “perception or knowledge of something.”[27] Awareness involves recognizing or understanding an idea or phenomenon. For example, take a second and think about your breathing. Most of the time, we are not aware of our breathing because our body is designed to perform this activity for us unconsciously. We don’t have to remind ourselves to breathe in and out with every breath. If we did, we’d never be able to sleep or do anything else. However, if you take a second and focus on your breathing, you are consciously aware of your breathing. Most breathing exercises, whether for acting, meditation, public speaking, singing, etc., are designed to make you aware of your breath since we are not conscious of our breathing most of the time.

Mindful awareness takes being aware to a different level. Go back to our breathing example. Take a second and focus again on your breathing. Now ask yourself a few questions:

a. How do you physically feel while breathing? Why?
b. What are you thinking about while breathing?
c. What emotions do you experience while breathing?

The goal, then, of mindful awareness is to be consciously aware of your physical presence, cognitive processes, and emotional state while engaged in an activity. More importantly, it’s about not judging these; it’s simply about being aware and noticing.

Mindful Practice

Mindful practice, as described by Shapiro and Carlson, is “the conscious development of skills such as greater ability to direct and sustain our attention, less reactivity, greater discernment and compassion, and enhanced capacity to disidentify from one’s concept of self.”[28] To help further explore the concept of mindful practice, Shauna Shapiro, Linda Carlson, John Astin, and Benedict Freedman proposed a three-component model (Figure 1.5.1): attention, intention, and attitude.[29]

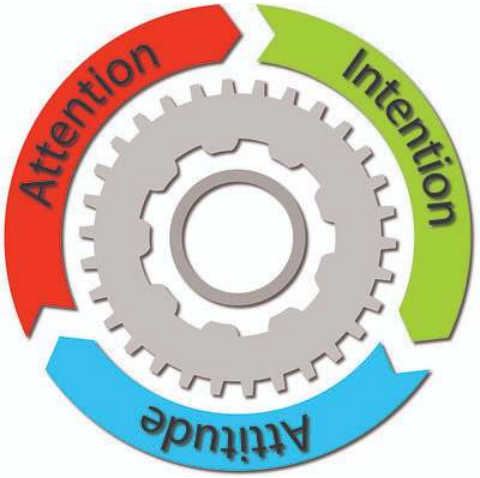


Figure 2.6.1: Model of Mindfulness

Attention

"*Attention* involves attending fully to the present moment instead of allowing ourselves to become preoccupied with the past or future."[30] Essentially, **attention** is being aware of what's happening internally and externally moment-to-moment. By internally, we're talking about what's going on in your head. What are your thoughts and feelings? By externally, we're referring to what's going on in your physical environment. To be mindful, someone must be able to focus on the here and now. Unfortunately, humans aren't very good at being attentive. Our minds tend to wander about 47% of the time.[31] Some people say that humans suffer from "monkey mind," or the tendency of our thoughts to swing from one idea to the next.[32] As such, being mindful is partially being aware of when our minds start to shift to other ideas and then refocusing ourselves.

Intention

"**Intention** involves knowing *why* we are doing what we are doing: our ultimate aim, our vision, and our aspiration."33 So the second step in mindful practice is knowing why you're doing something. Let's say that you've decided that you want to start exercising more. If you wanted to engage in a more mindful practice of exercise, the first step would be figuring out why you want to exercise and what your goals are. Do you want to exercise because you know you need to be healthier? Are you exercising because you're worried about having a heart attack? Are you exercising because you want to get a bikini body before the summer? Again, the goal here is simple: be honest with ourselves about our intentions.

Attitude

"**Attitude**, or *how* we pay attention, enables us to stay open, kind, and curious."[34] Essentially, we can all bring different perspectives when we're attending to something. For example, "attention can have a cold, critical quality, or an openhearted, curious, and compassionate quality."[35] As you can see, we can approach being mindful from different vantage points, so the "attitude with which you undertake the practice of paying attention and being in the present is crucial."[36] One of the facets of mindfulness is being open and nonjudging, so having that "cold, critical quality" is antithetical to being mindful. Instead, the goal of mindfulness must be one of openness and non-judgment.

So, what types of attitudes should one attempt to develop to be mindful? Daniel Siegel proposed the acronym COAL when thinking about our attitudes: curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love.[37]

1. C stands for curiosity (inquiring without being judgmental).
2. O stands for openness (having the freedom to experience what is occurring as simply the truth, without judgments).
3. A stands for acceptance (taking as a given the reality of and the need to be precisely where you are).
4. L stands for love (being kind, compassionate, and empathetic to others and to yourself).[38]

Jon Kabat-Zinn, on the other hand, recommends seven specific attitudes that are necessary for mindfulness:

1. Nonjudging: observing without categorizing or evaluating.
2. Patience: accepting and tolerating the fact that things happen in their own time.
3. Beginner's-Mind: seeing everything as if for the very first time.

4. Trust: believing in ourselves, our experiences, and our feelings.
5. Non-striving: being in the moment without specific goals.
6. Acceptance: seeing things as they are without judgment.
7. Letting Go: allowing things to be as they are and getting bogged down by things we cannot change.

Neither Siegel's COAL nor Kabat-Zinn's seven attitudes is an exhaustive list of attitudes that can be important to mindfulness. Still, they give you a representative idea of the types of attitudes that can impact mindfulness. Ultimately, "the attitude that we bring to the practice of mindfulness will to a large extent determine its long-term value. This is why consciously cultivating certain attitudes can be very helpful… Keeping particular attitudes in mind is actually part of the training itself."[39]

Five Facets of Mindfulness

From a social scientific point-of-view, one of the most influential researchers in the field of mindfulness has been Ruth Baer. Baer's most significant contribution to the field has been her Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, which you can take on her website. Dr. Baer's research concluded that there are five different facets of mindfulness: observing, describing, acting with awareness, nonjudging of inner experience, and nonreactivity to inner experience (Figure 1.5.2).[40]

Observing

The first facet of mindfulness is **observing**, or "noticing or attending to a variety of internal or external phenomena (e.g., bodily sensations, cognitions, emotions, sounds)."[41] When one is engaged in mindfulness, one of the basic goals is to be aware of what is going on inside yourself and in the external environment. Admittedly, staying in the moment and observing can be difficult, because our minds are always trying to shift to new topics and ideas (again that darn monkey brain).

Describing

The second facet of mindfulness is **describing**, or "putting into words observations of inner experiences of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sensations, and emotions."[42] The goal of describing is to stay in the moment by being detail focused on what is occurring. We should note that having a strong vocabulary does make describing what is occurring much easier.

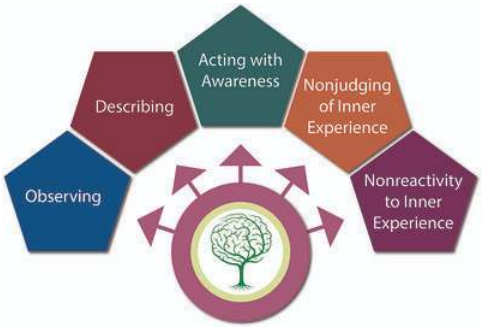


Figure **2.6.2**: Five Facets of Mindfulness

Acting with Awareness

The third facet of mindfulness is **acting with awareness**, or "engaging fully in one's present activity rather than functioning on automatic pilot."[43] When it comes to acting with awareness, it's important to focus one's attention purposefully. In our day-to-day lives, we often engage in behaviors without being consciously aware of what we are doing. For example, have you ever thought about your routine for showering? Most of us have a pretty specific ritual we use in the shower (the steps we engage in as we shower). Still, most of us do this on autopilot without really taking the time to realize how ritualized this behavior is.

Nonjudging of Inner Experience

The fourth facet of mindfulness is the **nonjudging of inner experience**, which involves being consciously aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes without judging them. One of the hardest things for people when it comes to mindfulness is not judging themselves or their inner experiences. As humans, we are pretty judgmental and like to evaluate most things as positive or negative, good or bad, etc.… However, one of the goals of mindfulness is to be present and aware. As soon as you start judging your thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, you stop being present and become focused on your evaluations and not your experiences.

Nonreactivity to Inner Experience

The last facet of mindfulness is **nonreactivity to inner experience** "Nonreactivity is about becoming consciously aware of distressing thoughts, emotions, and mental images without automatically responding to them."[44] Nonreactivity to inner experience is related to the issue of not judging your inner experience, but the difference is in our reaction. Nonreactivity involves taking a step back and evaluating things from a more logical, dispassionate perspective. Often, we get so bogged down in our thoughts, emotions, and mental images that we end up preventing ourselves from engaging in life.

For example, one common phenomenon that plagues many people is impostor syndrome, or perceived intellectual phoniness.[45] Some people, who are otherwise very smart and skilled, start to believe that they are frauds and are just minutes away from being found out. Imagine being a brilliant brain surgeon but always afraid someone's going to figure out that you don't know what you're doing. Nonreactivity to our inner experience would involve realizing that we have these thoughts but not letting them influence our actual behaviors. Admittedly, nonreactivity to inner experience is easier described than done for many of us.Interpersonal Communication and Mindfulness

For our purposes within this book, we want to look at issues related to mindful communication that spans across these definitions. Although the idea of "mindfulness" and communication is not new,[53,54] Judee Burgoon, Charles Berger, and Vincent Waldron were three of the first researchers to formulate a way of envisioning mindfulness and interpersonal communication.[55] As with the trouble of defining mindfulness, perspectives on what mindful communication is differ as well. Let's look at three fairly distinct definitions:

1. "Communication that is planful, effortfully processed, creative, strategic, flexible, and/or reason-based (as opposed to emotion-based) would seem to qualify as mindful, whereas communication that is reactive, superficially processed, routine, rigid, and emotional would fall toward the mindless end of the continuum." [56]
2. "Mindful communication including mindful speech and deep listening are important. But we must not overlook the role of compassion, wisdom, and critical thinking in communication. We must be able to empathize with others to see things from their perspective. We should not continue with our narrow prejudices so that we can start meaningful relationships with others. We can then come more easily to agreement and work together."[57]
3. "Mindful communication includes the practice of mindful presence and encompasses the attributes of a nonjudgmental approach to [our interactions], staying actively present in the moment, and being able to rapidly adapt to change in an interaction."[58]

As you can see, these perspectives on mindful communication align nicely with the discussion we had in the previous section related to mindfulness. However, there is not a single approach to what is "mindful communication." Each of these definitions can help us create an idea of what mindful communication is. For our purposes within this text, we plan on taking a broad view of mindful communication that encompasses both perspectives of secular mindfulness and non-secular mindfulness (primarily stemming out of the Buddhist tradition). As such, we define **mindful communication** as the process of interacting with others while engaging in mindful awareness and practice. Although more general than the definitions presented above, we believe that aligning our definition with mindful awareness and practice is beneficial because of Shapiro and Carlson's existing mindfulness framework.[59]

However, we do want to raise one note about the possibility of mindful communication competence. From a communication perspective, it's entirely possible to be mindful and not effective in one's communication. Burgoon, Berger, and Waldron wrote, "without the requisite communication skills to monitor their actions and adapt their messages, without the breadth of repertoire that enables flexible, novel thought processes to translate into creative action, a more mindful state may not lead to more successful communication." [60] As such, a marriage must be made between mindfulness and communication skills. This book aims to provide a perspective that enhances both mindfulness and interpersonal communication skills.

Key Terms

- **Mindfulness** – A state of present-moment awareness marked by openness, curiosity, and nonjudgment.
- **Mindful Communication** – The practice of interacting with others while maintaining mindful awareness and intentional presence.
- **Mindful Awareness** – Conscious attention to one's thoughts, emotions, and surroundings without judgment.
- **Mindful Practice** – The deliberate cultivation of attention, intention, and attitude to shape how we engage with others.

- **Attention** – Focusing fully on the present moment, both internally and externally.
- **Intention** – Understanding the purpose behind one's actions and communication.
- **Attitude** – The emotional and cognitive stance we bring to awareness, ideally open, kind, and curious.
- **COAL Attitudes** – Curiosity, Openness, Acceptance, and Love—qualities that support mindful engagement.
- **Kabat-Zinn's Attitudes** – Nonjudging, Patience, Beginner's Mind, Trust, Non-striving, Acceptance, Letting Go.
- **Observing** – Noticing internal and external experiences like sensations, thoughts, and emotions.
- **Describing** – Putting observations into words to clarify and stay present.
- **Acting with Awareness** – Engaging consciously in activities rather than operating on autopilot.
- **Nonjudging of Inner Experience** – Accepting thoughts and feelings without labeling them as good or bad.
- **Nonreactivity to Inner Experience** – Recognizing internal experiences without automatically responding to them.
- **Mindlessness** – Reactive, automatic, or superficial communication lacking awareness or intention.
- **Self-Awareness** – Understanding one's own cultural filters, biases, and emotional responses.
- **Cultural Filters** – Layers of worldview, age, and experience that shape how we interpret communication.
- **Monkey Mind** – The tendency of thoughts to jump rapidly from one idea to another, disrupting focus.
- **Impostor Syndrome** – A persistent belief that one is a fraud despite evidence of competence.
- **Communication Competence** – The ability to combine mindfulness with effective communication skills for meaningful interaction.

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2.7: Communication Fulfills Our Needs

Understanding the nature of our needs can help us understand why we--and others--act and feel the way we do. Some of the concepts and models in this area are useful and have been around for years. But as we move deeper into intercultural communication, we must be aware that not all aspects of all models are truly universal, as is noted below. Further into this text we will look at value theory and the idea that what unites us, at times, and sets us apart at other times, are how we rank our needs, which are typically expressed as values.

How Communication Helps

Studying communication is important for several different reasons. First, as we mentioned at the start, we spend a significant amount of time communicating with others. Second, learning about the various aspects of communication will help us be more effective communicators in our personal and professional relationships. Third, exploring something from new perspectives will help us broaden our understanding of ourselves. Finally, improving our communication will help us better understand the role that communication serves in our lives. Human beings rely fundamentally on communication to meet various needs. In this section we will talk specifically about physical, instrumental, social, and identity needs.

Maslow's Hierarchy

We are human and therefore, we are singular. Communication is needed to fulfill our needs. If you have taken any classes in the social sciences, odds are that you have come across the hierarchy below and its creator, Abraham Maslow. Figure **2.7.1** showcases Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which describes and explains what our needs are and how they affect and drive our interpersonal communication.

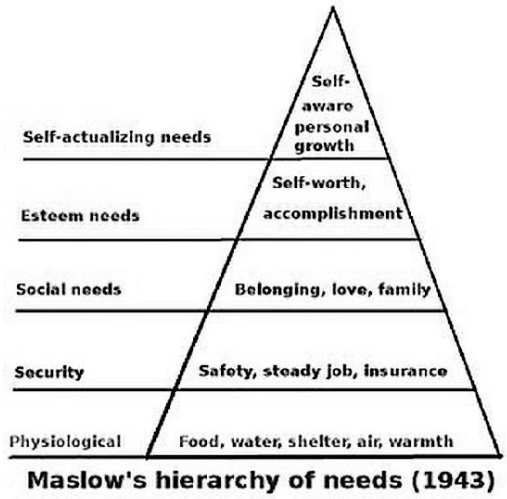


Figure **2.7.1**: Maslow hierarchy of needs by Tomwsulcer on Wikipedia Commons is in the Public Domain

We have personal needs and to achieve fulfilling these needs, we use communication.

Maslow's model shows us ways we approach communication as a way to fulfill our human needs. This model works well in westert, individualistic cultures.

Our most prevalent and basic needs, our **physiological needs,** are represented at the base level. We need water and food before we can critically think about problem solving or if we are on track to our career of choice. Then we move to **security needs**. We need to have health (mental and physical) and feel safe before we can move onto social needs. **Social needs**, or needs for love and belonging, are how we connect to others. We have a physical and psychological need for affiliation and connection. When these needs are not met they may have negative effects on our development. Next, says Maslow, are our **esteem needs**. This category has evolved over time as we learn more about what helps us to achieve and be accomplished. Esteem needs have to do with our relationships to others (interpersonal communication) and ourselves (intrapersonal communication). Maslow says that our highest needs are **self-actualization needs**. These are the deep-seated goals we have for ourselves and are at the core of who we are and become over time.

NOTE: Concepts and theories that have long been accepted and are useful must still be re-examined when moving into the context of a different culture.

Maslow's hierarchy is enormously influential, but it isn't considered a culture-free or universally valid model. Many intercultural researchers point out that it reflects Western, individualistic assumptions about what motivates people. The model places self-actualization at the top, which aligns with values like personal achievement, autonomy, and self-expression—ideas that are central in Western societies but not necessarily in collectivistic or interdependent cultures. In many parts of the world, fulfillment is defined through family obligation, group harmony, or social duty rather than individual growth, so the "highest" need looks very different.

Another limitation is the idea that needs must be met in a strict sequence. Cross-cultural studies show that people often pursue meaning, spirituality, or community leadership even when basic needs are unstable. Some cultures prioritize belonging before personal safety, while others value honor or duty above physical comfort. Human motivation turns out to be far more flexible and context-dependent than the pyramid suggests.

Maslow also developed his theory using small, culturally narrow samples, which means the hierarchy reflects Western psychological norms more than global ones. Still, the model remains useful because many cultures recognize similar categories of needs—safety, belonging, esteem—even if they arrange or interpret them differently. It works best as a starting point rather than a universal rule.

Intercultural research generally favors more adaptable frameworks that account for relational fulfillment, collective well-being, and culturally shaped definitions of success and happiness. In short, Maslow's hierarchy offers helpful insights, but it isn't culturally neutral and shouldn't be treated as a universal map of human motivation.

In Maslow's model we move through our needs from the bottom of the pyramid to the top. It shows us is how we need to fulfill certain needs before other needs and goals can be attained. Despite the fact that we do not always achieve our needs in a linear fashion, this model shows us how our needs are built on and fulfilled by understanding other needs. In understanding where our needs lie, we can better prepare ourselves to reach achievement. This is predicated on the notion that we are individuals with our individual lived experience and culture. These components of our self-concept drive how we interpret and fulfill our needs.

Take for instance a scenario where we may be housing insecure. It would be difficult to worry about a career or success at work; however, a successful job would help our housing insecurity. When looking at the model, we start at the bottom of the pyramid and try to focus on how to move toward the top by fulfilling each of our needs. It is important to prioritize our needs. At times it is easy to become hard on ourselves and forget that our needs are unmet, which affects many aspects of our lives.

In a later chapter, you will learn how the self-concept is formed and reinforced through interpersonal communication. Culture is a fundamental core of our self-concept. In looking at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it is important to point out that interpersonal communication is not always hierarchical or unidirectional. However, Maslow does provide a framework for understanding our needs. Culture is how we understand ourselves and helps us to address our needs and how they are fulfilled.

Physical Needs

Communication is vital to our physical needs. **Physical needs** are those that keep our mind and body functioning. Communication helps us express our physical needs and identify when they are not being met. When a child tells a parent that they are hungry or tired they are using communication to help fulfill their physical needs.

Studies show that there is a link between mental health and physical health. In other words, people who encounter negative experiences, but are also willing to communicate those experiences, are more likely to have better mental and physical health. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, many articles were written in magazines describing the decline in mental and physical health that people were experiencing due to a lack of communication. Almost all of us at one point or another felt a sense of loneliness or depression due to the lack of social interaction and physical proximity to other people. Research in health communication has

shown time and time again that our ability to communicate with others not only benefits our mental health but also our physical health as well. Many health problems—both cognitive and functional—create stress, or are caused because of excess amounts of stress. One way to relieve these tensions and alleviate some of the physical symptoms that may occur is through open communication. It is vital for people to share what they feel, because if they keep their feelings bottled up, then they are more likely to suffer emotionally, mentally, and physically.

Instrumental Needs

Like physical needs, communication is fundamental to meeting our instrumental needs. **Instrumental needs** are those we engage in to complete daily tasks. When you show up to the classroom and ask a classmate if someone is sitting in the chair next to them, you are using communication to meet your instrumental needs. Instrumental needs account for much of our daily communication. Instrumental communication is evident in much of our workplace communication both with coworkers and clients/customers. We can also see it in our academic lives when we ask clarifying questions in class or send emails to instructors. It would not be possible to move through our lives without these instrumental conversations. In addition to the practical needs, communication is also influential to our well-being and sense of self.

Social Needs

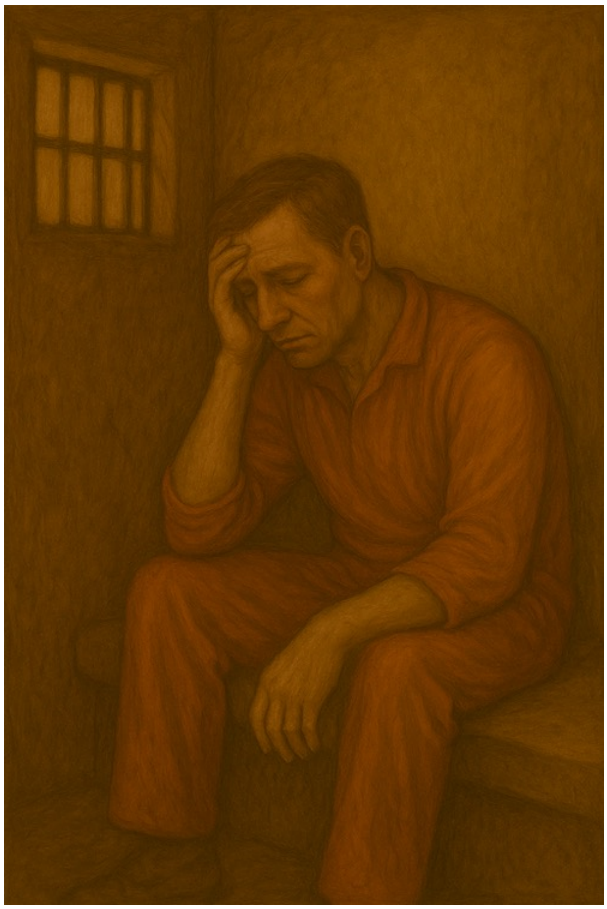
Humans are social creatures; we need interaction with other humans to survive and thrive, and communication is fundamental to this social engagement. Relationships are communicative. We rely on communication to build, maintain, and ultimately to end relationships. Think about one of your good friends. Can you remember back to when you first met them? Who initiated the encounter? How did they do so? Was it face-to-face or online? Regardless of the setting or circumstance, you are only friends now because one of you initiated communication and the other reciprocated. When we communicate with others, we share a part of ourselves and over time what we are willing to share becomes more intimate. These interactions are what make our relationships. At their core relationships are communicative. We would not be able to have friends or romantic partners without communication, and without this social interaction we would not be fully human.

Case Study - Solitary Confinement

The importance of social interaction cannot not be understated. The ability to engage with other people is fundamental to our physical and mental health.

One area where we can see this reality play out is in the use of solitary confinement as a form of punishment. Former Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy argued in a 2015 opinion that “years on end of near-total isolation exact a terrible price … common side-effects of solitary confinement include anxiety, panic, withdrawal, hallucinations, self-mutilation, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors. The effects of social isolation are lethal. Even though people in solitary confinement comprise only 6% to 8% of the total prison population, they account for approximately half of those who die by suicide” (Herring, 2020). It is because of these effects that recent years have seen a renewed call to ban or severely restrict the use of solitary confinement in US prisons. The American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina along with the North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services is currently suing on behalf of several prisoners held in cells described as no bigger than a parking space for 22 to 24 hours a day (Waggoner, 2019). Another lawsuit was filed by Dennis Hope, who has spent 27 years in solitary confinement in a Texas prison. “His only human contact is with the guards who strip-search and handcuff him before taking him to another enclosure to exercise, alone. He has had one personal phone call since 1994, when his mother died in 2013. He suffers from depression and paranoia and fears he is going insane.” His petition asks the Supreme Court to rule that such prolonged isolation is a violation of the Eighth Amendment, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment (Liptak, 2022). Some states have already restricted the use of such extreme measures with positive outcomes. For example, “assaults on employees at Colorado prisons dropped when the state reduced the use of solitary confinement and expanded access to mental health treatment” (Waggoner, 2019).

Identity Needs



Finally, communication is critical to our identity. Our sense of who we are is a reflection of how others see us. When someone tells you that you are funny, or smart, or attractive, you internalize these comments and they become a part of how you perceive yourself. An important part of our identity is being a Communication Studies instructor. We like teaching and we think we are good at it. This perception of ourselves is based on the communication that we have with our students. When students in our class are smiling and engaging, when they write comments on our evaluations, etc. this helps to reinforce our perception of ourselves and our identity as an instructor. Communication is also how we present ourselves to others. The biography that we have in our digital classroom on the university learning management system (LMS) allows us to present ourselves to our students by sharing aspects of our identity that we think will help us connect. We also share our identity nonverbally by posting a picture online and by how we present ourselves in the physical classroom. Communication is influential in both developing and sharing our identities.

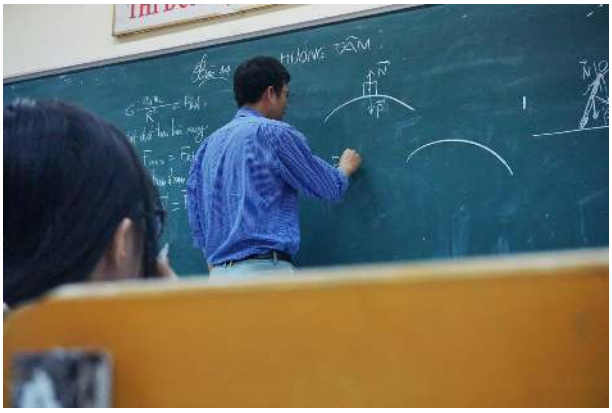


Figure **2.7.2**: Physics Teacher, Tra Nguyen, Unsplash

Without communication we would not be able to meet our basic needs, so learning to be more proficient with communication will help us in our daily lives and with our relationships. Taking this course will help you become a more competent communicator, and we hope that will help you navigate these needs more easily and successfully. “Communicative competence is the ability to achieve communicative goals in a socially appropriate manner. It is organized and goal-oriented, i.e. it includes the ability to select and apply skills that are appropriate and effective in the respective context” (Kiessling & Fabry, 2021) . You are already on the path to becoming a more competent communicator. As you learn more about the concept you will begin to see changes in your communication skills and behavior. Building communication competence is a life-long endeavor, and this course is just one part of that journey.

As you can see there are a number of reasons you should be excited to engage with this text and learn more about interpersonal communication. As we begin that process it is important that we have a shared language to talk about communication moving forward. T

Key Terms

- **Communication** – The process of sharing meaning through verbal and nonverbal interaction.
- **Physical Needs** – Basic survival requirements like food, water, and health that are supported through communication.
- **Instrumental Needs** – Practical, everyday tasks accomplished through communication (e.g., asking questions, giving directions).

- **Social Needs** – The human need for connection, belonging, and relationship-building through interaction.
- **Identity Needs** – The development and reinforcement of self-concept through how others perceive and respond to us.
- **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** – A motivational model that organizes human needs from physiological to self-actualization.
- **Self-Actualization** – The pursuit of personal growth, fulfillment, and realizing one's potential.
- **Esteem Needs** – The desire for respect, recognition, and self-worth, shaped by both internal and external communication.
- **Belonging Needs** – The need for love, friendship, and group affiliation.
- **Safety Needs** – The need for physical and emotional security, including health and stability.
- **Physiological Needs** – The most basic human requirements like food, water, and shelter.
- **Communication Competence** – The ability to achieve communication goals in a socially appropriate and effective manner.
- **Self-Disclosure** – Sharing personal information that can shape relationships and identity.
- **Solitary Confinement** – A case study illustrating the severe effects of social isolation and lack of communication.
- **Cultural Influence on Needs** – The idea that how we rank and interpret our needs is shaped by cultural values and context.

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2.8: Communication Tools

Complexities of Communication

While communication studies discipline experts will highlight throughout this text the many ways communication can benefit relational satisfaction, self awareness, and personal and professional growth, there are also dark sides to communication as well as misconceptions that can thwart our communication goals. Although the dark side of communication and communication misconceptions may sound negative, when we understand the related reasons why they occur and our role in those reasons, we are better able to adapt our skills and respond in a way that is communication competent. Throughout our course of study, we will explore facets of interpersonal communication, in order to set our goals of communicating effectively and appropriately throughout our learning journey.

Common Questions

Any time we begin learning something new, we may find ourselves curious about the subject and want to explore those curiosities in more depth. While the following listed questions and responses are some of the common questions we typically receive when introducing interpersonal communication, there may be more questions you discover as we continue our learning process. Throughout this text we will be working to answer some of these questions, but there are also some quick responses given in the following table to help frame our learning as we continue on.

Q & A Of common questions

Question	Response
Will communication solve all problems?	Not always. Some problems are bigger than simply “talking it out” and more communication is not always better.
Is being a competent communicator a “natural” talent?	Skill, dedication, and hard work towards creating positive habits is how someone strives towards communication competence.
Does “communication” just mean talking?	Communication involves the intentional and unintentional, conscious and unconscious sending, receiving, and responding of verbal and nonverbal messages.
Should people adapt to my way of communicating to understand me?	In order to prevent miscommunication, we must work at presenting our message in a way that best fits the needs of the listener.
Is interpersonal communication simple?	Interpersonal communication is complex! There is a large matrix of aspects that we explore through interpersonal communication research and theories that help explain why and how we function within societies through a communicative lens.

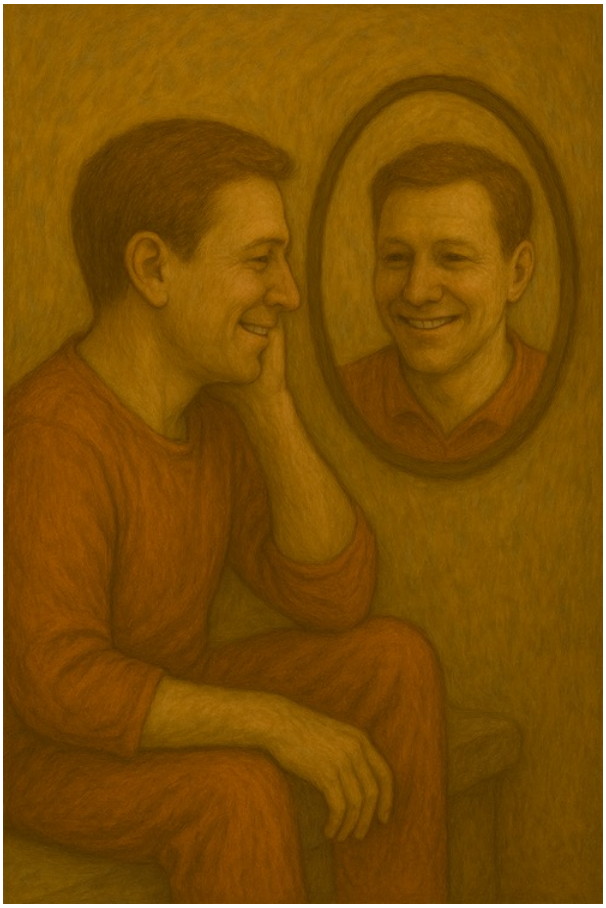
It is important to remember that communication is not “one size fits all.” As we discuss throughout this chapter, there are a wide variety of ways in which the complexities of communication can appear. By understanding these complexities in more depth, we are better able to overcome these misconceptions of communication and help prevent miscommunication from occurring in our relationships. Creating a deeper understanding of the various ways our relational satisfaction is impacted by our communication allows us to adjust and adapt the context, message, and perceptions surrounding our communication interaction. In understanding the interpersonal skills this text will help us learn, and maintaining our ethical standards at the forefront of our relationships, we are learning the tools within interpersonal communication to set us up for success in becoming the competent communicators we strive to be.

Assessing Your Skills

As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, communication seems easy because we are constantly doing it. Understanding the complexities that make up the act of communication helps us realize the conscious and unconscious effort that it takes. In addition,

communicating effectively and appropriately—being a competent communicator—takes dedication, mindfulness, and action. Being a competent communicator is not a natural state of being for most people (even Communication Studies scholars are not perfect!) and in order to develop these skills we must first understand each unique part of communication.

Throughout our study of interpersonal communication we will be exploring specific elements that make up competent communication, including understanding self concept, our ability to be an active listener, monitoring our verbal and nonverbal communication, fostering emotional intelligence, building and maintaining relationships, managing conflict, and perhaps most importantly, understanding how culture impacts every interaction we have.



Understanding the Self Concept

In order to actively engage in interpersonal communication, we must start at the base of understanding ourselves as communicators. The **self concept** is a foundation within communication, because at every interaction we are presented with, we are communicating from our worldview, our perspective, and from our unique lens of reality. The self concept is a stable sense of who we are in this world. It forms from a young age, developing to answers to the question "Who am I?" By answering these foundational questions, we begin to understand how our experiences and perceptions impact our behaviors and interactions with others around us in complex ways.

Using Active Listening

One of the hardest aspects of becoming a competent communicator is using intentionality within our communicative behaviors. **Active listening** requires that we are cognitively focused on what messages are sent so that value in the relationships is present. Listening helps us fulfill relational needs, such as being emotionally present for a friend who's had a rough day, informational needs such as attending lectures and gaining knowledge through education, and critical needs to form opinions and generate ideas. While active listening may be one of the hardest goals to accomplish, it can also be one of the most rewarding.

Monitoring Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Verbal and nonverbal communication is how we send our messages through our words, voice, body language, gestures, appearance, and beyond. There is usually much more meaning created in how we say something than by just what is said, and how we interpret these messages helps us to create and respond to complex messages. Think of the different ways one can interpret a text message such as, "OK", where there is so much meaning left out. With the addition of punctuation or emojis, the meaning changes completely. If the message contained the emoji with a winking face, that would be interpreted differently than a red angry emoji. Understanding these complexities helps us in the exploration of how we create unique understanding through the verbal and nonverbal elements and how this impacts all forms of our communication.

Fostering Emotional Intelligence

Being able to see another person's perspective, understanding how they may see a particular situation or scenario, is a foundational aspect of building communication competence. In order to know what will be an effective and appropriate method for them to receive information requires us to be emotionally aware and empathetic. **Emotional intelligence** relates to our ability to interpret and understand our emotions and our communication partners' emotions in a way that helps us to be successful in communicating our own needs while also working to meet the needs of our relational partners. Understanding how we build middle ground between our own emotional needs while also being present for the needs of others requires us to be self aware and able to communicate through them.

Building and Maintaining Relationships

Building relationships is a core part of interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication helps us to build and maintain relationships. In the absence of communication, a relationship does not receive the maintenance it requires to proliferate. From the initiation of relationships, the good times and the bad, all relationships have ebbs and flows in communication. Building our understanding around why we form relationships, why relationships end, and how to create satisfaction and growth within our relationships allows us to see we are not alone in our experiences.

Managing Conflict

Managing conflict is not easy but necessary. Conflict is inevitable and understanding conflict can help us avoid unnecessary conflict, learn conflict management strategies, and what we can do to be effective and appropriate in a conflict. Learning how to assess ourselves and how to use interpersonal communication strategies can help us achieve our relational and individual goals by allowing us to see that while conflict may always exist in our lives, conflict can have positive and successful outcomes through behavioral flexibility.

Intercultural Communication Competence

Culture influences all aspects of communication. We cannot communicate outside of our cultural context (Culture and Communication, 2012). Because of this innate and intertwined aspect of culture and communication, our study of interpersonal communication approaches discussions around culture the same way—consistently and throughout the learning process. **Intercultural communication competence** is the process of gaining knowledge and awareness of other cultures while we practice our communication competence skills alongside people from other cultural groups. Intercultural communication competence includes the aspects of being open-minded as well in knowing that we might not always "get it right" when communicating across cultural identities, but that we are willing to learn from our mistakes and try again.

Our interpersonal communication leans on our understanding of how the cultural context impacts and is impacted by the cultural lens of the individuals we are building relationships with. There are times when these aspects of culture are obvious, such as when we may be traveling abroad to a new country and experiencing a different culture for the first time, or when we interact with someone who speaks a different language than us and we are working towards building mutual understanding. There are other times when the aspects of culture are not so obvious. As competent communicators, we must remain culturally aware and responsive towards how culture is impacting our communication.

Figure 2.8.1: Young Women Leadership Program by Paula Bronstein on Images of Empowerment is licensed under CC BY NC 4.0.

For example, consider a disagreement between two friends: It may be difficult for Morgan to understand why Carlo cannot hang out all the time, and why Carlo needs to bring his younger sibling with them when they do. It might frustrate Carlo that Morgan

does not try to plan hangouts ahead of time so that Carlo can better accommodate his family's needs and priorities in order to make time for his friends.

This scenario highlights specific relational elements that these friends need to work on understanding, it also highlights the cultural elements as well. Both of them are communicating from very different cultural contexts and perspectives, impacting their interpersonal relationship. Morgan may have grown up in a more individualistic culture, one where individual needs are put above group or family needs, and does not see the big deal in leaving the house on a moment's notice to go meet up with friends. Carlo may have grown up in a collectivistic culture, one where the group and family needs and goals are valued over the individuals, and a "we" mentality is established. The collectivistic culture that Carlo grew up in may make him feel uncomfortable not asking permission to leave the house, making sure the family chores are done and his siblings are taken care of before he does.

While this scenario describes the interpersonal communication conflict these friends are experiencing, it also highlights some of the intercultural communication occurring between these two cultures as well. In gaining awareness of each other's culture through communicating openly within the relationship, the friends will be better able to manage their relationship and increase their relational satisfaction.

Key Terms

- **Complexity of Communication** – The idea that communication involves many interacting factors that make it challenging and nuanced.
- **Dark Side of Communication** – Harmful or unproductive communication behaviors that negatively affect relationships.
- **Communication Misconceptions** – Incorrect assumptions about communication that can hinder effectiveness.
- **Communication Competence** – The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in a given context.
- **Self-Concept** – A person's stable sense of who they are, shaped through communication and experience.
- **Worldview** – The lens through which individuals interpret experiences, shaped by culture and personal history.
- **Active Listening** – Fully focusing on, understanding, and responding to another person's message with intention.
- **Verbal Communication** – The use of spoken or written language to convey meaning.
- **Nonverbal Communication** – Communication through body language, facial expressions, tone, appearance, and gestures.
- **Emotional Intelligence** – The ability to understand, manage, and respond to one's own emotions and the emotions of others.
- **Relationship Maintenance** – Communicative behaviors that sustain and strengthen interpersonal relationships.
- **Conflict Management** – Strategies used to navigate disagreements constructively and appropriately.
- **Intercultural Communication Competence** – The ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds.
- **Individualistic Culture** – A cultural orientation that prioritizes personal goals and independence.
- **Collectivistic Culture** – A cultural orientation that values group harmony, family obligations, and interdependence.

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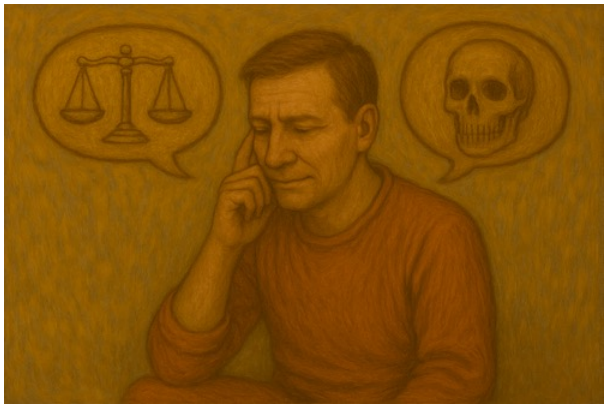
2.9: Ethical Communication

What Are Communication Ethics?

Communication has ethical implications. Ethics in the broadest sense asks questions about what we believe to be right and wrong. Communication ethics asks these questions when reflecting on our communication. Everyday we have to make communicative choices, and some of these choices will be more or less ethical than other options. It is because we have these different options that our ethics are tested. We can never really say that something is completely ethical or unethical, especially when it comes to communication.



"Murdering someone is generally thought of as unethical and illegal, but many instances of hurtful speech, or even what some would consider hate speech, have been protected as free speech. This shows the complicated relationship between protected speech, ethical speech, and the law" (Communication in the Real World, 2013).

When we make communication choices, the question of whether they are ethical or not depends on a variety of situational, personal, and and/or contextual variables that can be difficult to navigate. Many professional organizations have created ethical codes to help guide this decision-making, and the field of Communication Studies is no different. In 1999, the National Communication Association officially adopted the Credo for Ethical Communication. The NCA Credo for Ethical Communication is a set of beliefs that Communication scholars have about the ethics of human communication (NCA Legislative Council, November 1999).

We should always strive for ethical communication, but it is particularly important in interpersonal interactions. We will talk more about climate, trust and honesty, and specific relationships in the coming chapters, but at the most basic level you should strive to make ethical choices in your communication. Communication is impactful. Our communication choices have lasting impacts on those with whom we engage. While ethics is a focus on what is right and wrong, it is not easy to navigate. What is right in one circumstance may not be in another. To help us make our way through difficult ethical choices we must be competent.

Communication Competence

Communication competence focuses on communicating effectively and appropriately in various contexts (Kiessling & Fabry, 2021). In order to be competent you must have knowledge, motivation, and skills. You have been communicating for most of your life, so you have observational knowledge about how communication works. You are also now a college student actively studying communication so your knowledge will continue to increase. As you learn more about communication, continue to observe these concepts around you and you will expand the information you have to draw on in any given context. In addition to having basic information you must also be motivated to better your own communication and you need to develop the skills necessary to do so. One way to improve your communication competence is to become a more mindful communicator. "A mindful communicator actively and fluidly processes information, is sensitive to communication contexts and multiple perspectives, and is able to adapt to novel communication situations" (Communication in the Real World), 2013. Your path to improving your interpersonal communication competence is just beginning. You will learn more about specific aspects of mindfulness, such as listening, conflict management, deception, etc., in the coming chapters. For now we hope you are motivated to improve your knowledge and grow your skills.

Example 2.9.1

A physician had been treating an older woman whose health had been declining for months. Each time she came in, she asked the same question—softly, almost pleadingly—"Is it getting worse?" She wanted reassurance, something hopeful to hold onto. The doctor knew the truth: her condition *was* worsening, and the prognosis was not good.

Each appointment became a crossroads. The physician felt torn between two powerful ethical pulls. On one side was the desire to protect the patient from fear and despair. On the other was the belief that she deserved honesty so she could make informed decisions about her life, her family, and her care.

For several visits, the doctor chose the gentler path—offering vague, comforting statements that avoided the full truth. But the patient's repeated questions made it clear that she sensed something was being withheld. Her trust in the doctor began to waver; she grew anxious, watching his face more closely than his words.

Eventually, the physician realized that avoiding the truth was causing more harm than good. So at the next appointment, he sat beside her, spoke slowly, and explained her condition honestly but compassionately. He acknowledged the difficulty of the news and stayed with her as she processed it.

To the doctor's surprise, the patient did not react with anger or despair. Instead, she expressed relief—relief that someone had finally spoken plainly, relief that she could now prepare herself and her family. The honesty strengthened their relationship rather than damaging it.

Bok uses this story to show that ethical communication is rarely simple. The doctor's dilemma wasn't between "truth" and "lies," but between competing responsibilities: protecting the patient's emotional well-being and respecting her autonomy. The resolution required **mindfulness**, **contextual sensitivity**, and **communication competence**—the very skills your chapter emphasizes Bok (1978).

This is a field and and area of study in and of itself. To learn more see the references below.

Key Terms

- **Communication Ethics** – The study of right and wrong in communication and how our choices impact others.
- **Ethical Communication** – Communicating in ways that are honest, fair, respectful, and mindful of consequences.
- **Protected Speech** – Expression that is legally safeguarded, even when it may be offensive or harmful.
- **Ethical Dilemma** – A situation where multiple communication choices exist and none are clearly right or wrong.
- **Contextual Ethics** – The idea that what is ethical depends on the situation, people involved, and cultural norms.
- **NCA Credo for Ethical Communication** – A set of principles adopted by the National Communication Association to guide ethical communication behavior.
- **Communication Choices** – Decisions we make about how, when, and what to communicate.
- **Impact of Communication** – The lasting influence our messages have on others and our relationships.
- **Communication Competence** – Communicating effectively and appropriately across different contexts.
- **Knowledge (Competence Component)** – Understanding communication concepts and how they apply in real situations.
- **Motivation (Competence Component)** – The desire to improve one's communication and engage ethically.
- **Skills (Competence Component)** – The behavioral abilities needed to communicate effectively and appropriately.
- **Mindful Communicator** – Someone who processes information thoughtfully, adapts to situations, and considers multiple perspectives.
- **Mindfulness in Communication** – Being aware, intentional, and present during interactions.
- **Interpersonal Ethics** – Ethical considerations that arise specifically in one-on-one or relational communication.

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2.10: Self and Identity

To understand our communication interactions with others, we must first understand ourselves. Although each of us experiences ourselves as a singular individual, our sense of self is actually made up of three separate, yet integrated components: self-awareness, self-concept, and self-esteem.

- **Self Awareness** can be defined in many ways, including "conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires." (Google Dictionary 2/4/19) If the word "awareness" means consciously taking note of the world around us, then self-awareness should mean bringing an awareness to yourself. In other words, noticing your feelings, your reactions, your thoughts, your behaviors, and more.

- According to sociologist George Herbert Mead (1934), it helps if you have a strong sense of yourself because you monitor your own behaviors and form impressions of who you are through self-observation. As you are watching and observing your own actions, you are also engaging in **social comparison,** which is observing and assigning meaning to others' behavior and then comparing it with our own. Social comparison has a particularly potent effect on self when we compare ourselves to those we wish to emulate.
- **Self-concept** is your overall perception of who you thing you are. Self-concept answer the question of who am I? Your self-concept is based on the beliefs, attitudes, and values that you have about yourself. Identity and self-concept are so intertwined that any lasting desired change or improvement becomes very difficult (Fishe & Taylor, 1991).
- **Self-esteem** is how we value and perceive ourselves. Whereas self-awareness prompts us to ask, "Who am I?" and self-concepts answers that question, self-esteem lets us know how we feel about the answer. If the feeling is negative, then we have low self-worth or self-esteem and if the feeling is positive, then we have high self-esteem. Whether positive or negative, your self-concept influences your performance and the expression of that essential ability: communication. In addition to gender, friends, and family, our culture is a powerful source of self (Vallacher, Nowak, Froehlich & Rockloff, 2002). *Culture* is an established, coherent set of beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices shared by a large group of people (Keesing, 1974). If this strikes you as similar to the definition of *self-concept* and *worldview*, you are correct; culture is like a collective sense of self that is shared by a large group of people.

Thinking about intercultural communication in terms of self and identity has some important implications. First, *identities are created through communication.* As messages are negotiated, co-created, reinforced, and challenged through communication, identities emerge. Different identities are emphasized depending on the topic of the conversation and the people you are communicating with. Second, *identities are created in spurts*. There are long time periods where we don't think much about ourselves or our identities. Whereas other times, events cause us to focus on our identity issues and the insights gained modify our identities.

Third, *most individuals have developed multiple identities* because of membership in various groups and life events. Societal forces such as history, economics, politics, and communities influence identities. Fourth, *identities may be assigned by societies or they may be voluntarily assumed, but the forces that gave rise to particular identities are always changing.*

Lastly, it is important to remember that *identities are developed in different ways in different cultures.* Individualistic cultures encourage young people to be independent and self-reliant whereas collectivistic cultures may emphasize interdependency and the family or group.

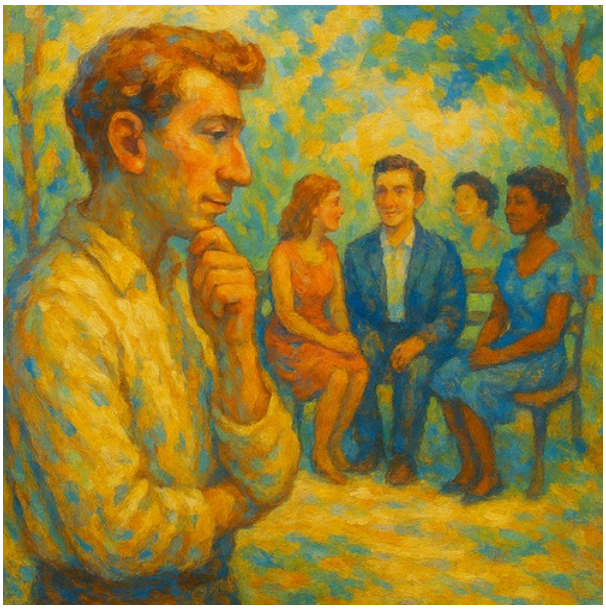
There are many types of identities that humans can adopt or be assigned into. Identities can be organized around gender, sexual, age, race, ethnicity, physical ability, mental ability, religion, class, national, regional, and so on. Culture includes many types of

large-group influences on identities. We learn our cultural beliefs, attitudes, and values from parents, teachers, religious leaders, peers, and the mass media (Gudykunst & Kim 2003).

At times, our various identities clash. When they do, we often have to choose the identity of which we value the most. In today's diverse world of interweaving cultures, it is an attractive notion to celebrate all one's identities by identifying as *multi-cultural*, but the reality still might be difficult to achieve.

Co-Cultures

As societies and nations become more culturally diverse, and awareness of how various cultures and the people within them interact, the more the idea of co-cultures takes root. Within any nation or society there will be a group or groups of people who have more power than other groups. Power generally comes from having control over governmental, economic, legal, or educational institutions. According to **Co-cultural Communication Theory**, the people who have more power within a nation or society, determine the *dominant culture*, because they get to determine the values and traditions of the nation or society (Orbe, 1998).



Members of a nation or society who do not conform to the dominant culture often form what are called *co-cultures* or cultures that *co-exist* within the dominant cultural perimeters (Orbe, 1998). By definition, co-cultures can range from slightly different to very different than the dominant culture, therefore, they develop communication practices that help them interact with people in the culturally dominant group (Ramirez-Sanchez, 2008). These practices can help co-cultures *assimilate* or attempt to become accepted into the dominant culture. The practices might also attempt to get the dominant culture to *accommodate* the co-culture, or *separate* from the dominant culture altogether. Examples of this might be using overly polite language with individuals from dominant cultures, attempting to look or talk like members of the dominant culture, or behaving in ways that shock or scare members of the dominant culture. Immigrants frequently form co-cultures in their new countries, which can lead to conflict between immigrant communities and the dominant culture.

Perception

Where did you start reading on this page? The top left corner. Why not the bottom right corner, or the top right one? In English we read left to right, from the top of the page to the bottom. But not everyone reads the same. If you read and write Arabic or Hebrew, you will proceed from right to left. Neither is right or wrong, simply different. You may find it hard to drive on the *other* side of the road while visiting England, but for people in the United Kingdom, it is normal and natural.

Your culture and identity strongly influences your perception. Whenever you interact with others, you interpret their communication by drawing on information from your stereotypes. Stereotyping is a term first coined by journalist Walter Lippmann (1922). When we stereotype others, we replace human complexities of personality with broad assumptions about character and worth based on social group affiliation. We stereotype people because it streamlines the perception process. Once we've categorized a person as a member of a particular group, you can categorize a person as a member of a particular group and form a quick impression of them (Macrae et al., 1999), which might be efficient for the communication process, but frequently leads us to form flawed impressions.

Although stereotyping is almost impossible to avoid, and most of us presume that our beliefs about other groups are valid, it's crucial to keep in mind that just because someone belongs to a certain group, it doesn't necessarily mean that all of the defining characteristics of that group apply to that person. Rigid stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are detrimental to all aspects of the communication process and have no redeeming qualities within the human experience.

Communication patterns are filled with the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that you have learned in your own culture (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003), therefore, people raised in different cultures interpret one another's communication in very different ways. You may

be from a culture that is collectivistic or values community and reads an advertisement that says: *Stand out from the crowd*. Given your cultural background, it may not be a very effective slogan because you do not want to stand out from the crowd.

Culture also effects whether you perceive others as similar or different from yourself. When you grow up within a certain culture, you naturally perceive those who are fundamentally similar to yourself as **ingroupers** and those who aren't perceived to be similar to yourself as **outgroupers** (Allport, 1954). You may consider individuals from a variety of co-cultures as your ingroupers as long as they share substantially similar points of culture with you, such as nationality, religious beliefs, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, or political views (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

Perceiving others as ingroupers or outgroupers is one of the most important perceptual distinctions that we make. We often feel strongly connected to our ingroups, especially when they are centrally tied to our identities and culture.

Culture Shock

When a person moves from to a cultural environment that is different than their own, they often experience personal disorientation called **culture shock.** It's common to experience culture shock when you are an immigrant, visit a new country, move between social environments, or simply become stressed by trying to deal with lots of new cultural information all at once. The impact intensifies due to the "need to operate" in unfamiliar and difficult contexts. Functioning without a clear understanding of how to succeed or avoid failure along with modifying your normal behavior tends to compound the problem. As symptoms of culture shock intensify, the ability to function declines making culture shock an intense version of frustration.

Common symptoms of culture shock include: homesickness, feelings of helplessness, disorientation, isolation, depression, irritability, sleeping and eating disturbances, loss of focus, and more. Although most people recover from culture shock fairly quickly, a few find it to be profoundly disorienting, and take much longer to recover, particularly if they are unaware of the sources of the problem, and have no idea of how to counteract it.

Many studies have been done on when culture shock occurs and how to work through the stages. There is the **U-Curve Model** by Lysgaard (1955) that introduced the honeymoon, shock, recovery and adjustment stages. Or the **W-Curve Model** adapted by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) of honeymoon, culture shock, initial adjustment, mental isolation, and plus acceptance & integration. Adler (1975) proposed a "contact-disintegration-reintegration-autonomy-independence" model. Recently Ward, Bochner, & Furnham (2001), and Berado (2006) have proposed that the curve models do not reflect the universal reality. In *The Psychology of Culture Shock*, Ward, Bochner, & Furnham (2001) propose that learning new cultural specific skills in the affective, behavioral, and cognitive component areas will minimize the adverse effects of culture shock. Berado's (2006) cultural adjustment model identifies five key factors (routines, reactions, roles, relationships, and reflections) that are exposed when moving across cultural boundaries.

While the idea of culture shock remains a viable and useful explanatory term, some individuals never experiences symptoms while others encounter an amazing range of reactions. There appears to be no one-size-fits-all model. Some people skip certain stages, experience them in a different order, or have a longer or shorter adjustment period than others. What researchers do agree upon is that it is natural to feel some degree of culture shock.

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

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

Key Terms

- **Self-awareness** – The ability to recognize your own thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and how they influence your communication.
- **Social comparison** – Evaluating yourself by comparing your abilities, traits, or behaviors to those of others.
- **Self-concept** – Your overall perception of who you are, shaped by experiences, relationships, and internal reflections.
- **Self-esteem** – The evaluative aspect of self-concept; the level of confidence and value you place on yourself.
- **Co-Cultural Communication Theory** – A framework explaining how marginalized or non-dominant group members communicate within dominant societal structures.
- **In-groupers** – People we perceive as similar to us, often leading to greater trust, comfort, and positive bias.
- **Out-groupers** – People we perceive as different from us, sometimes resulting in distance, uncertainty, or bias.
- **Culture shock** – The stress or disorientation experienced when encountering an unfamiliar cultural environment.
- **U-Curve Model** – A model describing cultural adjustment as moving through honeymoon, frustration, adjustment, and adaptation phases.
- **W-Curve Model** – An extension of the U-Curve that includes the challenges of returning home and re-adjusting to one's original culture.

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2.1: The First-Generation of Value Theories

The Value of Value Theory

One of the biggest benefits of studying communication is to deepen our understanding of others and, in practical terms, reduce the friction of misunderstandings. Nowhere is this more clear than when we think we are communicating with others who understand us and agree with us only to find that a conflict has erupted, seemingly out of nowhere.

Value theory offers insights into how this can happen and, importantly, what we can do about it.

The studies below were foundational, and they still have substantial merit. But as we'll soon see, they tend to slant towards societies that come out of a Western-oriented cultural experience and may not fully address additional factors that more recent research has identified. These additional considerations are part of what makes intercultural communication fascinating, frustrating, but also incredibly rewarding.

Early Theorists

Daryl Bem was one of the lead researches in this area, and he provided us with many of the core concepts and terms that are still used today. His primary idea, which represented a break from earlier thought, is that people discover their values from their behavior and make conclusions about the values of others by observing their behaviors (*Self-perception*, 1967). This can cause misunderstandings because specific values may not be linked to specific behaviors. As we've seen when considering non verbal communication. a smile does not always indicate pleasure or joy, nodding may not indicate agreement it may just indicate that you've been heard.

Values are reflected in our world views and how we rank things

The basic vocabulary of values comes from three terms. Values, attitudes, and beliefs. A belief is any thought of idea that a person may have. These need not be related to a value. You may believe it is cloudy today but not have any particular like or dislike. But if you have a belief that you hold that tilts into a positive or negative feeling, that is an attitude. Attitudes can vary in intensity. Many attitudes may be loosely held, such as a preference for a particular brand of beverage of food, and can change based on new information or experiences. Values, on the other hand, represent a special category of beliefs that are more deeply held and less likely to change.

Further research was done by other value theorists such as Milton Rokeach. Rokeach further developed our understanding of values my noting that they can be ranked and that, according to Rokeach, there are 36 identifiable values. These values fall into two categories: those that are instrumental and those that are intrinsic. Money or wealth, for example, is an example of an instrumental value because can be used to obtain other values, such as security, health, safety, or education. Health, though, is seen to be an intrinsic value, one that is sought and appreciated for its own sake. One way of differentiating these values is to ask the question: "Why do you want that?" In regards to the value of wealth, a respondent might well answer with the other values noted above. But if you were to ask someone why they wanted to be healthy, you might get a strange puzzled look and a incredulous shrug. Health is something that is so foundational for other values that it is, as Rokeach notes, intrinsically valued. Other common intrinsic values can include equality and freedom.

Milton Rokeach's comparison of Intrinsic and Instrumental Values

Terminal (Intrinsic) Values (End goals)	**Instrumental Values** (Means to goals)
A Comfortable Life	Independence
Equality	Responsibility
Freedom	Honesty
Inner Harmony	Ambition
National Security	Politeness
Salvation	Courage
Wisdom	Helpfulness

It is possible, of course, to argue that freedom is instrumental in that it leads to other values and helpfulness is valuable in and of itself. But what's most important about Rokeach's work is that we all have values, sometimes very similar values, but we rank them differently. So, some people so desire security and safety that they are willing to give up freedom and their agency to make their own decisions. You may, for example, find that someone values freedom, but when you engage them into a more thoroughgoing conversation, you find that they 1. mean something very different by this term, and 2. value it for themselves but don't feel obliged to see that others enjoy it.

When talking about value-laden terms, it can be helpful to use strategy that comes out of the field of psychology, and this is making terms "operational" by breaking them down to a list of characteristics, conditions, or behaviors. An example of this might be having an argument with a roommate over what constitutes "a clean room." The author of this text had may discussions with family members who were told to "clean the room," and seemingly did nothing more than push trash under a bed or couch. Cleaning a room, in an operational sense, might have a criteria list of:

- Bed made
- Dirty clothes in the hamper
- Clean clothes in the dresser
- No trash on floor
- All toys or books or study-aids in the bookcase
- All drawers closed

This list is not exhaustive, but it does demonstrate the concept.

Negotiating Desired Outcomes

Often, working through a challenge or a difference can be a matter of negotiating desired behaviors or coming to an agreement on how to allocate scarce resources, such as money or time. This can happen in a formal or informall way through the give-and-take of a friendship or the contract negotiations between businesses or between a business and a client. There are strategies that can lead to mutually agreeable outcomes, and a quick look at the basics of value debate can give us insights into helpful ways of gaining agreement.

1. Argue that your value has a higher ranking in the society.

    This is a sort of appeal to the conscience of your listener. It can be a reminder of "the greater good." But, that said, your opponent may still disagree.

2. Argue that choosing your value has more benefits.

    An example of this could be showing that spending more money in a given year on scholarships instead of building a needed parking garage would, over time, increase the citizen's earning ability and increase tax revenues for even better civic improvements down the road.

3. Argue that elevating your opponents' value has serious disadvantages.

Freedom is important. Most people agree with this, but it is usually circumscribed and not a value above all others, in all circumstances. For instance, motorists are not allowed to drive the "wrong way" on a freeway into oncoming traffic. To counter a value can, at times, to point out circumstances where it has to be bounded.

As noted above, values tend to be be deeply held, and that is because they are learned over a lifetime, in various cultural contexts, from family, school, and faith-based organizations, to name the major sources. It's usually easier to talk about re-ranking a value than to discard it or to argue that a different value should be in play. If you can link a desired behavior to a pre-existing value you are more likely to gain agreement and win your point.

But even with all this, your best strategy in intercultural situations is to first understand the value-sets and rankings in the culture of those with whom you're interacting. This is discussed in later chapter.

Rokeach identified 18 intrinsic values and 18 instrumental values. There are listed in the chart at the end of this chapter. But he said that you can often identify a person's cultural leanings by knowing their beliefs of two values: Freedom and Equality. Rokeach studied the speeches and public statements of different organizations to argue his point and explain his ideas.

What Rokeach Said

- People and groups can be meaningfully placed along a continuum based on how they rank **freedom** versus **equality**.
- **Those who prioritize freedom** tend to support individualism, personal autonomy, and limited government.
- **Those who prioritize equality** tend to support social welfare, redistribution, and collective responsibility.
- Political polarization often reflects **conflicting value hierarchies**, not simply differences in opinion.
- These value priorities are **learned**, stable, and predictive of behavior.

Rokeach used this framework to explain ideological divides in the U.S. and other societies, arguing that much political conflict is rooted in how people balance these two values. (Rokeach, 1973).

These differences can also be seen in organizations. Many organizations are multi-national, and the complex interrelationships between values and behaviors play out in novel ways in different locations. This topic is addressed in the concluding chapters of this text.

Organizational Values Matrix

Comprehensive Comparison Of Organizational Values

Organization Type	Terminal Values Emphasized	Instrumental Values Emphasized	How These Values Shape Behavior
Corporations (For-Profit)	A comfortable life, accomplishment, social recognition	Ambition, responsibility, efficiency	Competitive culture, performance metrics, innovation pressure
Nonprofits / NGOs	Equality, a world at peace, social justice	Helpfulness, compassion, honesty	Mission-driven decisions, community focus, advocacy
Healthcare Organizations	Health, well-being, security	Responsibility, competence, empathy	Patient-centered care, safety protocols, ethical standards
Educational Institutions	Wisdom, inner harmony, personal growth	Broad-mindedness, independence, curiosity	Learning culture, critical thinking, diversity initiatives
Government Agencies	National security, social order, equality	Obedience, responsibility, fairness	Policy consistency, regulation, public service orientation
Religious Organizations	Salvation, inner harmony, family security	Forgiveness, obedience, self-control	Moral guidance, community cohesion, tradition preservation
Startups / Innovation Hubs	Exciting life, accomplishment, creativity	Imagination, independence, risk-taking	Rapid experimentation, flexible roles, disruptive thinking
Military Organizations	National security, duty, loyalty	Obedience, courage, discipline	Hierarchical structure, clear roles, collective identity

Key Terms

- **Value Theory** – The study of how people form, prioritize, and act on their values.
- **Self-Perception Theory** – Bem's idea that people infer their own values and attitudes by observing their behaviors.
- **Values** – Deeply held beliefs about what is important, guiding long-term decisions and behavior.
- **Attitudes** – Evaluative feelings (positive or negative) toward ideas, objects, or people.
- **Beliefs** – Thoughts or ideas a person accepts as true, whether or not they carry emotional weight.
- **Instrumental Values** – Values that serve as means to achieve other goals (e.g., wealth, ambition, responsibility).
- **Intrinsic (Terminal) Values** – Values pursued for their own sake, representing desired end-states (e.g., freedom, equality, health).
- **Value Ranking** – The personal or cultural ordering of values by importance, which predicts behavior and conflict.
- **Worldview** – The lens through which individuals interpret reality, shaped by their value system.
- **Operational Definition** – A clear, behavior-based description of a concept to reduce ambiguity (e.g., defining "clean room" with specific criteria).
- **Negotiation** – The process of reaching agreement by aligning behaviors or resources with underlying values.
- **Value Conflict** – Disagreement rooted in differing value priorities rather than simple differences of opinion.
- **Freedom vs. Equality Continuum** – Rokeach's framework showing how people and groups can be classified based on how they prioritize these two core values.
- **Cultural Value Learning** – The lifelong process of acquiring values from family, education, religion, and society.
- **Organizational Values** – The shared value priorities within an organization that shape its culture, decisions, and behaviors.

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3.1: Cultural Characteristics and the Roots of Culture

What does the term “culture” mean to you? Is it the apex of knowledge and intellectual achievement? A particular nation, people or social group? Rituals, symbols and myths? The arbiter of what is right and wrong behavior?

It has become quite common to describe natural groupings that humans create as a “culture.” Popular media has given us women’s culture, men’s culture, workplace cultures, specially-abled culture, pet culture, school culture, exercise culture, and the list goes on. But, are all these divisions really classified as culture? For the purposes of this textbook, the answer is no. Cultural communication researcher, Donal Carbaugh (1988) defines culture as “a system of symbols, premises, rules, forms, and the domains and dimensions of mutual meanings associated with these.”

Carbaugh was expanding on the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who believed that culture was a system based on symbols. Geertz said that people use symbols to define their world and express their emotions. As human beings, we all learn about the world around us, both consciously and unconsciously, starting at a very young age. What we internalize comes through observation, experience, interaction, and what we are taught.

We manipulate symbols to create meaning and stories that dictate our behaviors, to organize our lives, and to interact with others. The meanings we attach to symbols are arbitrary. Looking someone in the eye means that you are direct and respectful in some countries, yet, in other cultural systems, looking away is a sign of respect.

Carbaugh also suggested that culture is “a learned set of shared interpretations and beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people.” Our course will combine Carbaugh’s longer definitions into the statement that culture is a learned pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a large group of people. It is within this framework that we will explore what happens when people from different cultural backgrounds interact.

Culture is Learned

Although there is a debate as to whether babies are born into the world as *tabula rasa* (blank slate) or without knowing anything. We can say that they do not come with pre-programmed preferences like your personal computer or cell phone. And, although human beings do share some universal habits such as eating and sleeping, these habits are biologically and physiologically based, not culturally based. Culture is the unique way that we have learned to eat and sleep. Other members of our culture have taught us slowly and consciously (or even subconsciously) what it means to eat and sleep.

Values and Culture

Value systems are fundamental to understanding how culture expresses itself. Values are deeply felt and often serve as principles that guide people in their perceptions and behaviors. Using our values, certain ideas are judged to be right or wrong, good or bad, important or not important, desirable or not desirable. Common values include fairness, respect, integrity, compassion, happiness, kindness, creativity, curiosity, religion, wisdom, and more.

Ideally, our values should match up with what we say we will do, but sometimes our various values come into conflict, and a choice has to be made as to which one will be given preference over another. An example of this could be love of country and love of family. You might love both, but ultimate choose family over country when a crisis occurs.

Beliefs and Culture

Our values are supported by our assumptions of our world. Assumptions are ideas that we believe and hold to be true. Beliefs come about through repetition. This repetition becomes a habit we form and leads to habitual patterns of thinking and doing. We do not realize our assumptions because they are in-grained in us at an unconscious level. We become aware of our assumptions when we encounter a value or belief that is different from our own, and it makes us feel that we need to stand up for, or validate, our beliefs.

People from the United States strongly believe in independence. They consider themselves as separate individuals in control of their own lives. The Declaration of Independence states that all people—not groups, but individual people—are created equal. This sense of equality leads to the idea that all people are of the same standing or importance, and therefore, informality or lack of rigid social protocol is common. This leads to an informality of speech, dress, and manners that other cultures might find difficult to negotiate because of their own beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors.

Beliefs are part of every human life in all world cultures. They define for us, and give meaning to, objects, people, places, and things in our lives. Our assumptions about our world determine how we react emotionally and what actions we need to take. These assumptions about our *worldviews* guide our behaviors and shape our attitudes. Mary Clark (2005) defines **worldviews** as "beliefs and assumptions by which an individual makes sense of experiences that are hidden deep within the language and traditions of the surrounding society." *Worldviews* are the shared values and beliefs that form the customs, behaviors and foundations of any particular society. *Worldviews* "set the ground rules for shared cultural meaning" (Clark, 2005). *Worldviews* are the patterns developed through interactions within families, neighborhoods, schools, communities, churches, and so on. *Worldviews* can be resources for understanding and analyzing the fundamental differences between cultures.

Feelings and Culture

Our culture can give us a sense of familiarity and comfort in a variety of contexts. We embody a sense of ethnocentrism. **Ethnocentrism** is the belief that one's own culture is superior to all other's and is the standard by which all other cultures should be measured (Sumner, 1906).

An example of this could be the farm-to-table movement that is currently popular in the United States. Different parts of the country, pride themselves in growing produce for local consumption touting the benefits of better food, enhanced economy, and carbon neutrality. Tasting menus are developed, awards are given, and consumers brag about the amazing, innovative benefits of living in the United States. What is often missed is the fact that for many people, in many cultures across the planet, the farm-to-table process has not changed for thousands of years. Being a locavore is the only way they know.

Geertz (1973) believed the meanings we attach to our cultural symbols can create chaos when we meet someone who believes in a different meaning or interpretation; it can give us culture shock. This shock can be disorientating, confusing, or surprising. It can bring on anxiety or nervousness, and, for some, a sense of losing control. Culture is always provoking a variety of feelings. **Culture shock** will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

Behavior and Culture

Our worldview influences our behaviors. Behaviors endure over time and are passed from person to person. Within a dominant or national culture, members can belong to many different groups. Dominant cultures may be made up of many subsets or co-cultures that exist within them. For example, your dominant or national culture may be the United States, but you are also a thirty-year-old woman from the Midwest who loves poodles. Because you are a thirty-year-old woman, you exist in the world very differently than a fifty-year-old man. A co-culture is a group whose values, beliefs or behaviors set it apart from the larger culture of which it is a part of and shares many similarities. (Orbe, 1996) Social psychologists may prefer the term micro-culture as opposed to co-culture.

Culture is Dynamic and Heterogeneous

In addition to exploring the components of the definition, it should be understood that culture is always changing. Cultural patterns are not rigid but slowly and constantly changing. The United States of the 1960s is not the United States of today. Nor if I know one person from the United States do I know them all. Within cultures there are struggles to negotiate relationships within a multitude of forces of change. Although the general nature of this book focuses on broad principles, by viewing any culture as diverse in character or content (**heterogeneous**), we are better equipped to understand the complexities of that culture and become more sensitive to how people in that culture live.

Describing Culture

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

The study of cross-cultural analysis incorporates the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and communication. Within cross-cultural analysis, several names dominate our understanding of culture—Florence Kluckhohn, Fred Strodtbeck, Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall. Although new ideas are continually being proposed, Hofstede remains the leading thinker on how we see cultures.

This section will review both the thinkers and the main components of how they define culture. These theories provide a comprehensive and enduring understanding of the key factors that shape a culture. By understanding the key concepts and theories, you should be able to formulate your own analysis of the different cultures.

Value Orientation Theory

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

SUMMARY OF KLUCKHOHN-STRODTBECK VALUES ORIENTATION THEORY

Values Orientation Theory As Relates To Intercultural

Basic Concerns	Orientations	
Human nature	Evil	Malevolent
Relationship to natural world	Mastery	Subjugation
Time	Past	Present-future
Activity	Being	Becoming
Social relations	Collective	Individual

What is the inherent nature of human beings?

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

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

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

What is the best way to think about time?

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

What is the proper mode of human activity?

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

What is the ideal relationship between the individual and society?

Expressed another way, we can say the concern is about how a society is best organized. People in some societies think it most natural that a society be organized [by groups or collectives]. They hold to the view that some people should lead and others should follow. Leaders, they feel, should make all the important decisions [for the group]. Other societies are best described as valuing

collateral relationships. In such societies, everyone has an important role to play in society; therefore, important decisions should be made by consensus. In still other societies, the individual is the primary unit of society. In societies that place great value on individualism, people are likely to believe that each person should have control over his/her own destiny. When groups convene to make decisions, they should follow the principle of "one person, one vote."

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

Hofstede's Dimensions of National Culture Theory

Geert Hofstede, sometimes called the father of modern cross-cultural science and thinking, is a social psychologist who focused on a comparison of nations using a statistical analysis of two unique databases. The first and largest database composed of answers that matched employee samples from forty different countries to the same survey questions focused on attitudes and beliefs. The second consisted of answers to some of the same questions by Hofstede's executive students who came from fifteen countries and from a variety of companies and industries. He developed a framework for understanding the systematic differences between nations in these two databases. This framework focused on value dimensions. Values, in this case, are *broad preferences for one state of affairs over others*, and they are mostly unconscious.

Most of us understand that values are our own culture's or society's ideas about what is good, bad, acceptable, or unacceptable. Hofstede developed a framework for understanding how these values underlie organizational behavior. Through his database research, he identified five key value dimensions (power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, & time) that analyze and interpret the behaviors, values, and attitudes of a national culture (Hofstede, 1980).

Power Distance

Power distance refers to how openly a society or culture accepts or does not accept differences between people, as in hierarchies in the workplace, in politics, and so on. For example, *high power distance* cultures openly accept that a boss is "higher" and as such deserves a more formal respect and authority. Examples of these cultures include Japan, Mexico, and the Philippines. In Japan or Mexico, the senior person is almost a father figure and is automatically given respect and usually loyalty without questions.

In Southern Europe, Latin America, and much of Asia, power is an integral part of the social equation. People tend to accept relationships of servitude. An individual's status, age, and seniority command respect—they're what make it all right for the lower-ranked person to take orders. Subordinates expect to be told what to do and won't take initiative or speak their minds unless a manager explicitly asks for their opinion.

At the other end of the spectrum are **low power distance** cultures, in which superiors and subordinates are more likely to see each other as equal in power. Countries found at this end of the spectrum include Austria and Denmark. To be sure, not all cultures view power in the same ways. In Sweden, Norway, and Israel, for example, respect for equality is a warranty of freedom. Subordinates and managers alike often have carte blanche to speak their minds.

Interestingly enough, research indicates that the United States tilts toward low power distance but is more in the middle of the scale than Germany and the United Kingdom. The United States has a culture of promoting participation at the office while maintaining control in the hands of the manager. People in this type of culture tend to be relatively laid-back about status and social standing—but there's a firm understanding of who has the power. What's surprising for many people is that countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia actually rank lower on the power distance spectrum than the United States.

In a high power distance culture, you would probably be much less likely to challenge a decision, to provide an alternative, or to give input. If you are working with someone from a high power distance culture, you may need to take extra care to elicit feedback and involve them in the discussion because their cultural framework may preclude their participation. They may have learned that less powerful people must accept decisions without comment, even if they have a concern or know there is a significant problem.

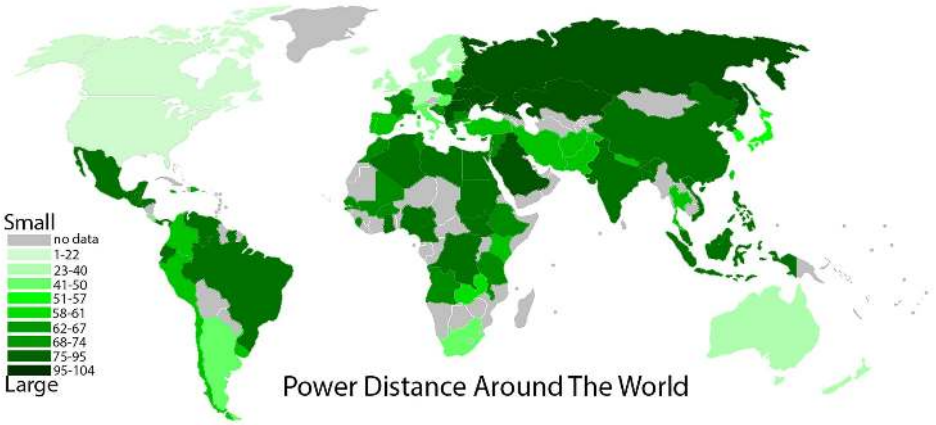

Figure 3.1.1: A map which shows the relative power distance of nations around the world

Individualism vs. collectivism

Individualism vs. **collectivism** anchor opposite ends of a continuum that describes how people define themselves and their relationships with others. Individualism is just what it sounds like. It refers to people's tendency to take care of themselves and their immediate circle of family and friends, perhaps at the expense of the overall society. In individualistic cultures, what counts most is self-realization. Initiating alone, sweating alone, achieving alone— not necessarily collective efforts—are what win applause. In individualistic cultures, competition is the fuel of success.

The United States and Northern European societies are often labeled as individualistic. In the United States, individualism is valued and promoted—from its political structure (individual rights and democracy) to entrepreneurial zeal (capitalism). Other examples of high-individualism cultures include Australia and the United Kingdom.

Communication is more direct in individualistic societies but more indirect in collectivistic societies. The U.S. ranks very high in individualism, and South Korea ranks quite low. Japan falls close to the middle.

When we talk about masculine or feminine cultures, we're not talking about diversity issues. It's about how a society views traits that are considered masculine or feminine. Each carries with it a set of cultural expectations and norms for gender behavior and gender roles across life.

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

In contrast, feminine cultures are thought to emphasize "feminine" values: concern for all, an emphasis on the quality of life, and an emphasis on relationships. In feminine-oriented cultures, both genders swap roles, with the focus on quality of life, service, and independence. The Scandinavian cultures rank as feminine cultures, as do cultures in Switzerland and New Zealand. The United States is actually more moderate, and its score is ranked in the middle between masculine and feminine classifications. For all these factors, it's important to remember that cultures don't necessarily fall neatly into one camp or the other. The range of difference is one aspect of intercultural communication that requires significant attention when a communicator enters a new environment.

Uncertainty avoidance

When we meet each other for the first time, we often use what we have previously learned to understand our current context. We also do this to reduce our uncertainty. People who have high uncertainty avoidance generally prefer to steer clear of conflict and competition. They tend to appreciate very clear instructions. They dislike ambiguity. At the office, sharply defined rules and rituals are used to get tasks completed. Stability and what is known are preferred to instability and the unknown.

Some cultures, such as the U.S. and Britain, are highly tolerant of uncertainty, while others go to great lengths to reduce the element of surprise. Cultures in the Arab world, for example, are high in uncertainty avoidance; they tend to be resistant to change and reluctant to take risks. Whereas a U.S. business negotiator might enthusiastically agree to try a new procedure, the Egyptian counterpart would likely refuse to get involved until all the details are worked out.

Berger and Calabrese (1975) developed uncertainty reduction theory to examine this dynamic aspect of communication. Here are seven axioms of uncertainty:

1. There is a high level of uncertainty at first. As we get to know one another, our verbal communication increases and our uncertainty begins to decrease.
2. Following verbal communication, as nonverbal communication increases, uncertainty will continue to decrease, and we will express more nonverbal displays of affiliation, like nodding one's head to express agreement.
3. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, we tend to increase our information-seeking behavior, perhaps asking questions to gain more insight. As our understanding increases, uncertainty decreases, as does the information-seeking behavior.
4. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, the communication interaction is not as personal or intimate. As uncertainty is reduced, intimacy increases.
5. When experiencing high levels of uncertainty, communication will feature more reciprocity, or displays of respect. As uncertainty decreases, reciprocity may diminish.
6. Differences between people increase uncertainty, while similarities decrease it.
7. Higher levels of uncertainty are associated with a decrease in the indication of liking the other person, while reductions in uncertainty are associated with liking the other person more.

In educational settings, people from countries high in uncertainty avoidance expect their teachers to be experts with all of the answers. People from countries low in uncertainty avoidance don't mind it when a teacher says, "I don't know."

Long-term vs. short-term orientation

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

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

CRITIQUE OF HOFSTEDE'S THEORY

Among the various attempts by social scientists to study human values from a cultural perspective, Hofstede's is certainly popular. In fact, it would be a rare culture text that did not pay special attention to Hofstede's theory. Value dimensions are all evolving as many people gain experience outside their home cultures and countries, therefore, in practice, these five dimensions do not occur as single values but are really woven together and interdependent, creating very complex cultural interactions. Even though these five values are constantly shifting and not static, they help us begin to understand how and why people from different cultures may think and act as they do.

However, Hofstede's cultural dimensions are not without critics. It has been faulted for promoting a largely static view of culture (Hamden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1997) and as Orr & Hauser (2008) have suggested, the world has changed in dramatic ways since Hofstede's research began.

Edward T. Hall

Edward T. Hall was a respected anthropologist who applied his field to the understanding of cultures and intercultural communications. Hall is best noted for three principal categories that analyze and interpret how communications and interactions between cultures differ: context, space, and time.

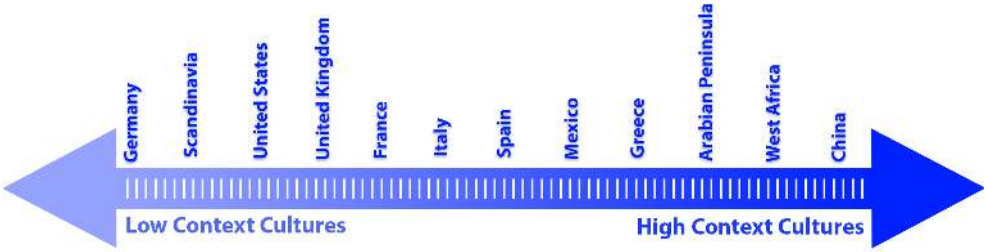

Figure **3.1.2**: A graph which shows the level of context in various world cultures

High and low context refers to how a message is communicated. In high-context cultures, such as those found in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, the physical context of the message carries a great deal of importance. People tend to be more indirect and to expect the person they are communicating with to decode the implicit part of their message. While the person sending the message takes painstaking care in crafting the message, the person receiving the message is expected to read it within context. The message may lack the verbal directness you would expect in a low-context culture. In high-context cultures, body language is as important and sometimes more important than the actual words spoken.

In contrast, in low-context cultures such as the United States and most Northern European countries, people tend to be explicit and direct in their communication. Satisfying individual needs is important. You're probably familiar with some well-known low-context mottos: "Say what you mean" and "Don't beat around the bush." The guiding principle is to minimize the margins of misunderstanding or doubt. Low-context communication aspires to get straight to the point.

Communication between people from high-context and low-context cultures can be confusing. In business interactions, people from low-context cultures tend to listen primarily to the words spoken; they tend not to be as cognizant of nonverbal aspects. As a result, people often miss important clues that could tell them more about the specific issue.

Space

Space refers to the study of physical space and people. Hall called this the study of proxemics, which focuses on space and distance between people as they interact. *Space* refers to everything from how close people stand to one another to how people might mark their territory or boundaries in the workplace and in other settings. Stand too close to someone from the United States, which prefers a "safe" physical distance, and you are apt to make them uncomfortable. How close is too close depends on where you are from. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we all establish a comfort zone when interacting with others. Standing distances shrink and expand across cultures. Latins, Spaniards, and Filipinos (whose culture has been influenced by three centuries of Spanish colonization) stand rather close even in business encounters. In cultures that have a low need for territory, people not only tend to stand closer together but also are more willing to share their space—whether it be a workplace, an office, a seat on a train, or even ownership of a business project.

Attitudes toward Time: Polychronic versus Monochronic Cultures

Hall identified that time is another important concept greatly influenced by culture. In polychronic cultures—*polychronic* literally means "many times"—people can do several things at the same time. In monochronic cultures, or "one-time" cultures, people tend to do one task at a time.

This isn't to suggest that people in polychronic cultures are better at multitasking. Rather, people in monochronic cultures, such as Northern Europe and North America, tend to schedule one event at a time. For them, an appointment that starts at 8 a.m. is an appointment that starts at 8 a.m.—or 8:05 at the latest. People are expected to arrive on time, whether for a board meeting or a family picnic. Time is a means of imposing order. Often the meeting has a firm end time as well, and even if the agenda is not finished, it's not unusual to end the meeting and finish the agenda at another scheduled meeting.

In polychronic cultures, by contrast, time is nice, but people and relationships matter more. Finishing a task may also matter more. If you've ever been to Latin America, the Mediterranean, or the Middle East, you know all about living with relaxed timetables. People might attend to three things at once and think nothing of it. Or they may cluster informally, rather than arrange themselves in a queue. In polychronic cultures, it's not considered an insult to walk into a meeting or a party well past the appointed hour.

In polychronic cultures, people regard work as part of a larger interaction with a community. If an agenda is not complete, people in polychronic cultures are less likely to simply end the meeting and are more likely to continue to finish the business at hand.

Those who prefer monochronic order may find polychronic order frustrating and hard to manage effectively. Those raised with a polychronic sensibility, on the other hand, might resent the "tyranny of the clock" and prefer to be focused on completing the tasks at hand.

What Else Determines a Culture?

The three approaches to the study of cultural values (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, Hofstede, and Hall) presented in this chapter provide a framework for a comparative analysis between cultures. Additionally, there are other external factors that also constitute a culture —identities, language, manners, media, relationships, and conflict, to name a few. Coming chapters will help us to understand how more cultural traits are incorporated into daily life.

Key Terms

- **Collectivism** – A cultural orientation that prioritizes group harmony, loyalty, and shared responsibility over individual goals.
- **Ethnocentrism** – The tendency to view one's own culture as superior and to judge other cultures by one's own standards.
- **Heterogeneous** – Describes a group or society made up of diverse cultural backgrounds, identities, or perspectives.
- **Individualism** – A cultural orientation that emphasizes personal autonomy, independence, and individual achievement.
- **Uncertainty Avoidance** – The degree to which a culture feels threatened by ambiguity and prefers clear rules, structure, and predictability.
- **Uncertainty Reduction Theory** – A theory proposing that people seek information to reduce uncertainty when interacting with others, especially strangers.
- **Space** – The culturally influenced use of physical distance in communication, often linked to comfort, power, and relational norms.
- **Power Distance** – The extent to which a culture accepts unequal distribution of power and hierarchical relationships.
- **High-Context vs. Low-Context** – A distinction between cultures that rely heavily on implicit, nonverbal cues (high-context) versus explicit, direct verbal communication (low-context).
- **Femininity vs. Masculinity** – A cultural dimension describing whether a society values cooperation, care, and quality of life (feminine) or competition, achievement, and assertiveness (masculine).
- **Short-Term Orientation vs. Long-Term Orientation** – A cultural value dimension contrasting focus on immediate results and tradition (short-term) with future planning, persistence, and adaptability (long-term).
- **Polychronic Cultures** – Cultures that view time as flexible, multitask frequently, and prioritize relationships over schedules.
- **Monochronic Cultures** – Cultures that value punctuality, scheduling, and completing one task at a time.
- **Proxemics** – The study of how people use and interpret physical space in communication.
- **Values** – Deeply held beliefs about what is important, guiding behavior and decision-making.
- **Worldviews** – The overarching frameworks through which individuals interpret reality, shaped by cultural and personal values.
- **Assumption** – An unstated belief or expectation that influences perception and communication.
- **Co-culture** – A smaller cultural group within a dominant culture that maintains distinct values, norms, or communication practices.

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3.2: Verbal Communication

How do you communicate? How do you think? We use language as a system to create and exchange meaning with one another, and the types of words we use influence both our perceptions and others interpretation of our meanings. Language is one of the more conspicuous expressions of culture. Aside from the obvious differences, vocabularies are actually often built on the cultural experiences of the users.

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

It is estimated that at least half of the world's languages will become extinct within the next century. Of the 165 indigenous languages still spoken in North America, only 8 are spoken by as many as 10,000 people. About 75 are spoken by only a handful of older people, and are believed to be on their way to extinction (www.linguisticsociety.org, 2/10/19)). When a language dies, a culture can die with it. A community's connection to its past, its traditions, and the links tying people to specific knowledge are abandoned as the community becomes part of a different or larger economic and political order (www.linguisticsociety.org, 2/10/19).

The Study of Language

Linguistics is the study of language and its structure. Linguistics deals with the study of particular languages and the search for general properties common to all languages. It also includes explorations into language variations (i.e. dialects), how languages change over time, how language is stored and processed in the brain, and how children learn language. The study of linguistics is an important part of intercultural communication.

Areas of research for linguists include **phonetics** (the study of the production, acoustics, and hearing speech sounds), **phonology** (the patterning of sounds), **morphology** (the patterning of words), **syntax** (the structure of sentences), **semantics** (meaning), and **pragmatic**s (language in context).

When you study linguistics, you gain insight into one of the most fundamental parts of being human—the ability to communicate. You can understand how language works, how it is used, plus how it is developed and changes over time. Since language is universal to all human interactions, the knowledge attained through linguistics is fundamental to understanding cultures.

Principles of Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is based on several basic principles. In this section, we'll examine each principle and explore how it influences everyday communication. Whether it's a simple conversation or a formal presentation, these principles apply to all contexts of communication.

Language Is Arbitrary and Symbolic

Words, by themselves, do not have any inherent meaning. Humans give meaning to them, and their meanings change across time. For example, we negotiate the meaning of the word "home," and define it, through visual images or dialogue, in order to communicate with our audience.

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

But what if we have to transfer meaning from one vocabulary to another? In such cases, language and culture can sometimes make for interesting twists. The *New York Times* Sterngold, J. (11/15/98) noted that the title of the 1998 film *There's Something About Mary* proved difficult to translate when it was released in foreign markets. In Poland, where blonde jokes are popular and common, the film title (translated back to English for our use) was *For the Love of a Blonde.* In France, *Mary at All Costs* communicated the idea, while in Thailand *My True Love Will Stand All Outrageous Events* dropped the reference to Mary altogether. Capturing ideas with words is a challenge when the intended audience speaks the same language, but across languages and cultures, the challenge becomes intense.

Language Has Rules

Using language means following rules. **Constitutive rules** govern the meaning of words, and dictate which words represent which objects (Searle, 1964). **Regulative rules** govern how we arrange words into sentences and how we exchange words in oral conversations. If you don't know the various rules, you will struggle to communicate clearly and accurately with others. Consequently, others will also struggle to find meaning in your communication.

Language Evolves

Many people view language as fixed, but in fact, language constantly changes. As time passes and technology changes, people add new words to their language, repurpose old ones, and discard archaic ones. New additions to American English in the last few decades include *blog*, *sexting*, and *selfie*. Repurposed additions to American English include *cyberbullying*, *tweet*, and *app* (from application). Whereas *affright*, *cannonade*, and *fain* are becoming extinct in modern American English.

Other times, speakers of a language borrow words and phrases from other languages and incorporate them into their own. *Wisconsin, Oregon, and Wyoming* were all borrowed from Native American languages. *Typhoon* is from Mandarin Chinese, and *influenza* is from Italian.

Language Shapes Our Thought

Members of a culture use language to communicate their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and values with one another, thereby reinforcing their collective sense of cultural identity (Whorf, 1952). Consequently, the language you speak, and the words you choose, announce to others who you are.

What would your life be like if you had been raised in a country other than the one where you grew up? Or suppose you had been born male instead of female, or vice versa. You would have learned another set of customs, values, traditions, other language patterns, and ways of communicating. You would be a different person who communicated in different ways.

It's not just the words themselves, or even how they are organized, that makes communication such a challenge. The idea that language shapes how we think about our world was first suggested by the research of Edward Sapir, who conducted an intensive study of Native American languages in the early 1900s. Sapir argues that because language is our primary means of sharing meaning with others, it powerfully effects how we perceive others and our relationships with them (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996). About 50 years later, Benjamin Lee Whorf expanded on Sapir's ideas in what has become known as

the **Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis** or what is known today as **linguistic determinism**. Whorf argued that we cannot conceive of that for which we lack a vocabulary or that language quite literally defines the boundaries of our thinking.

Contemporary scholars noted that linguistic determinism suggests that our ability to think is constrained by language (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996) and therefore not realistic. Yet, both Sapir and Whorf, along with contemporary scholars, recognize the dramatic impact that culture has on language. Because language influences our thoughts, and different people from different cultures use different languages, most communication scholars agree that people from different cultures would perceive and think about the world in very different ways. This effect is known as **linguistic relativity**. Your language itself, ever changing and growing, in many ways determines your reality.

Cultural Variations in Language

As has been established, language is not culture free. If your intercultural communication is to be effective, you cannot ignore the broader cultural context that gives words meaning. We've discussed the linguistic issues of language, but what about the cultural issues of language? Cultural competency is a kind of knowledge of all of the other systems of ideas and beliefs shared by members of a community and transmitted through language (Bentahila & Davies, 1989). Cultural knowledge can keep second language learners from producing perfectly grammatically correct language yet embarrassingly inappropriate sentences.

Cultural rules about when and how certain speech acts can be performed may differ greatly. Routine formulas such as greetings, leave-taking, thanking, apologizing and so on do not follow the same, or even similar rules, across cultures causing misunderstandings and confusion. How language is used in a particular culture is strongly related to the values a culture emphasizes, and how it believes that the relations between humans ought to be.

Attitudes Towards Speaking, Silence, and Writing

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

Silence in some Asian cultures can be a sign of respect. If a person asks a question, it is polite to demonstrate that you have reflected on the question before providing an answer. In differences of opinion, it is often thought that saying nothing is better than offending the other side, which would cause both parties to lose face. Sometimes words do not convey ideas, but instead become barriers. Silence can convey the real intention of the speakers and can be interpreted according to the expected possibilities for speech or have more profound meaning than words.

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

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

Variations in Communication Styles

Communication style refers to both verbal and nonverbal communication along with language. Problems sometimes arise when people from different cultures try to communicate, and they tend to "fail to recognize the conventionality of the communicative

code of the other, instead taking the communicative behavior as representing what it means in their own native culture" (Loveday, 1986).

An understanding of communication style differences helps listeners understand how to interpret verbal messages.

High Context cultures, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, are those in which people assume that others within their culture will share their viewpoints and thus understand situations in much the same way. Consequently, people in such cultures often talk indirectly, using hints or suggestions to convey meaning with the thought that others will know what is being expressed. In *high context* cultures, what is not said is just as important, if not more important, than what is said. *High context* cultures are very often collectivistic as well.

Low context cultures on the other hand are those in which people do NOT presume that others share their beliefs, values, and behaviors so they tend to be more verbally informative and direct in their communication (Hall & Hall, 1987). Many *low context* cultures are individualist so people openly express their views, and tend to make important information obvious to others.

Direct/Indirect styles are closely related to *high/low context* communication, but not exactly the same. Context refers to the assumption that speakers are homogeneous enough to share or implicitly understand the meanings associated with contexts. Whereas, *direct/indirect* refers directly to verbal strategies.

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

Indirect styles are those in which communication is often designed to hide or minimize the speaker's true intentions, needs, wants, and desires. Communication tends to be personal and focuses on the relationship between the speakers. The language may be subtle, and the speaker may be looking for a "softer" way to communicate there is a problem by providing many contextual cues. A hidden meaning may be embedded into the message because harmony and "saving face" is more important than truth and confrontation. In indirect cultures, such as those in Latin America, business conversations may start with discussions of the weather, or family, or topics other than business as the partners gain a sense of each other, long before the topic of business is raised.

Elaborate and Understated communication styles refer to the quantity of talk that a culture values and is related to attitudes towards speech and silence.

Elaborate styles of communication refers to the use of rich and expressive language in everyday conversation. The French, Latin Americans, Africans, and Arabs tend to use exaggerated communication because in their cultures, simple statements may be interpreted to mean the exact opposite.

Understated communication styles values simple understatement, simple assertions, and silence. People who speak sparingly tend to be trusted more than people who speak a lot. Prudent word choice allows an individual to be socially discreet, gain social acceptance, and avoid social penalty. In Japan, the pleasure of a conversation lies "not in discussion (a logical game), but in emotional exchange" (Nakane, 1970) with the purpose of social harmony (Barnlund, 1975).

Variations in Context Rules of Communication Styles

While there are differences in the preferred communication styles used by various cultures, it is important to remember that no particular culture will use the same communication style all the time. When a person either emphasizes or minimizes the differences between himself /herself and the other person in conversation, it is called **code-switching**. In other words, it's the practice of shifting the language that you use to better express yourself in conversations. According to **communication accommodation theory** (Auer, 1998) this can include, but is not limited to, language, accent, dialect, and vocalics or paralanguage.

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

Language & Power

It has been said that all language is powerful and all power is rooted in language (Russell, 1938). Those who speak the same language not only can make themselves understood to one another, but the ability to make oneself understood promotes a feeling of belonging *together*. The identity-forming power of language is incredibly significant. Based on language, individuals will form small or large social groups that become societies, states, and nations. (Goethe-Institut, 2/11/19)

Co-cultural groups will be impacted differently by language and social position within a dominant culture or language group. One's social position influences how one interprets a communication context or how one is viewed by others within a dominant language group. *Co-cultural groups* are often expected to adopt or adapt to the dominant communication strategies.

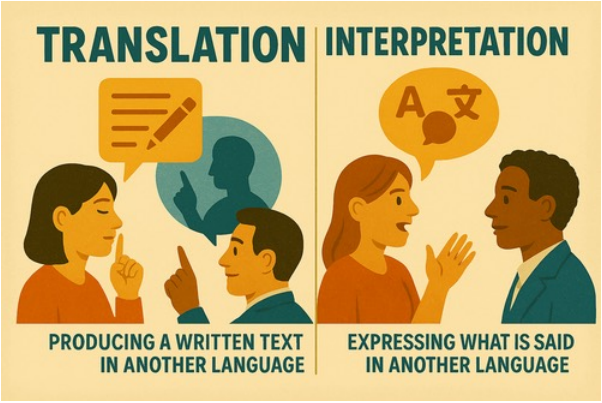
Politics & Policies

Language management is going on all the time. Language policy is deeply embedded in beliefs people have about language, and centers around the question of who has the ability or the authority to make choices where language is concerned, and whose choices will ultimately prevail. This could manifest in official governmental recognition of a language, how language is used in official capacities, or protect the rights of how groups use and maintain languages.

Language policies are connected to the politics of class, culture, ethnicity, and economics. While some nations have one or more official language, the United States does not have an official legal language. Much debate has been raised about the issue, and twenty-seven states have passed Official English laws (USConstitution.net, 2/12/19). English is only the de facto national language. The European Union has 23 official languages, while recognizing over 60 indigenous languages.

Moving Between Languages – Translation & Interpretation

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



Translation generally involves the process of producing a written text that refers to something written in another language. Traditionally, the *translator* would read the *source* in its original language, decipher its meaning, then write, rewrite, and proofread the content in the *target* language to ensure the original meaning, style and content are preserved. Some *translators* use computer-aided tools to convert the *source* into a file type for electronic translation, then proof-read each section of the text for quality of content, meaning, and style in the *target* language. **Translators** are often experts in their fields of knowledge as well as linguists fluent in two or more languages with excellent written communication skills.

Interpretation is the process of orally expressing what is said or written in another language. Contrary to popular belief, *interpretation* isn't a word-for-word translation of a spoken message. If it was, it wouldn't make sense to the target audience. *Interpreters* need to transpose the *source* language within the given context, preserving its original meaning, but rephrasing idioms, colloquialisms, and other culturally-specific references in ways that the *target* audience can understand. They may have to do this in a simultaneous manner to the original speaker or by speaking only during the breaks provided by the original speaker. **Interpreters** are also often experts in fields of knowledge, cultures, and languages with excellent memories.

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

Intercultural Communication Competence

Has learning about another culture changed or enhanced your impressions for the better? The gateway to such connections is **intercultural communication competence.** Another way to view *intercultural communication competence* is the ability to communicate and behave in appropriate ways with those who are culturally different. You are *interculturally competent* when you adapt to cultural difference by co-creating spaces, teams, and organizations that are inclusive, effective, innovative, and satisfying. You can strengthen your intercultural communication competence by becoming more world-minded, practicing attributional complexity, and understanding communication accommodation theory.

World-Mindedness

By possessing **world-mindedness,** you demonstrated acceptance and respect toward other cultures' beliefs, values, and customs or *worldviews* (Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003; Merryfield, et al (2008). Practicing *world-mindedness* happens in three ways. First, you must accept others' expression of their culture or co-culture as a natural element of their communication patterns (Chen & Starosa, 2005). Second, you should avoid any temptation to judge others' *worldviews* as "better" or "worse" than your own. Third, treat people from all cultures with respect.

By practicing *world-mindedness*, you are more than just tolerating cultural differences that you find perplexing or problematic, you are preserving others' dignity. *World-mindedness* is the opposite of **ethnocentrism** or the belief that one's own cultural beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices are superior to others'. *Ethnocentrism* is not the same thing as patriotism or pride in your own cultural heritage. You can be patriotic and proud of your own heritage without being *ethnocentric*! **Ethnocentrism** is a comparative evaluation where people view their own culture or co-culture as the standard against which all other cultures should be judged (Sumner, 1906; Neulip & McCroskey, 1997). Consequently, such people tend to view themselves as competent communicators and people from other cultures as incompetent communicators.

Attributional Complexity

Practicing **attributional complexity** means that you acknowledge that other people's behaviors have complex causes. You have the ability to observe others' behavior and analyze the various forces that might be influencing it. For example, rather than deciding that a reserved classmate is unfriendly, you might consider cultural theories about communication styles, and language usage before passing judgment.

In addition, you might check you might want to check your understanding of someone's words or behaviors. This is called **perception-checking,** and it's used to help us decode messages more accurately by avoiding assuming too much. *Perception-checking* is a three-part process that includes *description, interpretation,* and *clarification.* First, you should provide a description of the behavior that you noticed. For example, "you walked out of the room without saying anything." Second, you should provide one or two possible interpretations. Such as, "I didn't know if you were mad at me or if you were in a hurry." And thirdly, you should request clarification from the person about the behavior and your interpretation. As in, "could you help me understand this from your point of view?"

Perception-checking helps us try to see things from another perspective. It allows us to examine how people from other cultural backgrounds make decisions and allows us to make comparisons of their approaches to ours. And finally, it allows others to explain the reasons for their behavior and allows us to validate their explanations rather than challenging them.

Communication Accommodation

The last way to strive for *intercultural communication competence* is to embrace **communication accommodation theory** by meshing your communication with the behaviors of people from other cultures. People are especially motivated to adapt their communication when they see social approval, when they wish to establish relationships with others, and when they view the language use of others as appropriate (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). In contrast, when people wish to convey emotional distance and disassociate themselves from others, the accentuate the differences through communication.

So what does this mean for intercultural communicators? Try adapting to other people's communication preferences (Bianconi, 2002). Notice how long a turn people take when speaking, how quickly or slowly they speak, how direct or indirect they are, and how much they appear to want to talk compared to you. You may also need to learn and practice cultural norms for nonverbal behaviors, including eye contact, power distance, and touch. Use caution to avoid inappropriate imitation though. Mimicking could be considered disrespectful in some cultural contexts, whereas an honest desire to learn is often interpreted positively on the road to intercultural communication competence.

Key Terms

- **Linguistics** – The scientific study of language structure, use, and meaning.
- **Morphology** – The study of how words are formed from smaller units of meaning (morphemes).
- **Phonetics** – The study of the physical sounds of human speech.
- **Phonology** – The study of how sounds function and are organized within a particular language.
- **Pragmatics** – How language is used in context, including implied meanings and social rules.
- **Semantics** – The study of meaning in words, phrases, and sentences.
- **Syntax** – The rules that govern how words are arranged to form sentences.
- **Constitutive Rules** – Rules that define what communication behaviors *mean* within a culture.
- **Regulative Rules** – Rules that guide how people *should* behave in communication situations.
- **Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis** – The idea that language shapes thought and influences how people perceive the world.
- **Linguistic Determinism** – The strong version of Sapir-Whorf: language *limits* what people can think.
- **Linguistic Relativity** – The weaker version: language *influences* thought but does not restrict it.
- **High-Context Communication** – Communication that relies heavily on nonverbal cues, shared knowledge, and implicit meaning.
- **Low-Context Communication** – Communication that is direct, explicit, and relies on clear verbal messages.
- **Direct Communication** – A style that expresses meaning openly and clearly with little ambiguity.
- **Indirect Communication** – A style that conveys meaning subtly, often through implication or context.
- **Elaborate Communication** – A style that uses rich, expressive, and detailed language.
- **Understated Communication** – A style that uses restrained, simple, and minimal verbal expression.
- **Translation** – Converting written text from one language to another.
- **Interpretation** – Converting spoken language from one language to another in real time.
- **Intercultural Communication Competence** – The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural differences.
- **World-Mindedness** – An attitude of openness and respect toward people from other cultures.
- **Attributional Complexity** – The ability to recognize that people's behavior has multiple, layered causes.
- **Perception-Checking** – A communication strategy that verifies interpretations by asking clarifying questions.
- **Communication Accommodation Theory** – The idea that people adjust their communication style to converge with or diverge from others.
- **Code-Switching** – Shifting between languages, dialects, or communication styles depending on context or audience.

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3.3: Nonverbal Communication

You might have studied a second language for many years, and considered yourself fluent, but still find it difficult to communicate with others when you travel to a country where that second language is spoken. Most of us have to live within a culture before we learn the nonverbal communication aspects of culture. Learning nonverbal communication is important and challenging. It's important because much communication meaning is conveyed nonverbally, and challenging because nonverbal communication is often multi-channeled and culture-specific.

Human beings all have the capacity to make the same gestures and expressions, but not all of those gestures and expressions have the same meaning across cultural boundaries. Types of nonverbal communication vary considerably based on culture and country of origin. Every culture interprets posture, gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, vocal noises, use of space, degree of territory, and time differently.

Principles of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is those aspects of communication, such as gestures and facial expressions, that do not involve verbal communication, but which may include nonverbal aspects of speech itself such as accent, tone of voice, and speed of speaking (Dictionary.com 3/3/19). In other words, **nonverbal communication** is communication through means other than language. A famous study by Albert Mehrabian (1971) found that 93% of communication meaning comes from nonverbal communication. Mehrabian posited that 7% came from the words, 38% through vocal elements, and 55% from through other elements such as facial expressions, posture, gestures, etc. More recent studies have indicated that determining the impact of nonverbal elements on communication meaning is extremely difficult, and results can vary from 60-93%.

In the bigger picture, the exact results don't matter as much as the fact that nonverbal communication can contribute to well-over half of the emotional or relational meaning of any given message. However you look at it, nonverbal elements are crucial to the study of communication. When comparing verbal and nonverbal communication, it's important to remember that both are symbolic, and both communicate meaning, but other aspects differ greatly.

Figure **3.3.1**: Two rock climbers who speak different languages communicate non-verbally.

Nonverbal Communication Uses Multiple Channels

When we use verbal communication, we use words, and we transmit through one channel at a time. We can speak words, read words, type words, or listen to words, but the channel is words. Nonverbally, when I talk to a friend, I listen to my friend's tone of voice, I watch my friend's facial expressions, use of eye contact, and gestures, and possibly touch them (multiple channels) all while trying to make sense of the words (one channel). Or to impress a possible romantic partner, I dress up in my most flattering clothes, put on cologne or perfume, fix my hair, and laugh at their jokes to indicate my interest in them.

Nonverbal Communication is More Ambiguous

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

Some nonverbal behaviors are learned as part of being socialized into a culture. In the United States, we often shake hands when meeting someone new in a formal situation. Words such as "hi, I'm Karen" along with a firm handshake are general expectations in business settings. Or, "it was so nice to meet you" and another firm handshake at parting.

Nonverbal Communication Has Fewer Rules

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

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

Nonverbal Messages Communicate Emotions and Meaning

When we interact with others, we monitor many channels besides their words to determine meaning. Where does a wink start and a nod end? Nonverbal communication involves the entire body, the space it occupies and dominates, the time it interacts, and not only what is not said, but how it is not said. Nonverbal action flows almost seamlessly from one to the next, creating an intention of meaning in the mind of the receiver.

Nonverbal communication often gives our thoughts and feelings away before we are even aware of what we are thinking or how we feel. People may see and hear more than you ever anticipated. Your nonverbal communication includes both **intentional** and **unintentional** messages, but since it all happens so fast, the *unintentional* ones can contradict what you know you are supposed to say or how you are supposed to react.

Our reliance on nonverbal communication becomes even more intense when people display **mixed messages** or verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey contradictory meanings (Burgoon & Hoobler, 2002). In such cases, we almost always trust the nonverbal message over the verbal one as nonverbal behavior is believed to operate at the unconscious level. Still, we often assign intentional motives to nonverbal communication when in fact their meaning is unintentional, and hard to interpret.

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

Nonverbal Communication is Influenced by Culture

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

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

Nonverbal and Verbal Communication Work Together to Create Communication

Despite the differences between verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, and the importance of nonverbal noted by Mehrabian and others, both forms are essential. They both work together to create meaning (Jones & LeBaron, 2002). As communicators, we do not experience or express them separately, but rather jointly to create meaning (Birdwhistell, 1973). We need *both* to communicate competently. Nonverbal communication can reinforce, substitute for, and contradict verbal communication, but it can never be the words—and we need the words as that tip of the iceberg to have a focus for the meaning and feelings that are being displayed.

Types of Nonverbal Behaviors or Codes

One reason that nonverbal communication is so rich with information is that humans use so many different aspects of behavior, appearance, and environment to convey meaning. Scholars call the different means used for transmitting information **nonverbal communication codes** (Burgoon & Hoobler, 2002). The seven general codes for nonverbal communication are: kinesics, vocalics, proxemics, haptics, chronemics, physical appearance, artifacts, and environment.

The cultural patterns embedded in nonverbal codes should be used not as stereotypes for all members of particular cultures, but rather as tentative guidelines or examples to help you understand the great variation of nonverbal behavior in humans. Bodenhausen, Todd & Richeson (2009) remind us that prejudice is often based on certain aspects of nonverbal behavior such as appearance. Reread chapter XXX for a reminder how prejudice can hinder the communication process.

Kinesics is thought by some to be the richest nonverbal code in terms of its power to communicate meaning, **kinesics** includes most of the behaviors we usually associate with nonverbal communication. The word *kinesics* comes from the Greek word, *kinesis*, meaning "movement," and includes facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and posture.

Facial Expressions communicate an endless stream of emotions, and we make judgements about what others are feeling by assessing their **faces**. Our use of emoticons to communicate attitudes and emotions in electronic media testifies to the importance of this type of kinesics. In fact, some scholars argue that *facial expressions* rank first among all forms of communication (Knapp & Hall, 2002). Cultural rules often regulate *facial expressions*. You might have been taught that smiles are universal, but that simply is not true. Most human beings can smile, but cultures value and interpret smiles in different ways. In other words, the meaning behind a smile is not universal. For example, in Russian, people do not smile because it implies that you are foolish, or possibly sneaky and manipulative. Even family photos, adults often appear with flat or scowling faces. Many Hispanic cultures prefer a proud and elegant facial appearance, which does not include smiling. In Japan, smiling is a way to show respect or to hide what you are actually feeling. In the United States, we smile to show a pleasant face to the people around us, to express happiness, gratitude, and even when we are nervous. We often tend to smile for the purposes of getting along with others (Solomon, 2017).

Eye contact, *or Oculesics*, serves many purposes. We use our eyes to express emotions, regulate a conversation, indicate listening behavior, show interest in others, respect, status, hostility, and aggression (Burgoon, Buller & Woodall, 1996). Patterns of eye contact vary significantly by culture. Generally, **eye contact** is considered a good thing in the United States. It can mean that you are interested, confident, and bold (a good thing), but people often avoid **eye contact** in crowded, impersonal situations such as walking down a busy street or riding a crowded bus. In France, however, someone may feel free to watch someone interesting on

the street and consciously make eye contact to indicate interest. In the Middle East, direct **eye contact** is less common and generally less appropriate, whereas lack of **eye contact** in Asia is often a sign of respect and considered polite.

Gestures are arm and hand movements used for communication**.** There are at least four different kinds of gestures that we should consider: **emblems**, **illustrators**, **regulators**, and **adaptors**. The type of **gesture** known as **emblems** represent a specific verbal meaning and can replace or reinforce words (Ekman, 1976). If you are driving down a busy highway in the United States, and another driver quickly changes lanes in front of your car, making you hit the brakes, you can flip them off to easily convey meaning without using any words at all. With **emblems,** gestures and its verbal meaning are interchangeable, but they are also very culturally specific. If the person who changed lanes abruptly is from another culture, they may have no idea what your **emblem** means.

Illustrators, or **emblematic** nonverbal communications, are a nonverbal gesture used to communicate our message effectively and reinforce our point. Your grandfather may describe the fish he just caught and hold up his two hands 36 inches apart to **illustrate** exactly how big the fish was.

Regulators are nonverbal messages which control, maintain or discourage interaction. (McLean, 2003). For example, if someone is telling you a message that is confusing or upsetting, you may hold up your hand, a commonly recognized regulator that asks the speaker to stop talking.

Adaptors help us feel comfortable or indicate emotions or moods. An **adaptor** could involve you meeting your need for security, by playing with your hair for example, or hugging yourself for warmth.

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

Vocalics

Vocal characteristics we use to communicate nonverbal messages are called **vocalics** or *paralanguage* (with-language)**.** *Vocalics* involves verbal and nonverbal aspects of speech that influence meaning, including rate, pitch, tone, volume, intensity, pausing, and even silence. As previously discussed, silence or vocal pauses can communicate hesitation, indicate the need to gather thought, or serve as a sign of respect. Sometimes we learn just as much, or even more, from what a person does not say as what they do say.

Proxemics

Coming from the Latin *proximus*, meaning "near," **proxemics** refers to communication through the use of physical distance or space. When we discuss space in a nonverbal context, we mean the space between objects and people. Space is often associated with social rank and is an important part of communication. Who gets the corner office? Who sits at the head of the table and why?

People from diverse cultures may have different normative space expectations. If you are from a large urban area, having people stand close to you may be normal. If you are from a culture where people expect more space, someone may be standing "too close" for comfort and not know it.

Edward T. Hall, serving in the European and South Pacific Regions in the Corps of Engineers during World War II, traveled around the globe. As he moved from one place to another, he noticed that people in different countries kept different distances from each

other. In France, they stood closer to each other than they did in England. Hall (1963) wondered why that was and came up with a theory on spatial relations and boundaries.

The first aspect, Hall called "**territory**" and it is related to control. As a way of establishing control over your own room, maybe you painted it your favorite color, or put up posters that represent your interests or things you consider unique about yourself. Territory means the space you claim as your own, are responsible for, or are willing to defend.

The second aspect Hall highlights is **conversation distance**, or the "bubble" of space surrounding each individual. We recognize the basic need for personal space, but the normative expectations for space vary greatly by culture. In the United States, **intimate space** ranges from 0-18 inches. **Personal space** is the distance we occupy during encounters with friends and ranges from 18 inches to 4 feet. Many people use **social space** in social situations or with strangers, and ranges from 4 to 12 feet. In **public space**, the distance ranges from 12 feet and beyond. North American use of space tends to be much larger than most other cultures, especially people from Latin America and the Middle East where such vast use of personal space will make you seem aloof or distant.

Haptics

Touch in communication interaction is called **haptics**, from the ancient Greek word "*haptien.*" Touch can vary based on its duration, the part of the body being touched, and the strength of the contact (Floyd, 1999).

Cultural norms have a strong impact on how people use and perceive touch. For example, Hispanic cultures tend to hug more than do Europeans. Researchers in a study at outdoor cafes in London, England and San Juan, Puerto Rico found that Puerto Ricans touched each other an average of 180 times per hour whereas the British average was zero (EPA, 2002).

Hall (1963) suggests that the use of *proxemics* and *haptics* merge within a culture to create what researchers now call *contact* and *noncontact* cultures. In **contactcultures**, people stand closer together while talking, make more direct eye contact, touch more frequently, and speak in louder voices. Some examples of *contact cultures* would be South America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe with the Middle East being the highest contact.

In **noncontact cultures**, people stand farther apart while talking, maintain less eye contact, and touch less. Some examples of *noncontact cultures* would be Great Britain, the United States, and Japan.

Chronemics

Chronemics is the study of how we refer to and perceive time. Cultures vary widely in their *time orientation*, although context can also play a major role as well. "Time is money" is a common saying across cultures that display a high value for time. In social contexts, time often reveals social status and power. Who are you willing to wait for? A doctor for an office visit when you are sick? A potential employer for a job interview? Your significant other or children?

Some Mexican American friends may invite you to a barbecue at 8 p.m., but when you arrive you are the first guest, because it is understood that the gathering actually doesn't start until after 9 p.m. Similarly in France, an 8 p.m. party invitation would be understood to indicate you should arrive around 8:30, but in Sweden 8 p.m. means 8 p.m., and latecomers may not be welcome.

In the United States, we perceive time as linear, flowing along in a straight line. We did one task, we're doing another task now, and we are planning on doing something else later. In **monochronic** time orientation, time is a commodity. Being punctual, completing tasks, and keeping schedules is valued, and may be more important than building or maintaining personal relationships.

In **polychronic** time orientation, time is more holistic and circular. It is expected that many events happen at once, and things get done because of personal relationships, not in spite of personal relationships. The Euro Railways trains in Germany are famous for departing and arriving according to the schedule no matter what. In contrast, if you take the train in Argentina, you'll find that the schedule is more of an approximation of when the train will leave or arrive. Engineers, conductors, and even passengers influence the schedule, not a clock.

Physical Appearance

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

Artifacts

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

Environment

A final way in which we communicate nonverbally is through our **environment**. The *environment* involves the physical aspects of our surroundings. More than the tables and chairs in an office, environment is an important part of the dynamic communication process. The perception of one's environment influences one's reaction to it. For example, Google is famous for its work environment, with spaces created for physical activity and even in-house food service around the clock. The expense is no doubt considerable, but Google's actions speak volumes. The results produced in the environment, designed to facilitate creativity, interaction, and collaboration, are worth the effort.

Cultural Space

Although, the idea of *cultural space* doesn't fit neatly into the category of nonverbal behaviors, many intercultural communication researchers find significance in the idea as it merges *culture*, *environment* and *identity.* The seed originates in the writings of French philosopher and social theorist, Michel Foucault (1970). The argument is that culture is dynamic and redefines itself from one generation to the next so many scholars are now referring to this broad area of research by the metaphor of **cultural space.** *Cultural space* is the social and cultural contexts in which our identities are formed.

One of the earliest *cultural spaces* that humans experience is *home. Home* can be a tremendous source of identification. It often communicates social class and norms, as well as safety and security. *Home* is not the same as the physical location it occupies, but rather the feelings invoked. *Home* can be a specific address, cities, states, regions, and even nations.

A **neighborhood** is an area defined by its own cultural identity. This area can revolve around race and ethnicity, and certain cultural groups can define who gets to live where by dictating the rules by which other groups must live. Historical forces and power relations have led to different settlement patterns of cultural groups in the United States and around the world.

Many people identify strongly with particular regions. **Regionalism** is loyalty to an area that holds cultural meaning. This loyalty can be expressed symbolically by flying regional flags, wearing special clothing, celebrating regional holidays, and participating in other cultural activities. This loyalty can also be expressed through protests or armed conflict.

Social media has added a new dimension to cultural spaces by pushing definitions and boundaries. This notion of fluid cultural space is in contrast with previous notions of space which were rooted in landownership & occupation, along with borders, colonies, and territories. We will explore this idea more in our social media and popular culture chapter.

Cultural space influences how we think about ourselves and others therefore, changing **cultural space** is not easy to do. **Travel** raises important issues related to changing how we interact and communicate with others and is often associated with transformation of the traveler. **Migration** involves a more permanent kind of change than traveling, and is also an impetus of **cultural space** change.

Wrapping Up

People may not understand your words, but they will certainly interpret your nonverbal communication according to *their* accepted norms. Notice the word *their*. It is *their* perceptions that will count when you are trying to communicate, and it's important to understand that those perceptions will be based on the teachings and experiences of their culture—not yours.

The ideas and theories presented in the previous sections note how we look at the structures of cultures, values, and communication. They also provide a framework for talking about and comparing cultures, but it's always important to remember that cultures are heterogeneous, and constantly changing. One size does not fit all and nonverbal communication is ambiguous even in the best of times.

Key Terms

- **Nonverbal messages** – Information communicated without words through body language, voice, space, and appearance.
- **Mixed messages** – When verbal and nonverbal signals contradict each other.
- **Nonverbal communication codes** – Distinct categories of nonverbal behavior such as gestures, facial expressions, and vocalics.
- **Kinesics** – The study of body movement, including gestures, posture, and facial expressions.
- **Facial expressions** – Nonverbal cues conveyed through the face that communicate emotion and reaction.
- **Oculesics** – The study of eye behavior, including eye contact, gaze, and pupil movement.
- **Gestures** – Movements of the hands or arms that communicate meaning.
- **Posture** – The way one holds and positions the body, signaling confidence, openness, or emotion.
- **Emblems** – Gestures with a direct verbal translation (e.g., thumbs-up).
- **Illustrators** – Gestures that accompany and visually reinforce spoken words.
- **Regulators** – Gestures that manage the flow of conversation (e.g., nodding to signal turn-taking).
- **Adaptors** – Subconscious movements that satisfy physical or emotional needs (e.g., fidgeting).
- **Vocalics** – The nonverbal qualities of the voice, such as tone, pitch, volume, and rate.
- **Proxemics** – The study of how people use physical distance in communication.
- **Conversation distance** – The culturally influenced spacing people maintain during interactions.
- **Intimate space** – The closest zone of personal distance, reserved for close relationships.
- **Personal space** – The distance used with friends and acquaintances.
- **Social space** – The distance used in professional or casual social interactions.
- **Public space** – The distance used for speeches, lectures, or interactions with large groups.
- **Territory** – Physical areas people claim or protect as their own.
- **Contact vs. noncontact cultures** – Cultures that differ in comfort with touch and physical closeness.
- **Monochronic cultures** – Cultures that value punctuality, schedules, and doing one task at a time.
- **Polychronic cultures** – Cultures that prioritize relationships and multitasking over strict schedules.
- **Halo vs. horn effect** – The tendency to form positive (halo) or negative (horn) impressions based on one trait.
- **Artifacts** – Personal objects or appearance choices that communicate identity or status.
- **Cultural space** – The physical and symbolic environments that shape cultural identity.
- **Environment** – The physical surroundings that influence communication, comfort, and behavior.

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3.4: Relationships

Establishing relationships with people from cultures different than your own can be challenging. How do you get to know them? Should you treat those relationships differently than same culture relationships? Does society influence these new relationships? Learning new customs and traditions can be fun and exciting, but also force us to identify what we think that we know about ourselves along with our prejudices and fears. This chapter will help you gain a better understanding of what to expect when interacting with people that are culturally different from yourself. We will explore the benefits and challenges of intercultural relationships, discuss the different kinds of intercultural relationships, and encourage you with strategies to build solid intercultural relationships.

We establish and maintain relationships through our communication with each other. Although the term “relationship” is often associated with romance, intercultural relationships can be as varied as the people within them. Colleagues performing a work-related task can develop a friendship. Marrying into a family creates strong familial ties. Eating at the same family-run restaurant each week builds loyalty. Good friends are always treasured.

Benefits of Intercultural Relationships

The benefits of **intercultural relationships** span differences in gender, age, ethnicity, race, class, nationality, religion, and much more. The moment you begin an intercultural relationship, is the moment you begin to learn more about the world. You will start experiencing new foods, listen to new music, learn a new game, practice a new sport, acquire new words or a new dialect, or read new literature that you might never had access to before. In some ways you gain a new “history” as you learn what it means to belong to a new cultural group. Hearing a friend or family member describing their lived experience or stories is often much more compelling or “real” than knowledge gained in school or on television.

The difficulties involved in intercultural relationships may help you acquire new skills. According to Docan-Morgan(2015), the skills we develop in all relationships are exaggerated in intercultural relationships. Our diverse friends and loved ones teach us much about the world that we have yet to explore. Docan-Morgan postulates that our newfound understanding of one culture will likely make it easier to relate and to feel close to people from many different walks of life. In other words, our intercultural relationships result in new insights and new ways of thinking that we can apply to every relationship.

Intercultural relationships also help us rethink stereotypes we might hold. Martin and Nakayama (2014) point out that the differences we perceive with our partners tend to be more noticeable in the early stages of the relationship. Because these differences can seem overwhelming, the challenge is to discover the things both partners and in common and build on those similarities to strengthen the relationship. The suffering that one or both partners have gone through at the hands of prejudice can be addressed, and a healing effect can grow and thrive as relational partners learn that their prejudices have little to do with the thriving relationship being built.

Challenges in Intercultural Relationships

While intercultural relationships can enrich our lives and provide life-changing benefits, they can also present several challenges. In order to build a relationship across cultural boundaries, there has to be **motivation**. Much about this relationship will be different than same culture relationships, and take time to explore. It’s much easier to build a relationship where you understand the rules, behaviors and worldviews of your partner. Intercultural relationships are characterized by **differences**. Differences occur in values, perceptions, and communication styles. These differences have been discussed in greater depth in the cultural foundation and verbal chapters, but once commonality is established, and the relationship develops, the differences won’t seem to be as insurmountable.

Another challenge is **negative stereotypes**. Stereotypes are powerful, and often take a conscious effort to detect. Pathstone Mental Health (2017) suggests seven important things we can do to reduce stereotyping and discrimination within relationships.

- Know the facts.
- Be aware of your attitudes and behavior.
- Choose your words carefully.
- Educate others.
- Focus on the positive.
- Support people.
- Include everyone.

Anxiety or fear about the possible negative consequences because of our actions or being uncertain how to act towards a person from a different culture is another challenge. Some form of anxiety always exists in the early stages of any relationship, but being worried about looking incompetent or offending someone is more pronounced in intercultural relationships. The level of anxiety may even be higher if people have previous negative experiences.

The fifth challenge is *affirming another person's cultural identity.* We need to recognize that the other person might have different values, beliefs, and behaviors which form both their individual and cultural identities. The principle of **ethnocentrism** encourages a tendency for members of the majority culture to view their own values, beliefs, and behaviors to be the norm and that the minority culture should adapt to them. Lastly, the **need for explanations** is a huge challenge. Intercultural relationships can be more work that intracultural relationships because of the need for explanations. One must explain values, beliefs and behaviors to ourselves, to each other, and to our communities. Every difference, and similarity, must be explored. What does a friendship look like? What are the expectations? What does a romantic relationship look like? Who must approve the relationship? Why would we want to be friends? What taboos exist within the culture? It's not impossible for an intercultural relationship to work out. All it requires is being open-minded, being interested, being respectful, realizing the similarities, avoiding making assumptions, and celebrating the differences. Intercultural relationships have real challenges, but if things work out, they can be amazing.

Foundations of Relationships

Every day you meet and interact with new people while going about your daily life, yet few of these people will make a lasting impression. Have you ever wondered what draws you to these special few? It is not a mystery. The factors include physical attractiveness, similarity, complementarity, proximity, reciprocal liking, and resources (Aron et al., 2008). It's not a secret that many people feel drawn those that they perceive as **physically attractive**, but we also need to remember that the idea of attractiveness is not always the most stunningly beautiful or stunningly handsome person in the area. Attractiveness can also be what is familiar to us. Most of us do find physical beauty attractive to us, but we tend to form long-term romantic relationships with people we judge as similar to ourselves in physical attractiveness (Feingold, 1988; White, 1980).

Undoubtedly you've heard the common saying, "birds of a feather flock together." This is the same for relationships. Scientific evidence suggests that we are attracted to those we perceive as *similar* to ourselves (Miller, 2014). One explanation for this is that people we view as *similar* to ourselves are less likely to cause uncertainty. They seem easier to predict, and we feel more comfortable with them (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). *Similarity* is more than physical attractiveness through, it means sharing personalities, values, and preferences (Markey & Markey, 2007).

Another common saying that you have probably heard is that "opposites attract." **Complementarity** has been debated for a long time, and so far the research is inconclusive. Based on the 1950s research of sociologist Robert Winch, we would say that we are naturally attracted to people who are different from ourselves, and therefore, somewhat exciting (www.personalitypage.com). It was believed to be a natural quest for completion. Unfortunately, more current research from Markey & Markey (2007) found the opposite. What is not in question is when it comes to work colleagues and friends. On the job or with friends, we are not particularly interested in dealing with people who are unlike ourselves. Generally, we are most

interested in dealing with people who are like ourselves and don't display a lot of patience or motivation for dealing with our opposites (Ickes, 1999).

The simple fact of **proximity**, or often being around each other, exerts far more impact on relationships than generally acknowledged. The idea is that you are more likely to feel attracted to people with whom you have frequent contact with and are less attracted to those with whom you rarely interact. Another often overlooked determinant of attraction is *reciprocal liking* (Aron et al., 2008). The idea is quite simple, we tend to be attracted to people who are attracted to us. Studies examining stories about "falling in love" have found that reciprocal liking is the most commonly mentioned factor leading to love (Riela, Rodriguez, Aron, Xu, and Acevedo, 2010). mAnd lastly, the final attraction foundation is called **resources**. Resources include such qualities as sense of humor, intelligence, kindness, supportiveness, and more (Felmlee et al., 2010). **Social exchange theory** proposed that you will feel drawn to people that you see as offering benefits (things that you want) with few associated costs (things demanded from you in return) (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). In other words, you're attracted to people who can give you what you want and who offer better rewards than others.

Common Types of Relationships

In this era of globalization, people are traveling across geographical, national, and cultural boundaries as never before. For many, establishing relationships with persons different from ourselves can be challenging and rewarding. Although each intercultural relationship will differ based on the cultures and people involved, the following brief exploration of relationship types will begin to help you understand the plethora of intercultural relationships.

Friendship

Friendship is a unique and important type of interpersonal relationship that constitutes a significant portion of a person's social life from early childhood all the way through to late adulthood (Rawlins, 1992). Friendship is distinguished from other types of relationships by its "voluntary" nature. In other words, friendship occurs when individuals are relatively free from obligatory ties, duties, and other expectations (Fischer (1975). One can begin or end a friendship as desired.

These different notions about friendship are a function of variations in values as well as individualism and collectivism. People who tend to be individualistic often view friendship as a voluntary decision that is more spontaneous and focused on individual goals that might be gained by befriending a particular person. Such goals might include practicing language skills or learning to cook culinary specialties. On the other hand, collectivists may have more obligatory views of friendship. They may see it as a long-term obligation that involves mutual gain such as help with gaining a visa or somewhere to stay during vacations (Wahl & Scholl, 2014).

The idea of what constitutes a friendship certainly varies from culture to culture. In the United States, the term "friend" is a fairly broad term that applies to many different kinds of relationships. In Eastern European countries, for example, the term "friend" is used in a much more narrow context. What many cultures in the world consider a "friend," an American would consider a "close friend" (Martin & Nakayama, 2014). Americans often form relationships quickly, and can come across as informal, forward, intrusive, and superficial (Triandis, 1995). Asian cultures place more emphasis on indirect communication patterns and more stress on maintaining social relationships, sincerity and spirituality (Barnlund, 1989; Yum, 1988).

Intercultural friendship can be difficult to initiate, develop, and maintain, but that is not to say that different cultures cannot have similar views on friendship. Various cultures can value the same things, such as honesty and trustworthiness, but simply prioritize them differently (Barnlund, 1989). Researchers have found a wide range of important friendship variables such as values, interest, personality traits, network patterns, communication styles, cultural knowledge, relational competence, and intergroup attitudes that impact intercultural friendship formation (Aberson, Shoemaker & Tomolillo, 2004; Collier & Mahoney, 1996; Gareis, 1995; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1979; Mcdermott, 1992; Olanrian, 1996; Yamaguchi & Wiseman, 2003; Zimmermann, 1995).

Intriguing research from Sias et al. (2008) indicate that cultural differences can enhance, rather than hinder, friendship development. Cultural differences enhanced friendship development because the participants found those differences interesting and exciting. Those who overcame the challenges of language differences were able to develop rich friendships often with a unique vocabulary that included words created from a mixture of both languages. An example of this could be "Spanglish" which is a mixture of Spanish and English or "Chinglish" which is a mixture of Chinese and English. This idiosyncratic language seemed to strengthen the bond between the friends (Sias et al., 2008; Casmir, 1999; Imahori & Cupach, 2005).

There are also similarities and differences between how **romantic relationships** are perceived in different cultures. When two various cultures come together, there may be significant challenges they have to face, but it is important to remember that like any relationship, intercultural romantic relationships are all different. In general, romantic relationships are "voluntary," and most cultures stress the importance of openness, mutual involvement, shared nonverbal meanings, and relationship assessment (Martin & Nakayama, 2014). Individualism and collectivism play a role in romantic relationships as well. In individualistic cultures such as the United States, togetherness is important as long as it doesn't interfere too much with one's individual autonomy. Physical attraction, passion, and love are often initiators of romantic relationships in individualistic cultures. Being open, talking things out, and retaining a sense of self are maintenance strategies.

Collectivistic cultures often value acceptance and "fitting in" as the most important values for romantic partners. Family approval can make or break a romantic relationship. Family members are expected to align with, and support, the dominant values, beliefs, and behavioral expectations of the family hierarchy. Individual happiness is important, but thought only to be fully realized within the family system. Intercultural marriages and couplings are growing at an increasing rate. What once might have seemed unusual or exotic is becoming more accepted and common place. Finding an intercultural love relationship might be getting easier, but negotiating through the unique challenges inherent to these relationships can still be difficult.

Romano (2008) found **four distinct conflict styles** that reflect how intercultural couples negotiate their way through the differences. The **submission style** is the most common and involves one partner abdicating power to the other partner's culture or cultural preferences. Sometimes the submission is only seen as a display for the public, whereas the relationship may be more balance in private. Even though it is the most popular style, this approach rarely works because submission often involves denying certain aspect's of one's own culture. Although the **compromise style** might seem to be the most desirable, it really means that both people must sacrifice some aspect of their life. Each partner gives up some culturally bound habit or value to accommodate the other. Game theorists would call this a lose-lose or no-win situation.

Some couples will try the **obliteration style**. In this case, both partners try to erase or obliterate their original cultures, and create a new "culture" with new beliefs, values, and behaviors. This can be extremely difficult and create problems with other family members, but more likely if the couple lives in country that is "home" to neither of them. The ideal solution is the **consensus style**. As it is based on negotiation and mutual agreement, neither person has to assume that they must abandon their own culture. This style is related to compromise because of the give-and-take, but it is not a trade-off. Game theorists call this a win-win proposition.

In a survey on intercultural marriages (Prokopchak, 1994), couples were asked to respond about the positives and negatives of intercultural marriage. This survey resulted in four cautions to be considered during intercultural conflict. First, *know each other's culture.* Don't think that all families and all cultures operate in a certain way. Second, *be accountable.* There is a tendency not to listen to others. Weigh their concerns. Third, *know what both cultures value.* There is a tendency to value things, but people should be of primary concern. And last, *identify adaptation versus core value changes.* Be aware of the differences between behavior modification or adaptation and core value changes.

Gay & Lesbian Relationships

There has been much more research done on heterosexual or cisgender intercultural friendships and romantic relationships than gay or same-sex intercultural relationships. Although there are many similarities between gay and cisgender relationships, Martin and

Nakayama (2014) believe that such relationships differ in at least four areas. These areas include the importance of close friendships, conflict management, intimacy, and the role of sexuality. Close relationships and friendships might be more important to gays and lesbians who often rely on these ties in the face of social stigma, family ostracism, and discrimination. Researchers Gottman and Levenson (2004) have found some positive differences in the area of conflict management for gay and lesbian couples. Gay relationships often start with sexual attraction, but often persist after sexual involvement has ceased (Martin & Nakayama, 2014).

Although homosexuality has existed throughout human history, cultures can have vast differences in how they support, accept, and categorize attraction and sexual relations between persons of the same gender. **Two-Spirit,** a pre-contact pan-Indian term, has been adopted by some modern indigenous North Americans to describe gender-variant individuals in their communities (Medicine, 2002; Enos, 2017). Not all tribes or nations have rigid gender roles, but among those that do, some consider there to be at least four genders: feminine woman, masculine woman, feminine man, and masculine man (Estrada, 2010). Many East and Southeast Asian languages, including Chinese, do not contain grammatical gender, and also have histories of cultural tolerance.

Communicating in Intercultural Relationships

Intercultural relationships and intracultural or same culture relationships may hold many similarities, but also many differences. All relationships take time to develop, but it is especially important to give intercultural relationships time to develop. As previously discussed, there are many challenges within intercultural relationships that take time to explain, negotiate, and work through. We need to be **involved** through interaction and shared friendship networks. There are often significant events, or **turning points**, that move the relationship forward or backward. Perceived similarities can help relationships to develop whereas perceived differences can lead to roadblocks or failure to thrive.

Relationships are hard work, and require constant upkeep to combat the challenges that threaten them. It's no exaggeration to say that we develop, and maintain relationships through communication. What you say and what you do becomes part of the relationship. Incorrect interpretations of messages can lead to misunderstanding, uncertainty, frustration, and conflict, but the potential rewards include gaining new cultural knowledge, broadening one's worldview, and breaking stereotypes (Sias et al., 2008).

People who have developed good communication skills are often described as having **communication competence.** Communicating effectively, along with writing and critical thinking, is often considered one of the key skills of gaining a college education. A previous chapter has already defined communication, and to be competent at something means that you are good at it. To have **communication competence** means that "we have knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts" (Cooley & Roach, 1984). Researcher Owen Hargie (2011) proposed that there were four levels of competence based on competence and incompetent communication as well as conscious or unconscious communication.

Unconscious incompetence is the "be yourself" approach. This person may not have a strong knowledge of cultural differences and does not see any need to accommodate differences in communication styles or culture. They may not even be aware they are communicating in an incompetent manner. Once people learn more about culture and communication, they may become **conscious incompetent.** This is where they have the vocabulary to identify the concepts, and know what they should be doing, but realize they are not communicating as well as they could. Many of us have experiences the feeling that something isn't quite right, yet we can't quite figure out what went wrong. As communication skills increase, and the focus is on cultural concepts and communication styles, you become a **conscious competent** communicator. You know that you are communicating well in the moment, and you can add this memory to your growing bank of successful intercultural interactions. Reaching this level is important, but not the pinnacle of competent communication.

Unconscious competence is the level to achieve. Unconscious competence means that you can communicate successfully without straining to be competent. At this point all the knowledge and previous experiences have been put into practice, and you rarely have

to intently focus on your intercultural interactions because it has become second nature. You have developed the skills needed to be competent.

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

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

Communication competence is an important component in developing positive intercultural relationships, but it is also important to consider the societies in which these relationships develop. **Contact hypothesis** or **Intergroup Contact Theory** should be applied to intercultural communication. The **contact hypothesis** (Allport, 1954) suggests that under appropriate conditions intergroup contact will lessen stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination leading to better intergroup contact. Although the complexities of **contact hypothesis** are still being heavily researched today, with new focus on electronic communication, the general idea is that intercultural relationships occur when the political and societal conditions of the communication encounter promote friendly interaction. When people meet and interact in a cooperative environment, enjoy equal status, and share common goals, all of humanity wins.

Key Terms

- **Intercultural relationships** – Relationships between people from different cultural backgrounds that require navigating differing values, norms, and communication styles.
- **Motivation** – The desire or willingness to engage with people from other cultures.
- **Difference** – The cultural, linguistic, or value-based variations that shape how people relate to one another.
- **Negative stereotypes** – Oversimplified and harmful assumptions about a cultural group that hinder relationship building.
- **Anxiety** – The uncertainty or nervousness people feel when interacting across cultures.
- **Ethnocentrism** – Judging other cultures by the standards of one's own, often leading to misunderstanding.
- **Need for explanations** – The human tendency to seek reasons for others' behavior, especially when cultural cues are unfamiliar.
- **Similarity** – Shared traits or values that increase comfort and attraction in relationships.
- **Complementarity** – The idea that people are drawn to others whose qualities balance or enhance their own.
- **Physically attractive** – The role of perceived physical appeal in drawing people toward one another.
- **Proximity** – Physical or psychological closeness that increases opportunities for relationship formation.
- **Resources** – Qualities or assets (emotional, social, financial) that people bring to relationships.
- **Social Exchange Theory** – The idea that people evaluate relationships based on perceived costs and benefits.
- **Friendship** – A voluntary interpersonal relationship built on trust, support, and shared experiences.
- **Romantic relationships** – Intimate partnerships involving emotional, physical, and often long-term commitment.
- **Collectivist** – Cultures that prioritize group harmony, family ties, and interdependence.
- **Conflict styles** – Preferred ways of managing disagreement, shaped by culture and personality.
- **Submission** – A conflict approach where one person yields to the other's preferences.
- **Compromise** – A conflict style where both parties give up something to reach a middle ground.
- **Obliteration** – A conflict style where both partners abandon their original preferences to create a new shared solution.
- **Consensus** – A collaborative conflict style where both parties work toward a mutually satisfying agreement.
- **Two-spirit** – An Indigenous term describing people who embody both masculine and feminine spirits, often holding special cultural roles.

- **Turning point** – A significant event that changes the direction or intensity of a relationship.
- **Unconscious incompetence** – Not knowing what you don't know about intercultural communication.
- **Conscious incompetence** – Realizing your limitations in intercultural communication.
- **Conscious competence** – Being aware of and intentionally applying effective intercultural skills.
- **Unconscious competence** – Communicating effectively across cultures without deliberate effort.
- **Contact Hypothesis** – The idea that positive interaction between groups reduces prejudice under the right conditions.
- **Intergroup Contact Theory** – A broader framework explaining how structured, meaningful contact improves attitudes between cultural groups.

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3.5: Conflict

Conflict is a part of all human relationships (Canary, 2003). Almost any issue can spark conflict—*money, time, religion, politics, culture*—and almost anyone can get into a conflict. Conflicts are happening all around the world at the personal, societal, political, and international levels. Conflict is not simple and it's not just a matter of disagreement. According to Wilmot & Hocker (2010), "**conflict** is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scare resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals. (p. 11)" There are several aspects of conflict that we must consider when pondering this definition and its application to intercultural communication.

Expressed Struggle

Conflict is a communication process that is expressed verbally and nonverbally. Wilmot & Hocker assert that communication creates conflict, communication reflects conflict, and communication is the vehicle for the management of conflict (Wilmot & Hocker, 1998). Often, conflict is easily identified because one party openly and verbally disagrees with the other, but intrapersonal, or internal conflict, may exist for some time before being expressed. An example could be family members avoiding each other because both think, "I don't want to see them for awhile because of what they did." The **expression** of the struggle is often activated by a triggering event which brings the conflict to everyone's attention. In the case of family members, a triggering event could be going on vacation instead of attending a golden wedding anniversary party or other significant life event.

Interdependent

Parties engaged in **expressed struggle** do so because they are **interdependent**. "A person who is not dependent upon another—that is, who has no special interest in what the other does—has no conflict with that other person" (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). In other words, each parties' choices effect the other because conflict is a mutual activity. Each decision impacts the other.

Consider the teenager who chooses to wear an obnoxious or offensive t-shirt before catching the bus. People with no connections to the teen and notice the t-shirt are unlikely to engage in conflict. They have never seen the teen before, and probably won't again. The ill-advised decision to wear the t-shirt does not impact them, therefore the reason to engage in conflict does not exist.

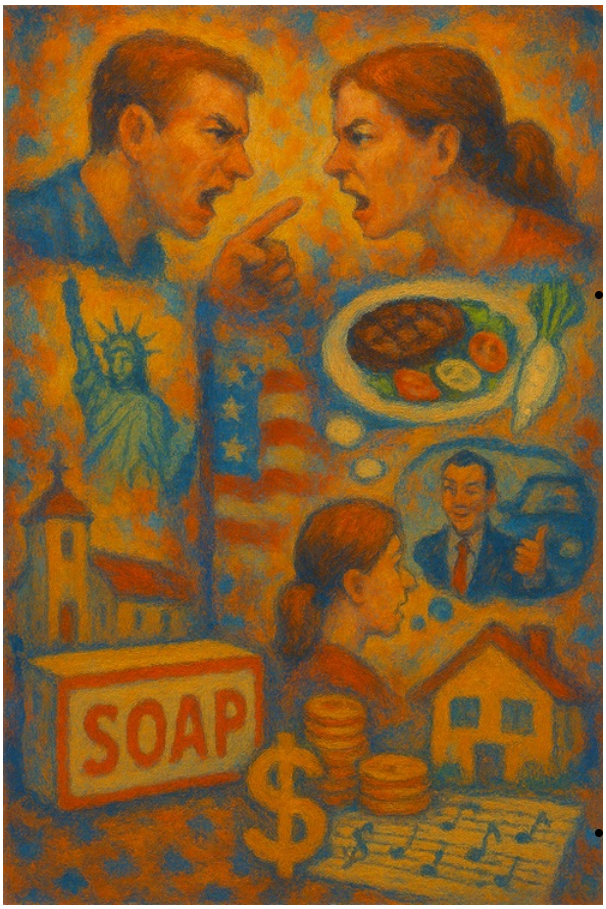
The same scenario involving a teen and their parents would probably turn out differently. Because parents and teens are interdependent, the ill-advised decision to wear an offensive t-shirt could quickly escalate into a power struggle over individual autonomy that leads to harsh words and hurt feelings.

Perception

Parties in conflict have perceptions about their own position and the position of others. Each party may also have a different perception of any given situation. We can anticipate having such differences due to a number of factors that create **perceptual filters** or **cultural frames** that influence our responses to the situation. Such influences can be things like culture, race & ethnicity; gender & sexuality; knowledge; impressions of the messenger; and previous experience. These factors and more conspire to form the **perceptual filters** through which we experience conflict.

Clashes in Goals, Resources, and Behaviors

Conflict arises from differences. It occurs whenever parties disagree over their values, motivations, ideas, or desires. The perception might be that goals are mutually exclusive, or there's not enough resources to go around, or one party is sabotaging another. When conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep need is typically at the core of the problem. When the legitimacy of the conflicting needs is recognized, it opens pathways to problem-solving.



Conflict Types

Conflict can be difficult to analyze because it occurs in so many different settings. Knowing the various types of conflict that occur in interpersonal relationships helps us to identify appropriate strategies for managing conflict. Mark Cole (1996) states that there are five types of interpersonal conflict: affective, interest, value, cognitive, and goal.

- **Affective** conflict occurs when people become aware that their feelings and emotions are incompatible. For example, if a romantic couple wants to go out to eat, but one of the partners is a vegetarian while the other is on the Paleo diet, what do they do? The food choices that they have committed to may impact their feelings for each other causing them to question a future together. If the same romantic couple marries and begins to raise children, what will their diet consist of? Do they follow the Paleo diet or the vegetarian one? **Conflict of interest** arises when people disagree about a plan of action or when they have incompatible preferences for a course of action. A difference in ideologies or values between relational partners is called **value conflict.** Our romantic partners eating preferences may be the result of strongly held religious or political views. Remember the old saying, "Never talk about religion and politics." Many people engage in **value conflict** about religion and politics.
- **Cognitive conflict** is when people become aware that their thought processes or perceptions are in conflict. Our romantic partners may disagree about the meaning of a wink from a car salesman as they shopped for a new car. One of the partners believes that the wink was friendly and meant to build a relationship with the couple, but the other partner saw the wink as a sign that the couple would get a better deal if they looked seriously at a specific car.
- **Goal conflict** occurs when people disagree about a preferred outcome or end state. Our car-shopping romantic partners need transportation. For one, the cost of a new car negates the choice made to continue using public transportation to save the money not spent for a house. For the other, buying a new car means gaining access to the suburbs where they can afford to buy a new house now.

Rarely do the types of conflict stand alone. Often, several types of conflict are found intertwined within each other and within the context itself. The situation in which the conflict happens can occur on many levels - the personal, societal, and even the international. How we choose to manage conflict may depend on the type of conflict, the contexts, and the particular situation.

Characteristics of Intercultural Conflict

Intercultural conflicts are often characterized by more ambiguity, language issues, and the clash of conflict styles than same culture conflict. Intercultural conflict characteristics rest on the principles discussed in greater depth in the foundation chapters. These principles stressed that culture is dynamic and heterogeneous, but learned. Values are manifest in beliefs and behaviors, which lead to the **worldviews** that guide our perception and navigation through life. Michelle LeBaron (2003) states that "cultures affect the ways we name, frame, blame, and attempt to tame conflicts (p. 3)."

Ambiguity, or the confusion about how to handle or define the conflict, is often present in intercultural conflict because of the multi-layered and heterogeneous nature of culture. What appears on the surface of the conflict may mask what is more deeply hidden below. Verbally indirect, high context cultures, may be reluctant to use words to explore issues of extreme importance that verbally direct, and low context cultures need to access the symbolic levels that are largely outside of their awareness. Yet, knowing the general norms of a group, does not predict the behavior of a specific member of a group. Dimensions of context, and individual differences can be crucial to understanding.

Language issues can also add to the confusion—or clarity—as we try to **name, frame, blame**, and tame the conflict. Not knowing each other's languages very well, could make conflict resolution difficult, and remaining silent could also provide a needed "cooling off" period with time to think. The Western approach to conflict resolution often means labeling and analyzing the smaller components parts of an issue (**name, frame, blame**), before a resolution (**tame**) can be proposed. The Eastern approach to conflict resolution often means reinforcing all aspects of the relationship (**tame**), before ever discussing the issue (**name, frame, blame**)–if at all. In the Eastern approach, language is more of a means of creating and maintaining identity than solving a problem.

Intercultural Conflict Management

Culture is always a factor in conflict, though it rarely causes it alone. When differences surface between people, organizations, and nations, culture is always present, shaping perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. Attitudes and behaviors shared with dominant or national cultures often seem to be *normal*, *natural*, or *the way things are done*. Our cultural background, and how we were raised, largely determines how we deal with conflict.

The term **facework** refers to the communication strategies that people "use to establish, sustain, or restore a preferred social identity to others during interaction" (Samp, 2015, p. ?). Goffman (1959) claims that everyone is concerned about how others perceive them. To lose **face** is to publicly suffer a diminished self-image, and saving **face** is to be liked, appreciated, and approved by others. Brown & Levinson (1987) use the concept of face to explain politeness, and to them politeness is universal, resulting from people's face needs.

Facework varies from culture to culture and influences conflict styles. For example, people from individualistic cultures tend to be more concerned with saving their own face rather than anyone else's face. This results in a tendency to use more direct conflict management styles. In contrast, people from collectivistic cultures tend to be more concerned with preserving group harmony and saving the other person's **face** during conflict. Making use of a less direct conversation style to protect the other or make them look good is considered the best way to manage **facework**.

Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2004) is based a number of assumptions about the extent to which **face** negotiated within a culture and what existing value patterns shape culture members' preferences for the process of negotiating face in conflict situations. The **Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory** is not only influenced by the individual and culture, but also the relationship and the situation of the people experiencing the conflict.

Two Approaches to Conflict

Ways of **naming** and **framing** vary across cultural boundaries. People generally deal with conflict in the way that they learned while growing up. For those accustomed to a calm and rational discussion, screaming and yelling may seem to be a dangerous conflict. Yet, conflicts are subject to different interpretations, based on cultural preference, context, and **facework** ideals.

Direct Approaches is favored by cultures that think conflict is a good thing, and that conflict should be approached **directly,** because working through conflict results in more solid and stronger relationships. This approach emphasizes using precise language, and articulating issues carefully. The best solution is based on solving for set of criteria that has been agreed upon by both parties beforehand.

Indirect Approaches on the other hand are favored by cultures that view conflict as destructive for relationships and prefer to deal with conflict **indirectly.** These cultures think that when people disagree, they should adapt to the consensus of the group rather that engage in conflict. Confrontations are seen as destructive and ineffective. Silence and avoidance are viewed as effective tools to

manage conflict. Intermediaries or mediators are used when conflict negotiation is unavoidable, and people who undermine group harmony may face sanctions or ostracism.

Emotionally Expressive people or cultures are those who value intense displays of emotion during disagreement. Outward displays of emotion are seen as indicating that one really cares and is committed to resolving the conflict. It is thought that it is better to show emotion through expressive nonverbal behavior and words than to keep feelings inside and hidden from the world. Trust is gained through the sharing of emotions, and that sharing is necessary for credibility.

Emotionally Restrained People or cultures are those who think that disagreements are best discussed in an emotionally calm manner. Emotions are controlled through "internalization" and few, if any, verbal or nonverbal expressions will be displayed. A sensitivity to hurting feelings or protecting the **face** or honor of the other is paramount. Trust is earned through what is seen as emotional maturity, and that maturity is necessary to appear credible.

Conflict Styles

Miscommunication and misunderstanding between people within the same culture can feel overwhelming enough, but when this occurs with people of another culture or co-culture, we may feel a serious sense of stress. Frequently, all of the good intentions and patience we are able to use during lower-stress encounters can be forgotten, and sometimes we may find that our behavior can surprise even ourselves. Because of this, intercultural conflict experts have developed conflict style inventories that help us to understand our own personal tendencies toward dealing with conflict, and the tendencies others may have.

The **Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory** or **ICS** (Hammer, 2005), measures people's approaches to conflict along two different continuums: direct/indirect and expressive/restrained. Different individuals, but also people of different national cultures, approach conflict in different ways.

The **discussion style** combines *direct* and emotionally restrained dimensions. As it is a verbally direct approach, people who use this style are comfortable expressing disagreements. User perceived strengths of this approach are that it confronts problems, explores arguments, and maintains a calm atmosphere during the conflict. The weaknesses perceived by others is that it is difficult to read "read between the lines," it appears logical but unfeeling, and it can be uncomfortable with emotional arguments. **Discussion style** can often be found in Northern Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and various co-cultures in the United States.

The **engagement style** emphasizes a *verbally direct* and *emotionally expressive* approach to dealing with conflict. This style views intense verbal and nonverbal expressions of emotion as demonstrating a willingness to resolve the conflict. User perceived strengths to this approach are that it provides detailed explanations, instructions, and information. This style expresses opinions and shows feelings. The weaknesses perceived by others are the lack of concern with the views and feelings of others along with the potential for dominatingly rude behavior. Individual viewpoints are not separated from emotion. **Engagement style** is often used in Mediterranean Europe, Russia, Israel, Latin America, and various co-cultures in the United States.

The **accommodating style** combines the *indirect* and *emotionally restrained* approaches. People who use this approach may send ambiguous message because they believe that by doing so, the conflict will not get out of control. Silence and avoidance are also considered worthy tools. User perceived strengths to this approach are sensitivity to feelings of the other party, control of emotional outburst, and consideration to alternative meaning of ambiguous messages. Weaknesses as perceived by others are difficulty in voicing your own opinion, appearing to be uncommitted or dishonest, and difficulty in providing explanations.

Accommodators tend to avoid direct expression of feelings by using intermediaries, friends or relatives who informally act on their behalf when dealing with the conflict. Mediation tends to be used in more formal situations when one person believes that conflict will encourage growth in the relationship. **Accommodating style** is often used in East Asia, North America and South America.

The **dynamic style** uses indirect communication along with more emotional expressiveness. These people are comfortable with emotions, but tend to speak in metaphors and often use mediators. Their credibility is grounded in their degree of emotional

expressiveness. User perceived strengths to this approach are using third parties to gather information and resolve conflicts, being skilled at observing nonverbal behaviors, and being comfortable with emotional displays. Weaknesses as perceived by others are appearing too emotional, unreasonable, and possibly devious, while rarely getting to the point. **Dynamic style** is often used in the Middle East, India, Sub-Saharan Africa, and various co-cultures in the United States.

It is important to recognize that people, and cultures, deal with conflict in a variety of ways for a variety of different reasons. Preferred styles are not static and rigid. People use different conflict styles with different partners. Gender, ethnicity, and religion may all influence how we handle conflict. Conflict may even occur over economic, political, and social issues.

Two Approaches to Managing Conflict

How people choose to deal with conflict in any given situation depends on the type of conflict and their relationship to the other person. Cognitive conflicts with close friends may be more discussion based in the United States, but more accommodating in Japan. Both are focused on preserving the harmony within the relationship. However, if the cognitive conflict takes place between acquaintances or strangers, where maintaining a relationship is not as important, the engagement or dynamic styles may come out.

Considering all the variations in how people choose to deal with conflict, it's important to distinguish between productive and destructive conflict as well as cooperative and competitive conflict.

Destructive conflict leads people to make sweeping generalizations about the problem. Groups or individuals escalate the issues with negative attitudes. The conflict starts to deviate from the original issues, and anything in the relationship is open for examination or re-visiting. Participants try to jockey for power while using threats, coercion, and deception as polarization occurs. Leaders display militant, single-minded traits to rally their followers.

Productive conflict features skills that make it possible to manage conflict situations effectively and appropriately. First the participants narrow the conflict to the original issue so that the specific problem is easier to understand. Next, the leaders stress mutually satisfactory outcomes and direct all their efforts to cooperative problem-solving. Research from Alan Sillars and colleagues found that during disputes, individuals selectively remember information that supports themselves and contradicts their partners, view their own communication more positively than their partners', and blame partners for failure to resolve the conflict (Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, & Dun, 2000). Sillars and colleagues also found that participant thoughts are often locked in simple, unqualified and negative views. Only in 2% of cases did respondents attribute cooperativeness to their partners and uncooperativeness to themselves (Sillars et al., 2000).

Competitive conflict promotes escalation. When conflicts escalate and anger peaks, our minds are filled with negative thoughts of all the grievances and resentments we feel towards others (Sillars et al., 2000). Conflicted parties set up self-reinforcing and mutually confirming expectations. Coercion, deception, suspicion, rigidity, and poor communication are all hallmarks of a **competitive** atmosphere.

Cooperative conflict promotes perceived similarity, trust, flexibility, and open communication. If both parties are committed to the resolution process, there is a sense of joint ownership in reaching a conclusion.

Because it is very difficult to turn a **competitive conflict** relationship into a **cooperative conflict** relationship, a **cooperative** relationship must be encouraged from the very beginning before the conflict starts to escalate. A **cooperative conflict** atmosphere promotes perceived similarity, trust, flexibility, and open communication. If both parties are committed to the resolution process, there is a sense of joint ownership in reaching a conclusion.

Consequently, the most important thing you can do to enhance *cooperative and productive conflict* is to practice critical self-reflection. Business consultants in the United States offer various versions of the **seven-step conflict resolution model** that is a good place to start. The seven steps are:

- State the Problem. Ask each of the conflicting parties to state their view of the problem as simply and clearly as possible.

- Restate the Problem. Ask each party to restate the problem as they understand the other party to view it.
- Understand the Problem. Each party must agree that the other side understands both ways of looking at the problem.
- Pinpoint the Issue. Zero in on the objective facts.
- Ask for Suggestions. Ask how the problem should be solved.
- Make a Plan.
- Follow up.

A quick review of the previous seven steps betrays its western roots with the unspoken assumption that conflicting individuals will be **verbally direct** and ***e*motionally restrained** or advocates of the **discussion style** of conflict.

Culture and Managing Conflict

The strongest cultural factor that influences your conflict approach is whether you belong to an individualistic or collectivistic culture (Ting-Toomey, 1997). People raised in collectivistic cultures often view direct communication regarding conflict as personal attacks (Nishiyama, 1971), and consequently are more likely to manage conflict through avoidance or accommodation. People from individualistic cultures feel comfortable agreeing to disagree, and don't particularly see such clashes as personal affronts (Ting-Toomey, 1985). They are more likely to compete, react, or collaborate.

Gudykunst & Kim (2003) suggest that if you are an individualist in a dispute with a collectivist, you should consider the following:

- Recognize that collectivist may prefer to have a third party mediate the conflict so that those in conflict can manage their disagreement without direct confrontation to preserve relational harmony.
- Use more indirect verbal messages.
- Let go of the situation if the other person does not recognize the conflict exists or does not want to deal with it.

If you are a collectivist and are conflicting with someone from an individualist culture, the following guidelines may help:

- Recognize that individualists often separate conflicts from people. It's not personal.
- Use an assertive style, filled with "I" messages, and be direct by candidly stating your opinions and feelings.
- Manage conflicts even if you'd rather avoid them.

Another thing to consider is replacing the **ethno-centric** "seven steps" with a more culturally friendly, or **ethno-relative**,**four skills approach** from **Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory** (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). These skills are:

- **Mindful Listening:** Pay special attention to the cultural and personal assumptions being expressed in the conflict interaction. Paraphrase verbal and nonverbal content and emotional meaning of the other party's message to check for accurate interpretation.
- **Mindful Reframing:** This is another face-honoring skill that requires the creation of alternative contexts to shape our understanding of the conflict behavior.
- **Collaborative Dialogue:** An exchange of dialogue that is oriented fully in the present moment and builds on Mindful Listening and Mindful Reframing to practice communicating with different linguistic or contextual resources.
- **Culture-based Conflict Resolution Steps** is a seven-step conflict resolution model that guides conflicting groups to identify the background of a problem, analyze the cultural assumptions and underlying values of a person in a conflict situation, and promotes ways to achieve harmony and share a common goal.
  - What is my cultural and personal assessment of the problem?
  - Why did I form this assessment and what is the source of this assessment?
  - What are the underlying assumptions or values that drive my assessment?
  - How do I know they are relative or valid in this conflict context?
  - What reasons might I have for maintaining or changing my underlying conflict premise?
  - How should I change my cultural or personal premises into the direction that promotes deeper intercultural understanding?

- How should I flex **adaptively** on both verbal and nonverbal conflict style levels in order to display **facework** sensitive behaviors and to facilitate a productive common-interest outcome?

(Ting-Toomey, 2012; Fisher-Yoshida, 2005; Mezirow, 2000)

Just as there is no consensus across cultures about what constitutes a conflict or how the conflicting events should be framed, there are also many different conflict response theories. LeBaron, Hammer, Sillars, Gudykunst, Kim, and Ting-Toomey are only a few of the many researchers who have explored the complexities of intercultural conflict. It is also a topic of interest for sociologists, psychologists, business managers, educators, and communities. Acquiring knowledge about personal and intercultural conflict styles can hopefully help us transform conflicts into meaningful dialogue, and become better communicators in the process.

Key Terms

- **Affective conflict** – Conflict driven by personal feelings, emotions, or relational tension.
- **Conflict of interest** – A disagreement caused by incompatible goals, needs, or desires.
- **Value conflict** – A clash rooted in differing deeply held beliefs or value systems.
- **Cognitive conflict** – Disagreement based on differences in ideas, interpretations, or perceptions.
- **Goal conflict** – Conflict that arises when people have incompatible desired outcomes.
- **Direct vs. indirect approach** – Cultural preferences for addressing conflict openly and explicitly (direct) or subtly and implicitly (indirect).
- **Emotional expressiveness vs. restraint** – Cultural differences in showing emotion openly versus controlling emotional display during conflict.
- **Destructive vs. productive** – Whether conflict escalates harm and hostility (destructive) or leads to growth and improved understanding (productive).
- **Competitive vs. cooperative** – Conflict styles that focus on winning (competitive) versus working together for mutual benefit (cooperative).
- **Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory** – A theory explaining how people manage conflict and "face" based on cultural norms, especially individualism vs. collectivism.
- **Mindful listening** – Fully attentive, nonjudgmental listening that seeks to understand another's perspective.
- **Mindful reframing** – Reinterpreting a conflict situation to highlight shared goals or reduce negative assumptions.
- **Collaborative dialogue** – Open, respectful communication aimed at jointly solving problems.
- **Culture-based conflict resolution steps** – A framework that considers cultural values, communication styles, and face concerns when resolving conflict.
- **Conflict** – A perceived incompatibility of goals, values, or expectations between individuals or groups.
- **Face** – A person's desired social identity or public self-image.
- **Facework** – Strategies used to maintain, defend, or restore one's own or another's face during interaction.

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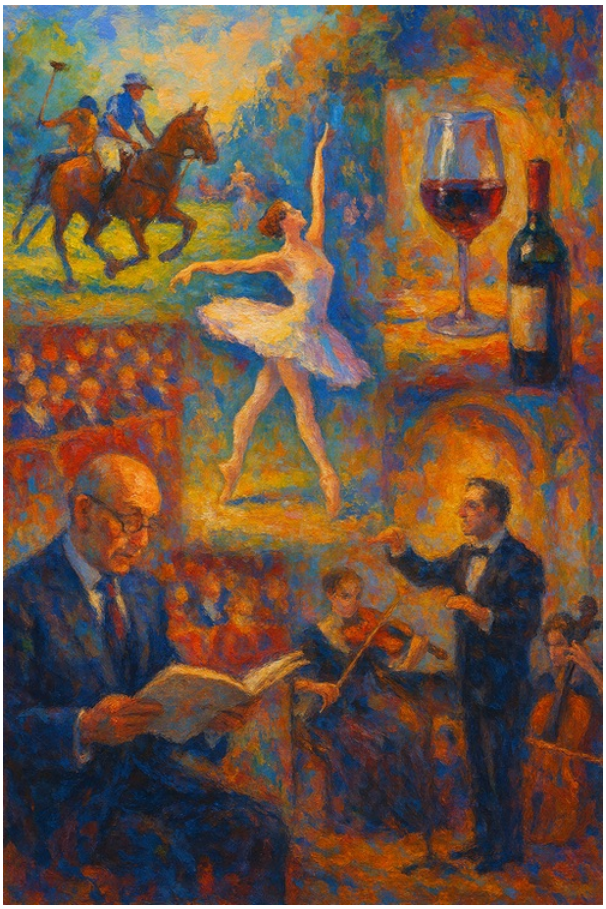
3.6: Pop Culture

How important do you think popular culture is within your life? Are you constantly listening to the newest music? Do you enjoy watching the most recent episode of something on Amazon Prime or Netflix? Or do you follow social influencers on YouTube? Look around your house. Have your purchases been influenced by the Disney Corporation, Game of Thrones, World of Warcraft, or Peppa the Pig? The most common forms of popular culture are movies, music, television, video games, sports, entertainment news, fashion, and various forms of technology. Some of us may be very selective in our consumption of popular culture, but it's difficult to find someone who has not been touched by popular culture at all. Even if the mere mention of popular culture makes you roll your eyes and sigh, most of us—no matter what nation you are a citizen of—have been impacted by the economic and social impact of popular culture.

According to Dictionary.com, **popular culture** or **low culture** as it is sometimes referred as, is comprised of the "cultural activities or commercial products reflecting, suited to, or aimed at the tastes of the general masses of people" (7/21/19). In other words, popular culture is accessible to the masses and has huge appeal. Traditionally, the term was associated with lower classes who were poorly educated, but after World War II, innovations in radio and television broadcasting or mass media led to significant cultural and social changes. Popular culture almost always relies on mass consumption of mass media by the masses of people on the planet. Popular culture is constantly evolving and is unique to the time and place in which it occurs. Societal influences and institutions merge and diverge to appeal to a broad cross-section of people within a culture. Some social scientists theorize that popular culture is a tool that elites use to control the people below them in society, but others stress that popular culture can also be used as a means of rebellion against the dominant culture. For our purposes, the characteristics of popular culture fulfill social functions within cultures and can be found everywhere.



High culture, on the other hand, isn't meant for mass consumption. It might not be easily available to everyone. Consumers might need training or education to fully appreciate the benefits of high culture. It's also possible that consumers of high culture might need to purchase costly equipment or memberships to participate in high cultural activities. Because of these limitations, high culture often belongs to social or economic elites, and does not often cross over into the realm of the masses. In the US, examples of high culture could be opera, ballet, classical music, an appreciation of fine wine, horse polo matches, or other items associated with "sophisticated" tastes.

If popular culture is for the masses, and high culture is for the elites, **folk culture** is a localized form of culture. Folk culture refers to the rituals and traditions that maintain a cultural group identity. According to Wikipedia, "folk culture is quite often imbued with a sense of place. If elements of folk culture are copied by, or moved to, a foreign locale, they will still carry strong connotations of their original place of creation" (7/21/19). Examples of US *folk culture* could be quilt-making, powwows, cakewalks, hula, Shaker furniture, corn dogs, and Creole cuisine.

Folk culture often informs pop culture and has even influenced high culture, but once folk cultural icons have become so internationalized that they have lost their original sense of place, they are no longer part of folk culture. An example of this could be the Seattle Seahawks football team emblem. The original 1975 emblem was derived from a picture of a Kwakwaka'wakw tribal mask found in an art book (www.wearefanatics.com/seattle-seahawks-logo, ret. 8/28/19). Most Seahawk fans will recognize the NFL logo instantly, but have little or no understanding that a "sea hawk" is the nickname for an osprey, and that the original sea hawk mask used as a basis for

the team emblem was a “transformational” mask with a specific religious meaning (www.audubon.org/news/what-seahawk-anyway, ret. 8/28/19).

So why have a chapter on popular culture in an intercultural communication book? “Popular culture is intimately connected with education, mass communication, production, and a society’s ability to access knowledge” (Campbell, Intellectbooks.com). From an intercultural communication perspective, popular culture is usually our first exposure to other cultures. It is the place that we learn about those who are different than us. Martin & Nakayama believe that “popular culture is a lens for viewing other cultural groups” (2011, p. 202). Research tells us that people use popular culture to learn about other cultures, to re-affirm their own cultural identities, and to reinforce stereotypes. In other words, popular culture plays a powerful role in how we think about and understand ourselves as well as others.

If you are interested in how popular culture impacts your life, look around. Did you buy a lot of Vans because your really like them? How many of your friends own them? Next check your clothing. Are you buying things because you like them or because they are popular?

What about your entertainment choices? The 2019 DC Comics film, AQUAMAN, grossed over $1 billion dollars making it the highest-grossing DC Comics film. A former student and her husband looked forward to watching it because of its popularity, but was disappointed when they finally saw it. “We sat and watched the entire thing even though it was cheesy and not very well made. Why? Probably because we have watched many other superhero movies over the years that have taken over the movie scene” (Hein, 2019). According to CNBC.com, “more than 70% of the film’s revenue came from countries outside the US” (www.cnbc.com/2019/01/08/aqua...nal-sales.html, ret. 8/18/19).

According to Kathryn Sorrells (2013, pp. 142-144), there are several ways that we can become informed consumers of popular culture. First, we should increase awareness of what role media plays in forming views, normalizing ideas, and spreading stereotypes. Second, we need to understand that we have a choice in what we media we consume and what we don’t. And third, we do not have to accept what mass media promotes. Kalle Lasn, author of *Cultural Jam* (2000), introduced the idea of **cultural jamming** which is a form of public activism that helps us to become better interpreters of media rather than simply consumers.

Globalization and Popular Culture

The economic prosperity of the United States at the beginning of last century created **cultural industries**. The term **cultural industry** was created by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944; 1993) to mean the creation, production, and distribution of goods and services that are cultural in nature and usually protected by intellectual property rights. The globalizing forces of trade & international commerce, media & communication technology plus the arts & languages are behind the rise of US pop culture. In the 1920s, US media was exported to boost sales of US products. Among the major sponsors of such programming were Procter & Gamble, Colgate-Palmolive, and Lever Brothers, all US manufacturers of soap and cleaning products, thus the term **soap opera** came into being for the daytime dramas that also became popular exports by themselves.

The growth of the influence of US television has also impacted the international film industry. In 1987, US films captured 56% of the European film market. Less than a decade later, that statistic rose to 90% (Dager, n.d.). Recently, the market share across Western Europe has ranged from 60-75% (Hopewell, 2013). In such a lop-sided import/export market, concerns are often raised. “Not only do foreign nations worry about their own domestic entertainment industries from an economic standpoint, but they also worry about the effects on their culture” (Levin Institute, 2017).

For many countries the abundance of US media is not just another commodity, but rather **cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism** can be defined in many ways, but for our purposes, we will think of it as *domination through cultural products*. Imperialism is the “creation and maintenance of unequal power relationships between civilizations favoring a more powerful civilization” (Wikipedia, 7/25/19). Other related terms include **media imperialism** or the domination or control through the media, and **electronic colonialism** or domination or exploitation through using technological forms.

When culture becomes a commercial commodity, the fear of the homogenization of cultures rises. People from different parts of the world can learn to dress, eat, consume, and communicate in the same ways. Localized cultural diversity could become endangered as a dominant, globalized culture becomes the norm. As Martin & Nakayama (2011, p. 202) note “There is no easy way to measure the impact of popular culture, but we need to be sensitive to its influences on intercultural communication because, for so many of us, the world exists through popular culture.” Global circulation of popular culture enables foreign companies to distribute

materials from cultural industries as well. Not all popular culture comes from the United States. Manga, anime, K-pop, bairro dances, and British rock bands are all prime examples of wildly popular cultural influences originating from outside of the United States.

It's interesting to note that some forms of popular culture can be limited to particular cultures such as slang words, while other forms, such as music can be universally popular.Globalization also allows foreign companies to earn money selling US cultural products and making them more accessible worldwide as well. CNN now reaches over 200 million households in over 212 countries and territories. Such exposure could only be possible through the cooperation of international distributors.UK culture and communication researcher, Mark Banks, believes that the heart of the pop culture discussion is always about power. His work focuses on how pop culture, economics and politics collide through use, social critique, and exploitation of cultural work.

Consuming and Resisting Pop Culture

People negotiate their relationship to pop culture in interesting and complex ways. To maintain or reshape our identities, we both resist popular culture, and actively consume it. If a social group participates in particular forms of pop culture, individuals often feel that they should participate as well. On the other hand, if a social group has concerns about pop culture, individuals will often refuse to engage with that particular form as well.

Facebook usage is a great example of this. According to Statista.com (ret. 7/25/19), seventy-nine percent of 18-49 year-olds in the United States used Facebook in February of 2019 while only forty percent of the 65 and older group did. According to the Pew Research Center (ret. 7/25/19), those in the 18-24 range embrace a variety of platforms (YouTube 94%, Snapchat 78%, Instagram 71%, and Twitter 45%) by visiting them multiple times (71%) a day. Interestingly enough, popular culture does not have to win over the majority of the people to be considered "popular." With usage by less than a quarter of the world's population, Facebook can be considered the ultimate **media imperialist.**

Wrapping it up…

According to Internet Live Stats (ret. 2/27/18) there are 3.5 billion Google searches per day. Some scholars have proposed that this usage indicates the intensity that US culture has permeated the planet through continual dependence.Whether you embrace it or resist it, popular culture serves important cultural functions. Those functions are connected to cultural identities, or our view of ourselves in relation to the cultures to which we belong. Those functions also embrace how we get information about, and understand, other cultural groups.

Key Terms

- **Popular culture** – Mass-produced, widely shared cultural products and practices consumed by large audiences.
- **Low culture** – Everyday, accessible cultural forms often associated with mass audiences rather than elites.
- **High culture** – Cultural products linked to elite tastes, such as classical art, literature, and fine arts.
- **Folk culture** – Traditional, community-based cultural practices passed down through generations.
- **Cultural jamming** – The act of disrupting or subverting mainstream media messages to challenge dominant cultural narratives.
- **Cultural industries** – Businesses that produce and distribute cultural goods such as film, music, television, and publishing.
- **Soap opera** – A serialized drama focused on interpersonal relationships, typically airing daily or weekly.
- **Cultural imperialism** – The dominance of one culture over others through media, values, and consumer products.
- **Media imperialism** – The global influence of powerful nations' media systems on less dominant cultures.

- **Electronic colonialism**

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3.7: Tourism Overview

The travel and tourism industry is one of the world's largest industries. Statista.com (ret. 7/26/19) estimates that the (direct, indirect, and induced) global economic contribution of tourism in 2016 was over 7.6 trillion US dollars. Amazing, considering the tourism industry has experienced growth almost every year. International border crossings increased from 528 million in 2005 to 1.19 billion in 2015 with a forecast of 1.8 billion by 2030. Each year, Europe receives the most international border crossings, but it also produces the most travelers with 607 million outbound in 2017. This constitutes a huge movement of people and a large transfer of resources.

International tourism is booming, but it's important to remember that many people travel within their own country. Approximately 25% of tourists actually cross national boundaries (Orion, 1982). The Great Recession of 2007-2010 popularized a relatively new form of tourism called the **staycation**. A *staycation* is an alternative to the traditional vacation and is influenced by such things as economic conditions, availability of discretionary income, and time. One might spend time in their home country visiting local and regional parks, museums, and attractions rather than going abroad. In the larger, more geographically isolated countries, such as the United States and Canada, local and regional travel has probably always been the norm, whereas travelers from the European nations probably expect to cross national boundaries on vacation. Of course, tourism in the sense of travel to distant lands is a very ancient tradition. The scale and economic reach of contemporary tourism is something new.

Economics aside, tourism provides rich opportunities for intercultural encounters. "**Tourism** is centered on the fundamental principles of exchange between peoples and is both an expression and experience of culture. It reaches into some deep conceptual territories relating to how we construct and understand ourselves, the world and the multilayered relationships between them" Dimitrova, et al., 2015, p. 225). Outside of our exposure to the various forms of popular culture, tourism is the next big way that we are exposed to cultures other than our own.

Communication Challenges with Tourism

Coping with tourists can be a complex process involving social, political, and economic contexts better addressed in courses other than a fundamentals of communication class. Valid questions exist about the ethics of resource consumption, power inequities, standard of living, and cost-benefit distribution along with the consequences of culture becoming public property. From a communication studies perspective, the challenges we are concerned with involve attitudes of hosts/tourists, characteristics of tourist/host encounters, language issues, social norms, and culture shock.

Tourism acts as a vehicle to provide direct encounters between people of diverse cultural backgrounds; therefore, tourism is a social activity in which the relationship between hosts and guests is fundamental to the experience. The various attitudes that hosts display towards tourists is crucial in understanding the communication process.

Attitudes of Hosts Toward Tourists

Traditionally, a **host** is a person who invites and receives visitors. In the tourist context, we refer to the people who live in the tourist region as hosts, taking note of the fact that many hosts have not invited the tourist, nor do they particularly welcome them. One attitude of hosts towards tourists is **retreatism**. *Retreatism* basically means that hosts actively avoid contact with tourists by looking for ways to hide their everyday lives. Tourists may not be aware of this attitude because the host economy may be dependent upon tourism. Such dependence could possibly force the host community to accommodate tourists with tolerance.

Hawaii is a place that depends heavily on tourism and often uses various forms of *retreatism* to cope with the tourist invasion. Several students have mentioned that other than people who worked at restaurants or on tourist excursions, they didn't see many locals when vacationing in Hawaii.

Another attitude of hosts towards tourists is **resistance**. This attitude can be passive or aggressive. Passive resistance may include grumbling, gossiping about, or making fun of tourists behind their backs. Aggressive resistance often takes more active forms, such as pretending not to speak a language or giving incorrect information or directions. Deserved or not, the French have a reputation of tourist *resistance*. As Paris is the number one tourist destination in the world for many years in a row, and during the tourist season the population doubles or triples with visitors, it is not surprising that Parisians have developed a *resistant* attitude.

Boundary maintenance is a common way to regulate the interaction between hosts and tourists. This attitude is a common response by hosts who do not want a lot of interaction with tourists. The community may be dependent upon the economics of tourist interactions, but prefers to encounter tourists on a limited level–possibly in specific locations or only with specific people. Many Native American tribes and First Nations people prefer to have visitors start at a tribal welcome center or museum before wandering around their reservations or traditional lands. Horror stories exist of tourists walking into private homes in order to meet "real Indians" and see how they live.

Not all host attitudes are protective or negative. Some communities may capitalize on tourism and accept it as the social fabric of their community. Other communities actively invest money to draw tourists as a way to create economic. Other communities passively accept the community members who actively develop tourism opportunities to keep the community from dying. This attitude is called **revitalization.** Residents do not always share equally in the revitalization, but sometimes it does lead to pride in the re-discovery of community history and traditions. Dolly Parton's "Dollywood" located in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee was created as a way to revitalize a community that she loved much as "Disneyland" is a revitalizing force in Southern California.

Within the same community, hosts can have a variety of attitudes towards tourists. These differences can be major sources of conflict that cause on-going strife. It's important that tourists be aware of their own attitudes towards tourism and acknowledge the cultural differences between hosts and tourists.

Characteristics of Tourist and Host Encounters

Much has been written about the characteristics of tourist and host encounters in all the various shapes and forms it occurs. The newest research tends to focus on not the encounter itself, but rather the context in which the encounter occurs as a measure of success. In general, there are a few concepts that are basic to tourist/host encounters from an intercultural perspective.

First, most encounters are very predictable and ritualistic because they are business transactions and nothing more. If you are thirsty, you can buy something to drink from a vendor, market, or restaurant. You ask as politely as you know how, exchange money, and receive a product. Once you have learned the ritual, you use it repeatedly throughout your visit.

Most tourists don't have time for lengthy interactions, which leads to fewer opportunities to authentically engage with the hosts. Package tours are infamous for short time schedules, but free-range tourists often try to fit in as many local attractions as they can in one day before moving to the next location. Such commodification leads to great Instagram pictures, but little time to interact with the locals on a meaningful level.

Another characteristic of the tourist/host encounter is that tourists are often—but not always–more economically and socially privileged than their hosts. Traveling can be expensive so tourists are often looking for a good deal or places where their money can go farther than at home. Maybe they splurge on something normally inaccessible to them in daily life. Such actions are part of normal tourist expectations, but can lead to power imbalances between hosts and tourists.

Research indicates that contact between hosts and tourists is significantly more positive if tourists slow down and take an interest in the country they are visiting and the culture they are experiencing. It is also clear that when hosts have the time and space to treat tourists like guests, while taking pride in their own communities, hosts are most likely to welcome interaction with tourists.

Language Challenges

Not surprisingly, language is often a problem for both hosts and tourists. No one can learn all of the languages of the places they might visit or of the people who do visit. Perceptions of service, inability to interact, and the lack of language resources are all huge frustrations for both sides. Host cultures often have very different expectations of tourists regarding language usage as well. Some host cultures expect tourists to use the host language in interactions whereas other host cultures believe that they should provide language assistance for tourists. Language difficulties are often the basis for any culture shock experienced by both the host culture and the tourists.

Social Norms and Expectations

People do not behave randomly. Social norms and expectations regulate human behavior. For example, people visiting a tourist site may avoid littering because the site is clean, which suggests that others have been making an effort to be environmentally responsible. Whereas the community may support recycling programs at the site because they think that tourists are willing to pay extra for eco-friendly practices.

Norms that govern tourist/host behaviors are influenced by personal, societal, and cultural expectations. Some of the most impactful cultural norms to consider are expectations about public social behavior, shopping, and acceptable communication styles.

Social interaction in public ranges from informal to very formal. Most cultures have expectations for gender- and age-related interactions. Some accepted conventions may have speakers address status with a formal relational title such as “honored grandmother” or “small friend” whereas a more informal convention would be “Florence” and “Ryann.” Norms may also be related to religious beliefs, traditions, politeness, and more.

Norms for shopping vary from culture to culture. It might be expected that consumers touch the merchandise before buying it or touching might be forbidden until after the purchase. Bargaining might be the norm, and initial prices are given as higher than the expected purchase price or the price on the tag is the price you pay.

According to Howstuffworks.com (Curran, ret. 7/30/19) there are “10 Grocery Store Etiquette Rules” in the United States.

1. Don’t yell at the checker.
2. Bring a reusable tote instead of one-use bags provided by the store.
3. Children sometimes have a mind of their own, so parents are not always to blame.
4. If you break it, you buy it.
5. Ask for a mop if you make a mess.
6. Don’t judge the contents in the cart of someone else.
7. If using a check, pre-write as much as you can while waiting.
8. It’s okay to avoid people you know if you don’t have time to talk.
9. Don’t text and push a cart at the same time.
10. When you are done, park your cart in a safe place.

Shopping norms are significant, but even more importantly, communication styles (see the verbal chapter) do dictate how people act in public. Direct cultures will still ask questions that they want to know the answer for and expect to hear an answer. Indirect cultures will still avoid asking questions but strive to provide direction in the context of the situation. Some cultures value elaborate speakers and some value being concise. Conversation might involve grabbing a hand or arm to emphasize sincerity or you might want to avoid physical contact with others at all costs. Information about the appropriate behavior is all around you. Observe what the host/tourists usually do and act accordingly.

Culture Shock

Being in new cultural contexts can lead to **culture shock** and feelings of disorientation. Even the physical aspects of traveling (crossing time zones, changes in food, etc.) can be difficult for some tourists. One student mentioned experiencing culture shock as

a naive 16-year-old in Mexico. She didn't understand the language, and was freaked out by all the lizards in her room. Although culture shock has already been discussed in previous chapters, it's important to remember that both hosts and tourists can experience culture shock. When host communities encounter new values and behaviors, they can reach a point of uncertainty. Researchers (Prokop, 1970; Furnham & Bochner, 1989) who examined culture shock experienced by host cultures noted higher incidence of alcoholism, depression, and minor psychiatric illness.

Not all tourists experience culture shock. Many variables, including purpose of the trip, power dynamics, mental & physical health, and types of contact influence the experience of culture shock. New research (Moufakkir, 2013), proposes that culture shock can be negotiated at home before the trip even begins. One thing to note is that when tourists do experience culture shock, they often take it out on the host community.

Culture Learning and Types of Tourism

Sharing food, holding a conversation, or participating in a meaningful cultural event are all ways that one can learn about a different culture before going on a trip. Be observant and more conscious of your own and others' communication. Read books and articles written by people from other cultures from their own cultural perspective. Follow social media of people from, or organizations that represent, other cultures. Learn another language. Enter into a cultural exchange. Visit museums and cultural centers. Ask questions (gcorr.org, ret. 7/30/2019). Be flexible and open to other ways of living. These are all great ways to negotiate culture shock before leaving home or before you find yourself hosting others.

Although we have a tendency to think that all tourist experiences are the same, in today's world, this is not the case. As the economy changes, and as tourists and hosts needs change, the idea of what travel can be has also changed. Below you will find a short list of things that travel agents book tours for.

Adventure travel, agritourism, alternative tourism, athletic tours, birth tourism, booze cruise, camping, culinary, cultural tourism, dental tourism, recreational drug tourism, ecotourism, experiential travel, extreme tourism, fashion tourism, garden tourism, genealogy tourism, geotourism, glamping, guest ranch, heritage trails, identity tourism, industrial tourism, international volunteering, justice tourism, LGBT tourism, literary tourism, medical tourism, military, music cruise, railroad attraction, religious tourism, river cruise, romance tours, safari, scenic route, senior, sex tourism, space tourism, sports tourism, virtual tours, walking tours, war tourism, water tourism, wellness tourism, and women's tours.

Tourism and New Media

Tourists and hosts are using new media as never before. Tourists are skipping the traditional ways of booking vacations and directly interacting with hosts and cultural organizations. Hosts are enticing, inviting, and advertising their experiences directly to the public. Free apps allow tourists and hosts to talk directly over the internet. Pre-departure information no longer is in the control of travel agents, airlines, and hotels.

Fascinating research is being done by Thurlow & Mroczek (2014) that explores the ways that the **micro-blogging** (web-based self-reporting of short messages) is changing the tourist experience. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter use self-reporting to share what one is doing, thinking, and feeling at any moment. Viewers can not only experience the trip in real time, but also plan the same experiences with the contacts provided.

Another new media impact on tourism is **cyber tourism** and **virtual tourists**. *Cyber tourism* is the application of new technologies such as GIS or Google Earth to create realistic images. *Cyber tourism* can lead to actual physical tourism, but for those without the time and money, or have other restrictions to prevent travel, new technologies offer a viable alternative.

Back in 2001, Lonely Planet noticed a group of people who would buy travel books, but never travel. They called these people, *virtual tourists* (Champion, ret. 7/30/2109). Today's virtual tourist uses an enhanced virtual environment that can be seen through a headset. This augmented reality merge the real and virtual world together into virtual reality. Although a new and emerging experience, various organizations such as museums, cultural groups, and travel agencies are beginning to offer this interesting way to "travel."

E-Tourism is a non-governmental organizational (NGO) initiative from the United Nations with the aim of helping developing countries make the most of their tourism potential. The internet is packed with plans and discussion of tourism potential from such varied places as Afghanistan to Botswana.

Political and Environment Impact on Tourism

Tourists consider a multitude of factors when deciding where they should or should not go. One such factor is politics. A country's "visitor-friendly" policies are important. Does travel require a passport or visa? Are they easy to obtain? Are they costly? Does the ruling party encourage or discourage visitors?

Instability can have devastating consequences on tourism, but even the perception of political trouble can effect tourism. In recent times, Qatar tourism was largely impacted by a political decision. The UAE and other countries in the region banned travel to and from Qatar. As most tourists to Qatar were from neighboring states, tourist numbers dropped leading to an economic downturn.

Tourism can exacerbate political tensions through environmental disasters as well. Tourism can increase the price of housing, land, goods, and services thereby increasing the cost of living. Imported labor may be needed to support tourist demands unfulfilled through local populations. There might also be additional costs to support the infrastructure needed for tourism such as water, sewer, power, fuel, hospitals, roads, and transportation systems. Plus tourism uses resources and generates waste well in excess of local population needs. Without a planning and oversight system, tourism can add problems to an already strained political system.

To Wrap It Up

Tourism is one of the world's largest and most complex industries. Most of us have been a tourist, and have interacted with tourists. Much like our exposure to popular culture, our tourist experiences have formed and impacted our understanding of different cultures. There are intercultural communication challenges inherent in the tourist process. We must consider the attitudes towards tourists, tourist host encounters, language, cultural norms & expectations, and culture shock. In today's world, there are many ways to be a tourist, and all of them are being impacted by new media. Tourism is not without costs to political structures and the environment.

At its best, tourism is a useful tool to share, sustain, and improve cultural diversity. At its worst, tourism can destroy a community and a culture. The reality of tourism is much more complicated than just taking a vacation.

Key Terms

- **Staycation** – A vacation spent at home or nearby rather than traveling long distances.
- **Tourism** – The activities of people traveling outside their usual environment for leisure, business, or cultural experiences.
- **Host** – A person or community that receives and interacts with visitors or tourists.
- **Retreatism** – Withdrawing from dominant cultural expectations or norms, often as a response to cultural pressure or overload.
- **Resistance** – Actions taken to oppose, challenge, or push back against dominant cultural influences or tourism impacts.
- **Boundary maintenance** – Efforts by a community to preserve cultural identity and limit outside influence.
- **Revitalization** – The process of renewing or restoring cultural practices, traditions, or spaces.

- **Culture shock** – The stress or disorientation experienced when encountering an unfamiliar culture.
- **Micro-blogging** – Posting short, frequent updates online, typically through platforms like Twitter or similar services.
- **Cyber tourism** – Exploring destinations through digital platforms rather than physical travel.
- **Virtual tourist** – A person who experiences places through digital simulations, videos, or online environments.
- **E-tourism** – The use of digital tools and online platforms to plan, book, or experience tourism activities.

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3.8: Environmentally Sensitive Travel

Today there is an increasing awareness of the environmental impacts tourism has. In many regions of the world, tourism does bring in desperately needed money, but it also can put pressures on the region's infrastructure and environment that cause problems and lasting damage. Visitors' experiences shape their perception of the culture, and the reverse is true. Indiginous people form lasting impressions of visitors based on their behavior. This can promote better intercultural relationships or detract and damage them.

This chapter explores that issue.

Tourism and the Environment

Travel opportunities are plentiful to the point that it is the rare—or rich—person who can “do it all.” Since most travelers must pick and choose, deciding what to do and what not to do, it is worth looking at ways of ranking and rating travel. Beyond just looking at the sticker price, there are other significant things to consider. More and more, travelers and those companies that cater to them, are taking into account the environmental impact and sustainability of those attractions, excursions, or educational opportunities that can form the core of a “once-in-a lifetime” trip.

Many countries depend on money that comes from tourism. But scholars have only recently begun to look at the data behind eco-tourism. The risks of tourism to the environment come from the impact that tourists have in traveling to the sites, the pollution or degradation of the site from foot-traffic or litter and the risk of disturbing animals as they rest, feed, or mate, thereby disrupting their ability to survive or thrive.

One such example is in Sri Lanka. There, the Kosgoda Sea Turtle Conservation Project, KSTCP, has been in operation for almost 40 years. A 2025 study looked at the project (Pattiyagedaraa, Sustainable Management Practices of Turtle Hatcheries in Sri Lanka as Premier Tourist Attractions, 2025). They found that the turtle conservation project does supports the local economy in various ways. It buys turtle eggs from fisherman, which keeps the eggs from being eaten, and the project’s education efforts are aimed at increasing awareness and cutting cut down on poaching.

Sustainable tourism studies have looked at factors that relate to the environment, the local population’s benefits, and the quality of the experience for tourists. Different studies have expanded these three basic considerations into more detailed rubrics to evaluate, rank, and offer insights into so-called best-practices. One such rubric of “sustainability indicators” was offered by researchers Choi and Siraka (Choi, 2006). Their scale has seven components, and suggests questions that travelers can ask when decided whether they should visit an attraction.

- What is the social cost?
- Is this activity environmentally sustainable?
- Does this site have a long-term plan focused on sustainability?
- Does this benefit the locals, or just outside corporate interests?
- Is the community engaged in the planning?
- To what extent are the jobs created filled by locals and fairly compensated?
- Does this activity provide a satisfying visitor experience in line with its cost?

Of course, it can be hard for a tourist to do this sort of research all on their own. But, increasingly, promotional materials speak to these issues, and if they do not, it’s worth asking these questions.

In the case of the seat turtle project, the research findings were that the projects is effective in educating the public and promoting conservation.

Some travel experiences go beyond just having the traveler be a passive observer of the environment. An example of this the beach clean-up initiatives. For example, the state of California sponsors the Coastal Cleanup Day one day each year where coastal

communities turn out in force to pick up trash and properly dispose of it. According to the California Coastal Commission website, it is the state's largest volunteer event (Commission, 2025)

It may seem a bit far afield of our core subject, intercultural communication, to consider how tourism affects the environment. But it is worth considered the lasting effects of sustainable tourism. Of course, tourists want a positive, memorable experience. But it also is true that when tourists depart, the community they leave behind will remember them. It is in the interest of everyone that the legacy of these visits build understanding and demonstrate respect. Tourism should be of substantial benefit to the local community and create lasting good-will.

So, conscientious travelers can "vote with their dollars" and educate their friends on the trips that meet the seven-questions of sustainability.

Key Terms

- **Environmental impact** – The effects tourism has on natural ecosystems, including pollution, habitat disruption, and resource strain.
- **Sustainable tourism** – Tourism practices that balance visitor experience with long-term environmental and community well-being.
- **Infrastructure pressure** – Strain placed on local systems (roads, water, waste, energy) due to increased tourist activity.
- **Eco-tourism** – Environmentally responsible travel that supports conservation and benefits local communities.
- **Site degradation** – Damage to natural or cultural locations caused by foot-traffic, litter, or overuse.
- **Wildlife disturbance** – Disruption of animals' natural behaviors due to tourist presence.
- **Kosgoda Sea Turtle Conservation Project (KSTCP)** – A Sri Lankan initiative that protects turtle populations while supporting local livelihoods.
- **Sustainability indicators** – Criteria used to evaluate whether a tourism activity is socially, environmentally, and economically responsible.
- **Social cost** – The negative effects tourism may have on local communities, such as overcrowding or cultural disruption.
- **Local benefit** – The extent to which tourism revenue and opportunities support residents rather than outside corporations.
- **Visitor experience quality** – How well a tourism activity meets travelers' expectations relative to its cost and impact.
- **Conservation education** – Programs that teach visitors about protecting wildlife and ecosystems.
- **Volunteer tourism (clean-up initiatives)** – Travel experiences where visitors actively participate in environmental restoration, such as beach cleanups.
- **Legacy of tourism** – The lasting impression tourists leave on a community, including cultural respect or harm.
- **Voting with dollars** – Choosing travel options that support sustainable practices and responsible organizations.

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3.9: Culturally Sensitive Travel

Travelers are often drawn to specific regions because of the rich and unique characteristics of the culture in those locales. A part of this may be traditions that have striking visual aspects or dynamic physical characteristics, such as dance or simulated combat. There are opportunities and challenges in allowing visitors to see these things.

Culturally Sensitive Travel

As noted earlier, many countries depend on such tourism to fund essential activities that might not be possible otherwise. One example, from the author's personal experience, was seen during a Kava Ceremony. Shortly before the ceremony, our guide, a member of the village, said that the revenue from the tour company and the post-event purchases of the art and artifacts they made was what made it possible to send their children to school. The government did not provide funding for educating the indigenous people. The photo, taken by the author with permission depicts the welcoming ceremony and traditional attire. The Kava ceremony is open to outsiders and is, indeed, a ceremony that is intended to welcome and form bonds. However, this is not true of all ceremonies across the board. Some were sacred and secretive, and were opened up to visitors only recently and even reluctantly. And this is understandable. There is an irony is having tourists observe what have been sacred events. Your presence as an observer changes things!

In traditional cultures, these events often marked rights-of-passage and had significant limitations on who could be present and participate. It might be exclusive to the men of the village who were initiating boys into manhood. Or, in a similar vein, it could be the females teaching things only women were supposed to know. Yet when these events become, essentially, a form of entertainment, with photo-ops and tourists being a part of the show, the authenticity of the events diminishes or vanishes altogether. Some cultures have responded by creating newer sacred activities, and excluding outsiders. But then there is pressure to open these up to public inspection. It is not uncommon for uninformed tourists to come to these events and take pictures when it they shouldn't, speak when they should be silent, or otherwise intrude by touching or interacting with the participants in ways that maybe inappropriate and offensive.

Ethical tour operators can help offset these problems by educating their clients and only bringing visitors to events that are appropriate to the public. But there is still an appetite for some travelers to break into events that are essentially sacred and religious ceremonies.

For tourists who is out and about on their own, it's best to me cautious and ask for permission at every turn.

- Can I attend?
- Can I take pictures?
- Should I offer a donation?
- Should I speak or remain silent?
- Is there a point in the event/ceremony where outsiders should leave?
- With whom can I interact?
- What should I explicitly refrain from doing, saying, wearing, or eating?
- How can I most clearly convey respect and gratitude?

It's true that a tourist asking such questions is admitting to ignorance, but those with the courage to ask and truly answer will learn more than those who take it all in passively as one might a novelty act at a circus.

Again, it is worth remembering that most cultures have some places and events that welcome visitors. Others still have times and spaces that are sacred. Being mindful goes a long way toward creating good-will and thereby opening up a positive and memorable experience.

Here are some books on this topic that may be helpful:

An Anthropologist on Mars, by Oliver Sacks. It talking about "deep listening," nonjudgment, and observing with humility.

The Ethical Traveler, by Daisann McClane. It offers suggestions on when to speak or not and insights into avoiding bad behavior.

Travel as a Political Act, by Rick Steeves. Thoughts on how to avoid cultural arrogance and have genuine and respectful interactions with the community.

The Art of Being a Traveler, Not a Tourist, by James O'Reilly, Larry Habegger, and Sean O'Reilly. Practical wisdom about "ethical presence."

Key Terms

- **Culturally sensitive travel** – Tourism that respects local traditions, values, and boundaries while minimizing disruption.
- **Traditional ceremonies** – Cultural rituals with historical or spiritual significance, often with rules about who may attend or participate.
- **Sacred events** – Ceremonies or practices considered spiritually important and not always open to outsiders.
- **Authenticity loss** – The diminishing of cultural meaning when sacred practices are altered for tourist entertainment.
- **Cultural boundaries** – Limits set by a community regarding who may observe, participate in, or document certain traditions.
- **Ethical tourism** – Travel that prioritizes respect, consent, and responsible behavior toward host communities.
- **Tourist intrusion** – When visitors unintentionally offend by taking photos, speaking, or interacting at inappropriate times.
- **Permission-seeking** – The practice of asking before attending, photographing, or participating in cultural events.
- **Respectful behavior** – Actions that show cultural awareness, such as remaining silent, dressing appropriately, or offering gratitude.
- **Tour operator responsibility** – The duty of guides and companies to educate travelers and avoid exposing them to restricted events.
- **Cultural commodification** – When traditions become performances for tourists, potentially altering their meaning.
- **Welcoming ceremonies** – Events intentionally designed to include outsiders and build bonds between visitors and hosts.
- **Cultural exclusivity** – Practices reserved only for community members, often tied to gender, age, or spiritual status.
- **Mindful tourism** – Approaching cultural experiences with humility, curiosity, and awareness of one's impact.
- **Ethical presence** – Being a visitor who listens deeply, avoids arrogance, and engages with communities respectfully.

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3.10: Business

World economies and cultures are becoming more complex and interconnected as never before. To remain competitive in this rapidly changing world, most businesses will need to enter the global marketplace because information, technology, investors, and customers are no longer restricted by national borders or cultural boundaries. Insights from studies in intercultural communication can help business professionals understand how cultural differences can be used as assets in the ever-changing corporate world.

Principles fundamental to intercultural communication can be used to navigate both the domestic and global economies. On the domestic front, there is an increasing demographic diversity within the workplace. Never before have so many people on this planet been on the move. Whether it be economic opportunity, political strife, changing climate, or war, people are migrating in record number. Massive relocation means that much of the workforce and small business ownership in any given nation is becoming increasingly diverse. Such diversity is driving major changes in consumer trends as well.

Global markets are also changing and expanding as multinational companies play an increasingly important role in the world economy. To see continued growth and remain competitive, most companies must employ **economies of scale.** In other words, if production increases while all other costs remain the same, the company can grow through lower cost per unit. If a domestic market has achieved **market saturation**, and everyone who wants a product or service has bought the product or service, the next step is move into the global market.

Fun facts about international businesses - Did you know?

- That Coca-Cola sells more of its product in Japan (population: 127 million) than it sells in the United States (population: 319 million)?
- That the nationality of many globally branded products in often difficult to pin down. For example, Stolichnaya vodka, originally made from grains grown in Russia, uses Latvian spring water, is filtered, blended, and bottled in Riga, the capital of Latvia, is sold throughout the world in bottles made in Poland and Estonia, and is sealed with caps made in Italy?
- More than half of US franchise operators (e.g. Dunkin Donuts or KFC) are in markets outside the United States?
- The US based computer giant, IBM, has more than 430,000 employees working in some 40 different countries?
- (Ferraro & Briody, 2017)

Power in Intercultural Business Encounters

Elements of power exist in every business encounter both domestic and international. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) along with researchers through the present day, have created value orientations that have relevance for international business. The **equality-hierarchy dimension**, also referred to as **power distance**, helps us understand how people with different levels of power, prestige, and status should interact with one another. Communication across power divides can be difficult, especially when there are cultural differences in how power is viewed or expressed.

Cultures that practice **high power distance** feel that organizations function best when the differences are clearly observed, and there is no confusion as to who the boss is, and who the worker is. Managers may reject assistance from subordinates, but willingly consult with their peers. Subordinates may compete for the attention of their superiors, while avoiding disagreements. Education signals greater social status although being average means a lack of power (Drake, 2010). Leaders in *high power distance* cultures, are expected to resolve conflict, while subordinates are expected to support the conflict resolution process. Overall in *high power distance* cultures, the division between superior and subordinate is clear.

High Power Distance	Low Power Distance
• Organizations function best with clear distinctions between levels	• Power differences should be minimized
• Managers reject assistance from subordinates	• Managers accept support from subordinates
• Subordinates compete for superior's attention	• Subordinates unthreatened by disagreeing with superiors
• Education signals greater social status	• Education signals accomplishment
• Leaders are expected to resolve conflict	• Managers and workers work together to resolve conflict

Cultures that practice **low power distance**, such as the United States, feel that power differences should be minimized. Managers accept the support of subordinates, with subordinates expecting to have some voice or power in the decision-making process. Subordinates are relatively unthreatened by disagreeing with superiors, therefore are more likely to cooperate rather than compete with each other. Education signals accomplishment whereas being seen as average means acceptance and inclusion. (Drake, 2010) In *low power distance* cultures, managers and workers expect to work together to resolve conflict.

Other power issues that indirectly effect intercultural communication are the benefits and harms of outsourcing, access to information, one-person-one-vote versus consensus decision-making, supervision style, and tension between workers of mixed status.

Communication Challenges in Business Contexts

To increase effectiveness across cultures, everyone should learn about the influence of culture on communication. Having a sense of diverse cultural traits and concepts will help you to appreciate the perspectives and goals of your domestic and global business partners.

Work-Related Values

There are three major work related values that impact the workplace in significant ways: **individualism** and **collectivism**; views of the **value of work versus material gain**; plus, the relative **importance of tasks versus relationships.**

As discussed in greater depth in the cultural foundation chapter, the fact that a culture leans toward **individualism** or **collectivism** can be very insightful in cultural understanding. In an **individualistic culture**, workers are expected to perform certain functions and have clearly defined responsibilities. There is a clear boundary that exists between individual workers and job expectations with the idea that individuals work better alone. Loyalty to the company is not demanded, but pay for performance is expected. Efficiency and productivity are valued above attitude. (Drake, 2010).

In **collectivistic cultures**, jobs are assigned to a unit, section, or department. Legal and other structures often protect the group so individuals generally defer to the group interests. Consensus decision-making is preferred. Individuals are thought to perform better in groups. Loyalty to the company and/or superiors is more valued than efficiency and performance (Drake, 2010).

Another dimension of a culture is its attitude toward **work**. Work is generally known as an effort directed to produce or accomplish something, and can be comprised of the types of work, the division of work, along with work habits and practices of a culture. Cultures also vary in how they view the **material gain** that comes from working. **Material gain** might mean that all members of a culture are expected to engage in cultural pursuits while in other cultures, the material gain is measured in terms of income produced.

If **work is seen as a virtue,** it will pay off. Over the course of time, hard work can change a character deficiency into a strength. Luke Skywalker, Harry Potter, Simba in The Lion King are all characters who never gave up. Kobe Bryant, Tom Brady, and Michael Phelps put hours into honing their skills and learning from others. Tech CEOs Marissa Mayer and Sheryl Sandberg arrived early and left late. In these cultures, hard work leads to material gain therefore, people who have a lot of material goods, are thought to have been hard workers. Conversely, for those who see work as a virtue, poor people are seen as lazy.

Sometimes **work is viewed as a necessary burden or evil**. *Necessary* in the fact that there will be some greater good that happens because work occurs. The benefit of work has value. Bills can be paid with the money earned from working. Food can be bought. Communities need medical care, education, and functioning infrastructure. Work can be a catalyst of good, but also provide a mild amount of harm. Parents who work leave their children in the care of others and that might cause a certain amount of guilt. Working late at the hospital night-after-night might ruin a marriage. Even fastidious street maintenance can't prevent automobile accidents from happening. Cultures that identify and articulate the benefits and challenges of working feel that they provide a realistic framework in which to manage life-altering choices.

Cultural values surrounding the **task and relationship** dimensions are also strongly tied to how business is conducted. In **relationship** cultures, people are valued for who they are. Their personality, character, appearance, behavior, and family ties are all part of the picture. Social relationships take priority over work relationships. Family commitments take precedence over work commitments. Achievement is measured by friendships, peer recognition, and respect. Criticism is rare and usually interpreted as negative (Drake, 2010).

Cultures with a strong **task orientation** want to get the job done quickly and right the first time. Tasks are more important than social relationships and family commitments. Achievement is measured by accomplishment, possessions, and power. Professional recognition is determined by expertise. Constructive criticism is welcomed (Drake, 2010).

While each person is unique and different, work-related values are so closely tied to fundamental cultural values that form individual cultures, it's often difficult to separate the culture from the person.

Language Issues

Communication, both verbal and nonverbal, is often used to distinguish one culture from another. International business professionals often have to deal with many languages, including those nations that have more than one "official" national language. On a planet where the population exceeds 7 billion, linguistic diversity is alive and well.

If the global population was only 1000 people, about half of the people would speak the following as their first language.

- 165 Mandarin
- 86 English
- 83 Hindi/Urdu
- 64 Spanish
- 58 Russian
- 37 Arabic
- 500 remaining would be a variety of 6000 other languages (Meadows, 1990)

In a global economy where we are more comfortable communicating with those who are more similar to us than different (Ayoko, 2007), people are often unaware of language misunderstandings that occur when working with people from different cultures. Effective communication across cultural and linguistic boundaries is difficult, but not impossible. Martin & Nakayama (2007) offer some behaviors that can help.

- Don't assume that people speaking a language other than your own are speaking about you.
- Speak simply, but not simple-mindedly.
- Avoid using slang or jargon.
- Try not to crowd too much into one sentence.
- Pause between thoughts.
- Pronounce words clearly and speak slowly.
- Don't be condescending and don't raise your voice.

Communication Styles

Effective communication across cultures is crucial in the global economy. Several fundamental communication styles were introduced in the verbal communication chapter, but one more will be added for the business context.

A common communication style is **direct versus indirect** communication. Cultures with **direct styles** ask for more information whereas cultures with **indirect styles** may not feel comfortable either giving or asking for information. If a manager from a verbally *direct* culture receives a poorly written report, they might say, "you have made many errors in this report. Go back and proof-read this report to check for errors." A verbally *indirect* manager who receives a poorly written report, might say, "readers may have questions about this report. Can you check this over one more time?" Good intercultural business communication involves slowing down. You should listen and observe how others get information from one another. Remember to watch for variations impacted by status and relationship.

Another common communication style is **high versus low context** communication. **High context** communicators place great importance on the context or nonverbal aspects of communication. For them words don't matter nearly as much as the context in which they exist. **Low context** communicators prefer to be very explicit and express everything in words. For them context is ambiguous, so they want to hear verbal thoughts and ideas to be sure of what is being communicated.

The communication style of **honesty versus harmony** is tied to the notion of **facework**, and one that has not been discussed yet. In many cultures **saving face** is a strategy to avoid humiliation or embarrassment and to maintain dignity or reputation. **Face** is a symbolic resource in any social interaction. It can be threatened, honored, or maintained (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002). The concept of **face** is often associated with collectivistic cultures, and is a consequence of people living in close-knit societies where social context is important (Hofstede, 2011). Avoiding conflict is a way to show honor and respect to another person. Giving negative feedback may cause a loss of face.

Harmony includes the notion of preserving or saving one's face. For Asians, the concept of saving face is more about achieving mutual honor and respect for the larger group, the business, or the family. In the US, the concept of saving face is more about maintaining self-pride, reputation, and credibility. In the business context, harmony may mean allowing other people room to maneuver, and the ability to understand when a "yes" really means "no."

Cultures that value **honesty** over **harmony** are often associated with individualistic cultures. They are concerned with the ethics of individual trustworthiness and respect. It's acknowledged that the truth might hurt, but sincerely believed that it will also set you free (John 8:32). US women's rights activist, Gloria Steinem, is famously attributed with saying, "the truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off." Please be aware that there are BIG cultural variations in how honesty and truth are defined, and practiced, within cultural norms.

Business Etiquette

Business etiquette is about building relationships with other people and organizations. Business etiquette is not about rigid rules and regulations but rather creating an environment through communication where others feel comfortable and secure. Basic business etiquette may vary from culture to culture. Juggling business etiquette and business activities can be incredibly complicated, but success can mean the difference between securing the deal and failure.

Many cultures tend to conduct business much more formally than the US therefore it is preferable to avoid excessive informality especially at the beginning. Many cultures also emphasize the importance of relationship building for business success. Nelson (2009) offers some general rules for international business success.

1. Remembering and pronouncing people's names correctly.
2. Using appropriate rank and titles when required.
3. Knowing the local variables of time and punctuality.
4. Creating the right impression with suitable dress.
5. Practicing behavior that demonstrates concern for others, tact and discretion, and knowledge of what constitutes good manners and ethics locally.
6. Communicating with intercultural sensitivity, verbally and nonverbally, whether in person, electronically, or in writing or printing.
7. Giving and receiving gifts and favors appropriate to local traditions.
8. Enjoying social events while conscious of local customs relative to food and drink, such as regarding prohibitions, the use of utensils, dining out and entertaining, and seating arrangements.

Virtual Communication

In today's global economy, it is not unusual to have important meetings of team members in virtual space. If you are working on a team, just setting up a meeting is a major task because of the time zone differences. This often means that someone has to get up really early or work really late into the evening.

In customer interactions, sometimes employees have to make or take calls from home which means taking time away from families. Often small things go a long way towards success. Helpful tips include putting your time zone in the signature of your email or on the biographical section of your social media profile, getting team members to use 24 hour UTC/GMT time, and using time management apps such as Boomerang.

Other issues to consider are language and translation concerns infrastructure access issues, and the unique impact of cultural values on virtual message. In high context cultures when relationships are valued, face-to-face interaction is frequently a must. And sometimes, people are just reluctant to reply to messages from people they don't know.

Negotiation

Negotiation is the face-to-face process of resolving conflict to a mutually satisfying end. Globalization has resulted in increased business travel to many countries in order to buy, sell, form mergers or acquisitions, build relationships and more. Most of these business relationships involve some form of negotiation, but the negotiation process differs from culture to culture because of language, cultural conditioning, negotiation styles, approaches to problem-solving, and building trust. Differences in work-related values, communication styles, and even business etiquette can also have an impact on the negotiation process.

Although much has been written about the intercultural negotiation process, there are four major areas where cultural groups may differ. First, cultural groups may differ in their view of what the negotiation process is. Cultural groups that prefer harmony over honesty might view negotiation as one group gaining power at the expense of another. Second, cultural groups may differ in task or relationship priorities. Task-oriented groups will prefer to come to a quick agreement whereas relationship-oriented groups may not even be able to negotiate until they know who their counterparts are as people. This can lead to our third issue, and that is different ideas in what constitutes trust. Does trust come from a signed agreement or a relationship? And lastly, is the preferred form of agreement a formal written contract approved by the legal department or an informal agreement based on historical and social contexts?

The Dark Side of the Business Contexts of Intercultural Communication

The global economy often leads to mergers and acquisitions that bring international businesses to your hometown. Mergers can make companies more productive, better able to handle competition, and lead to lower prices for consumers, but they can also lead to lost jobs and resentments. When your company has been acquired by a large multi-national corporation, with a CEO that speaks another language, is located in a different time zone, and has "strange" business practices, it's best to accept that you have not control over the situation. Remember that the process isn't personal and certainly isn't an indictment of your work ethic.

The real challenge in workplace communication is knowing how to work with cultural differences in a productive way, but not all differences are seen as equal. Certain communication styles may be viewed as childish, naïve, or less advanced. Often those holding the most power control the desired form of communication leaving little room for other communication traditions.

It's also important to remember that each intercultural encounter occurs in a social and political context that extends well beyond the individuals and businesses involved. Intergroup, or co-cultural, resentments and jealousies exist within nations and dominant cultures. Large political events such as terrorism impact business, but smaller ones such as changes to traffic laws do as well. Worldwide we are struggling to handle health epidemics, immigration, and climate change—each able to disrupt global business agreements in a blink.

Culture matters. We must understand the concept of culture and its characteristics so we can appreciate the impact of our specific cultural background on our own mindset and behavior, as well as those of colleagues and customers. According to Hirsch (1987), business literacy requires more than knowing how to read, it also requires a certain level of comprehension of background information about the culture.

Key Terms

- **Economies of scale** – Cost advantages gained when production or operations increase, lowering the per-unit cost.
- **Market saturation** – A point at which a market can no longer absorb additional products or services due to full demand.
- **Equality-hierarchy dimension** – A cultural value spectrum describing whether a society emphasizes equal status or accepts ranked social order.
- **Power distance** – The degree to which a culture accepts unequal distribution of power.
- **High/low power distance** – High: strong acceptance of hierarchy; Low: preference for equality and shared decision-making.
- **Individualism/collectivism** – Individualism prioritizes personal goals; collectivism emphasizes group harmony and shared responsibility.
- **Value of work vs. material gain** – A cultural distinction between valuing work as meaningful versus valuing work primarily for financial reward.
- **Tasks vs. relationships** – Whether a culture prioritizes completing objectives (task-oriented) or maintaining social harmony (relationship-oriented).
- **Work as a virtue** – The belief that work is inherently good, moral, or character-building.
- **Work as a burden or necessary evil** – The view that work is something to endure for survival or material needs.
- **Task orientation** – A focus on efficiency, productivity, and achieving measurable outcomes.
- **Direct vs. indirect** – Communication styles that express meaning explicitly (direct) or rely on implication and context (indirect).
- **High vs. low context** – High-context cultures rely on shared understanding and nonverbal cues; low-context cultures rely on explicit verbal communication.
- **Honesty vs. harmony** – A cultural tension between speaking truth directly versus preserving relationships and avoiding conflict.
- **Face** – A person's social identity, dignity, or public self-image.
- **Facework** – Strategies used to maintain, protect, or restore one's own or another's face.
- **Saving face** – Actions taken to prevent embarrassment or preserve dignity in social interactions.
- **Negotiation**

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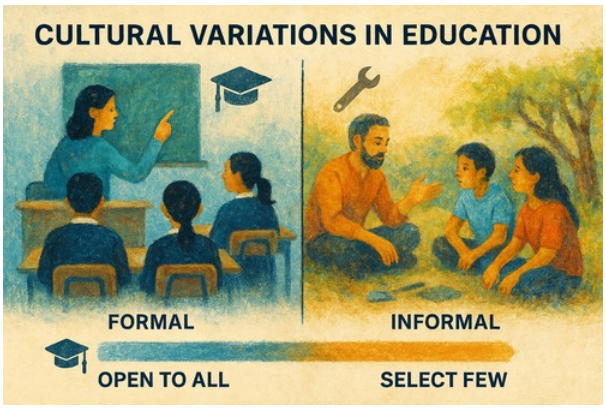
3.11: Education



All cultures have some form of an education system, but it is no means universal. The features of any given system can vary widely from culture-to-culture. Common variations include the formality or informality of the system, the emphasis on memorization or experiential knowledge, general education versus specific occupational education, and whether the educational system is open to all or a select few. How cultures deal with these issues can have a profound effect on how individuals see the world and process information.

What is the purpose of an education?

Educational systems strive to produce effective citizens capable of participating in, and contributing to, their societies. Education is not simply driven by the simple desire to teach and learn. Education is *enculturation*. **Enculturation** is the process by which people acquire the values, norms, and worldviews of their cultural group. An example of *enculturation* could be watching family members go grocery shopping. You learn which stores you typically go to, which foods you usually each, how to pick good products, and what foods are used to make your favorite dishes.

Fun fact - Twenty-five percent of the population in China with the highest IQs and 28 percent in India are greater than the total population of North America. Think about it—China and India have more honor students than most if not all, countries. (Fisch & McLeod, 2010)

Acculturation is the process where people from one culture adopt the process of another culture which is not their own. Acculturation begins when two cultures meet. Acculturation is not necessary for survival, but is basically adopted because the dominant culture has influence over the other. Acculturation is often seen in those far from their home cultures such as refugees and migrants.

There is no universal curriculum that all students in all cultures follow. History plays an important role in student experiences of education as well as the educational systems created within a culture. During the era of great national expansion known as the **colonial period,** the colonizers educational systems were imported into the conquered or assimilated nations. Western-style education systems, originally under the auspices of the **colonial education system**, can be controversial even today. Colonial education systems—rightly or wrongly–have been accused of being tools by capitalists to exploit the underdeveloped world to keep people in subjection (Basu, 1989).

Whether a culture has a colonial educational history or not, currently education is widely perceived to be an important avenue for advancement within a society. In an era when it is estimated that a weeks' worth of the New York Times contains more information than a person was likely to come across in a lifetime in the 18th century, most cultures place high value on their education systems (Scott, ret. 8/4/19).

Challenges in the Intercultural Educational Context

The effects of education reverberate across generations, because once languages, customs, traditions, and religions are lost, it is difficult to recover them. Education, then, is very influential in maintaining or altering cultural communities.

Individualism and Collectivism

Underlying the many differences between cultures, and the educational systems that have emerged from them, is individualism and collectivism. **Collectivism** is marked by structured relationships where individual needs are subservient to the group. Solidarity, harmony, and equal distribution of rewards among students is expected. Modesty is valued, norms are set by the average student, and failure is seen as unfortunate but not dire. Success is seen as something linked to family, classmates, and society as a whole (Rubenstein, 2001; Dimmick & Walker, 2005; Watkins, 2000).

Conversely, **individualism** is marked by loose relationships and ties that are forged according to self-interest. Status and grades are based on individual success. Competition is encouraged, norms are set by the best students, and failure is perceived as fairly

significant (Rubenstein, 2001; Dimmick & Walker, 2005; Watkins, 2000).

These basic values impact everything from the atmosphere in the classroom, teaching styles, and attitudes about dishonesty and plagiarism. In **collectivistic** classrooms, for instance, education is seen as a tool for strengthening the country rather than for the betterment of an individual. This fundamental premise has implications for the teacher-student relationship where working together is not cheating, but rather a happy by-product of good relations. The collectivistic mentality may also account for the absence of sorting students by ability, and the lack of teasing of less gifted students. Fast learners are expected to help slow learners (Rubenstein, 2001).

In **individualistic** classrooms, education is seen as a tool for getting ahead. Students are responsible for their own learning. Academic progress is measured through individual assessment and reported as individual grades. The learning relationship is primarily between the teacher and the student, not the classmate group. If a student needs help, they ask the teacher questions. Students are taught to be more engaged in discussions and arguments. Schools encourage students to become independent thinkers (Faitar, 2006)). An academic task has value in and of itself so getting one's work done is important. Relationships with other students is secondary. In certain situations, helping others could be cheating (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLeskey, 2010).

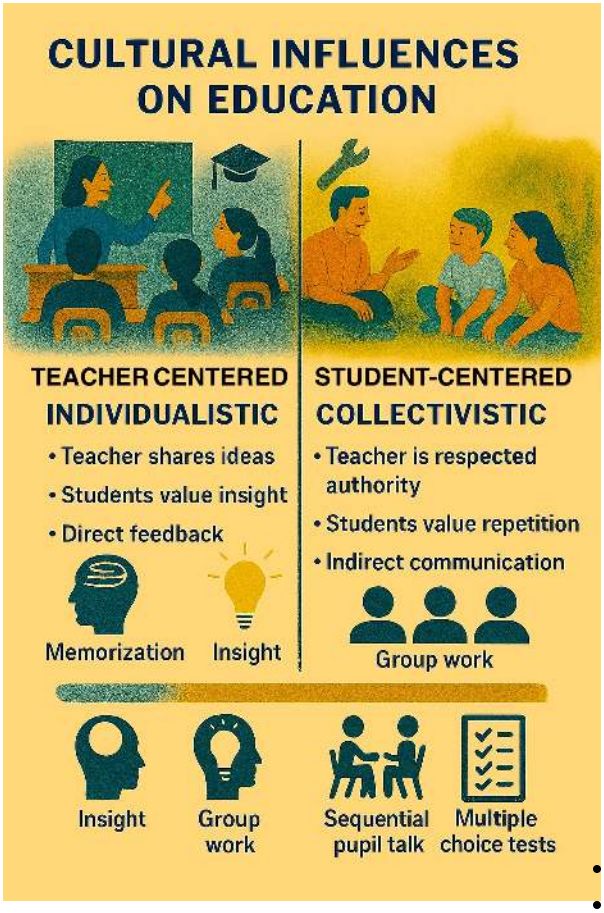
Even concepts of intelligence are culture-based. Individualistic cultures have a tendency to think of intelligence as a "gift" and relatively fixed, although somewhat impacted by environmental influences. Collectivistic cultures view intelligence as something that can be improved by hard work rather than a lack of ability (Henderson, 1990; Watkins, 2000).

Teaching and Learning Styles

Much of our communication behavior and our expectations for the educational process are deeply embedded parts of our culture. What happens in the classroom is primarily reflective of the values of the dominant culture (Evertson & Randolph, 1995; Hofstede, 1980, 2005). For example, "what teachers consider to be 'discipline problems' are determined by their own culture, filtered through personal values and teaching style" (Johns & Espinoza, 1996). For this reason, "teachers from non-dominant cultural groups have often learned to suppress their intuitive cultural knowledge in favor of the 'best practices' that they learned in school" (Hollins, 2008; Lipka, 1998; Trumbull et al., 2001).

Teachers generally use one of the two types of **teaching styles:** *teacher-centered or student-centered* (Prosser & Trigwell, 2010). Encouraging students to become independent thinkers, focusing on individual needs, being assertive and expressing opinions, criticism as a strategy for improvement, and trying to bring about conceptual change in students' understanding of the world are all considered-**student-centered** strategies (Faitar, 2006). Knowledge that is always transferred from an expert to a learner, with conformity and group needs as a focus, are considered more **teacher-centered** strategies (Staub & Stern, 2002). Students used to *teacher-centered* instruction may be puzzled, or even offended, by the more informal *student-centered* approach. They may perceive the teacher as being poorly prepared or lazy (McGroaty & Scott, 1993).

In individualistic settings, the **teacher's role** in the classroom is to share ideas, and provide practice time to develop further knowledge and/or skills. In collectivistic settings, the teacher is viewed as a moral guide, and friend or parent figure with valuable knowledge that it is a student's duty to learn (Husen & Postlethwaite, 1991). Researchers Cortazzi & Jinn (1998) compared British and Chinese student/teacher relationships and noted that in Britain *good* students obeyed and paid attention to the teacher, but in China, students and teachers assumed that *all* students would behave in this way. Consequently, Chinese teachers spend little time and effort on discipline. In Norway and Russia, students often spend their first 5 or 6 years of school with the same teacher (Cogan et al., 2001).



The ways that student learn in different cultures is called **learning styles.** For many individualistic students, the use of repetition in the classroom is a test of memory. Understanding results from sudden insight, but for many collectivistic students, repetition helps to deepen or develop an understanding. Memorizing and understanding are interlocking processes, not separate activities.

How students communicate is also part of the *learning style***.** In the US, direct eye contact is interpreted as a sign of interest and honesty. The lack of eye contact is a sign of dishonesty or lack of interest so teachers adjust their styles accordingly. Looking a teacher in the eye in many Asian countries would the height of disrespect.

Group work is also approached differently in different places. In the US, the class is often split into pairs, or small groups to work on a task or to discuss a topic. Watkins calls this “simultaneous pupil talk. In a Chinese classroom, you would more likely view “sequential pupil talk” where two students at a time stand and engage in dialogue while the others listen and think.

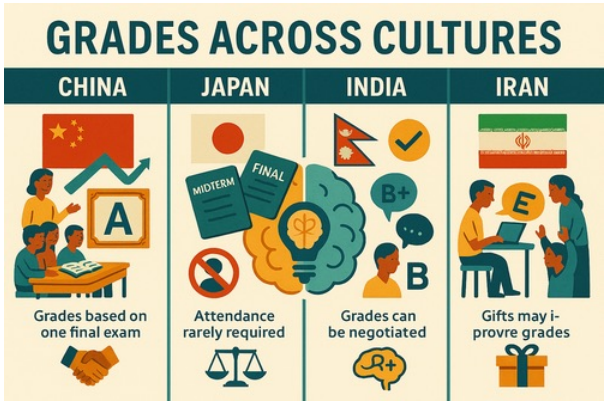
The ideas of testing and evaluation also vary widely from culture to culture. Students in many countries are accustomed to very rigorous high stakes testing. Multiple choice tests, common in the US, are rare outside of the US.

What are your assumptions?

- Instructors should set time aside for lecture?
- Instructors should let students discuss the material?
- Students should be allowed to say what they want about the material?
- Students should be allowed to ask questions?
- Students should be assigned readings at the beginning of the term, and only take one exam at the end of the term?
- Students are assigned a structured list of readings and assignments are created along the way?
- Grading should be done “on a curve?”
- Everyone should be allowed to flunk the class?

Grading and Power

Cultures can have very different expectations about grades and the grading process. There may always be power distance issues in the communication between instructors and students, but these differences will be greater or lesser depending on the culture. Notions of what constitutes being “fair” or “unfair” are cultural embedded as well.



Grading systems are far from universal, making the understanding of what a grade means opaque at best. In the Chinese University system, grades are often based on one final examination. There are no other grades so plagiarism is rarely considered a problem. In the Japanese University system, final grades are based on the mid-term and final. There are no regulations about plagiarism in Japan or Nepal. Students do not need to attend classes in the Nepal University system; they can choose to directly sit for the national exam. Attendance and plagiarism are very important in the university system in India, but students can negotiate with their professors for grades. The Iranian university system also enforces consequences for plagiarism, but considers gift giving an opportunity for extra credit (Smith et al., 2013).

How do you feel about grades?

- What are your assumptions?
- How important are grades?
- Should grades be public or private information?
- What do grades communicate to others?

Communication, Education, and Cultural Identity

We would prefer to think that education provides equal opportunities for all students, but that simply is not true. Many teachers may not have received the kind of training necessary to incorporate materials into the curriculum that reflect the diversity of students in their classrooms nor their learning preferences. While educational institutions can be places of international, interracial, and intercultural contact, these contacts do not necessarily lead to increased intercultural competence. Students "who see culture as a barrier tend to deny, resist, or minimize differences" while "those who see culture as a resource tend to accept and appreciate difference" (Martin & Nakayama, 2011).

Key Terms

- **Enculturation** – The lifelong process of learning one's own culture through family, community, and social norms.
- **Acculturation** – The process of adapting to a new culture while retaining aspects of one's original culture.
- **Colonial period** – A historical era when foreign powers controlled territories, often reshaping local cultures and institutions.
- **Colonial education system** – Schooling imposed by colonial powers that reflected their values, language, and social hierarchies.
- **Teaching styles** – Approaches educators use to deliver instruction, shaped by cultural expectations and educational philosophies.
- **Student-centered** – A teaching style that emphasizes student participation, inquiry, and independent thinking.
- **Teacher-centered** – A teaching style where the teacher directs learning through lecture, authority, and structured guidance.
- **Teacher's role** – The culturally defined expectations for how teachers should lead, guide, or control the classroom.
- **Learning style** – The culturally influenced ways students prefer to process information, participate, and demonstrate understanding.

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3.12: Health Care

In today's culturally diverse world, intercultural communication is becoming increasingly important. For many businesses, effective intercultural communication can mean increased profits and business opportunities, but in the healthcare industry, effective intercultural communication can impact a patients' physical or mental well-being (Voelker, 1995), as well as their quality of life.

Barriers to Effective Intercultural Healthcare

The complex issue of cultural impact on healthcare has multiple facets. Both verbal and nonverbal communication can create barriers to healthcare. Lack of interpreters who are familiar with important cultural nuances, as opposed to translators who just substitute an indistinguishable word for a distinguishable one, can lead to the misunderstanding of cultural issues that may also hinder care. Healthcare professionals often use *medical terminology* or *jargon*. **Medical terminology** is the scientific language used by doctors to describe specific medical conditions. **Jargon** or **lingo** is often the shorthand used between people practicing the same profession and it might have no meaning outside the profession. Examples of jargon in the healthcare world would be BP for blood pressure, NPO (*nil pers os*) or nothing by mouth, and c-section for birth by caesarian section.

Another issue is that healthcare providers and patients may both operate out of an ethnocentric framework without realizing it. Cultural beliefs and the ensuing approaches to healthcare are so fundamental to a human being that they are not often overtly communicated, but rather just assumed. Questions such as '*what does a good patient do?*' or '*how does a good healthcare provider act?*' are encoded and decoded throughout a lifetime. For instance, people from different cultures do not always report pain in the same ways, which easily leads to miscommunication in cross-cultural encounters (Lee et al., 1992). In working with patients from other cultures, healthcare providers can learn as they go, but this can be dangerous when dealing with diagnosis and treatment of issues.

And lastly, treating patients is not always a matter of communication just between doctors and patients. Most cultures have laws regarding healthcare issues and practices. In the United States the judicial issue of informed consent requires that all patients receive full information enabling them to freely make decision about their own health care (Gostin, 1995). This might make sense to you, but in some family-centered cultures, this might be a problem. In this case, families and extended families may expect to be actively involved by providing input and support on treatment decisions.

Historical Treatment of Cultural Groups

Widespread stereotypes and prejudice directed toward different cultural groups have fostered differential treatment for some groups —especially racial and ethnic minorities. Some historical examples that you might be familiar with are Josef Mengele, the SS physician at Auschwitz, Germany who conducted experiments on Holocaust prisoners that included giving prisoners infections to watch the progression of the disease and spraying them with chemicals to test possible chemical warfare solutions. In the 1930s and 1940s, Japan's Imperial Army Unit 731 conducted biological warfare and medical testing on Chinese civilians.

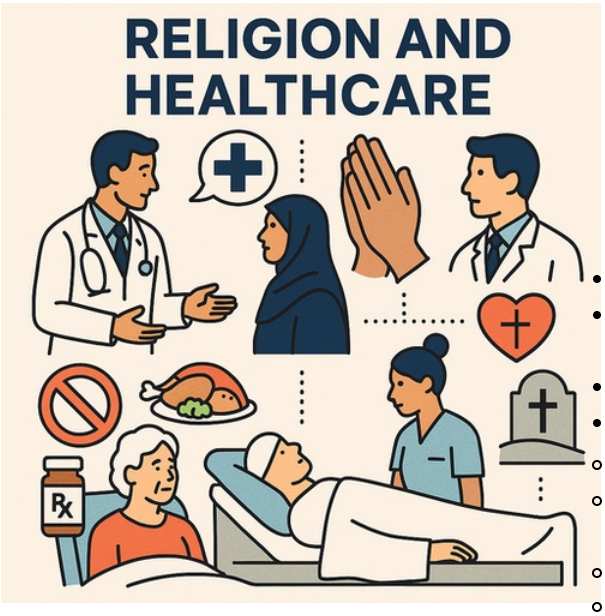
As many as 200,000 people were impacted. Of course, in the United States, there was the Tuskegee Syphilis Project that lasted for 40 (1932-1972) years where researchers launched a study on the health effects of untreated syphilis telling those enrolled in the "project" that they were being treated for "bad blood." During the same time period, the US was also doing experiments with syphilis in Guatemala on prisoners and individuals with mental illness. Based on both recent and historical atrocities, it is not surprising that some cultural groups are suspicious of healthcare.

Prejudicial ideologies or sets of ideas based on stereotypes, can cause significant barriers to intercultural communication, and may influence the quality of care that patients receive. Patients may enter the healthcare system with their own prejudices based on historical events, distrust of doctors, distrust of certain treatments, and more. Professional healthcare workers may lack an understanding of healthcare provided outside of the traditional western system and that are a part of cultural traditions other than their own.

Religion and Healthcare

When people become ill, and the treatment isn't effective, some people are driven to seek answers to questions from sources outside of the science-based medicine process. The role of religion and spirituality in healthcare raises a number of issues about ethical ways to incorporate healthcare practices into existing beliefs. Some providers worry about religious freedom issues, while others may not be aware of the diversity of religious beliefs surrounding health care.

Religious beliefs can impact concerns about modesty and being treated by someone of the opposite sex. Some patients will refuse to consume certain foods or eat at certain times or even take medications that are produced using problematic processes. Pain medications may be welcomed or shunned because of beliefs. Healthcare providers may also be asked to minimize actions that might disturb the sick person. Washing, fasting, jewelry might have to be negotiated with providers. Other points of negotiation might be blood and organ donations, transplants, withholding or providing life-sustaining therapy, and the burial of amputated limbs. Family and faith community members might expect to keep company with a dying patient, and for some the bodies of the dead may have to be buried or cremated as soon as possible. And it cannot be stressed enough that rituals and prayers occur in a variety of different ways, but they are all viewed as a necessary part of the healthcare process.



While religious and spiritual beliefs may vary, there are strategies for helping healthcare professionals serve religious patients. The following is a compilation put together from lists provided by the Agency for Healthcare Research (2015), the US Health Resources & Services Administration (ret. 8/10/19), the University of Pennsylvania Medical System (2008), the University of Washington Medical Center (1997), and the Canadian Paediatric Society (2019).

- Help patients feel comfortable at the facility.
- Establish a relationship with patients by supporting or encouraging religious beliefs.
- Provide health information in ways the patient accepts.
- Maintain good communication with patients
  - What do you call your illness and what do you think caused it?
  - Is there anything I should know about your culture, beliefs, or religious practices that would help me take better care of you?
  - Do any traditional healers advise you about your health?
  - Do you have any dietary restrictions that we should consider as we develop a food plan?
  - Your condition is very serious. Some people like to know everything that is going on with their illness, whereas others may want to know what is most important but not necessarily all the details. How much do you want to know? Is there anyone else you would like me to talk to about your condition?
- Show patients respect by viewing religious and spiritual support as part of the healthcare plan.
- Be ready for when religious and spiritual support are not available.

Cultural Influences on Approaches to Medicine

Health is a cultural concept because culture frames and shapes how we perceive the world and our experiences therefore different cultures bring different perspectives on health. Most cultures fall somewhere within the **individualism** and **collectivism** continuum. Verbal communication styles that directly affect health care are traits like **direct/indirect** communication, **high/low**

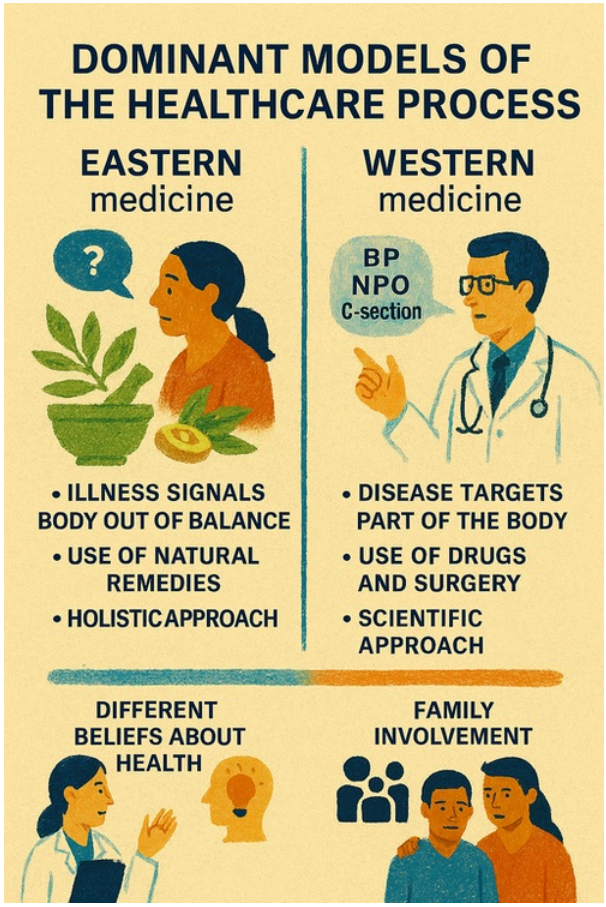
context, and **honesty versus harmony**. Nonverbal communication styles would include **high and low contact**. Healthcare is also heavily impacted by the cultural view of **power relationships**.

Being familiar with the characteristics of individualistic and collectivistic cultures is useful because it helps to 'locate' where someone might fall within the healthcare spectrum. Culture helps to define what patients and healthcare providers believe about the causes of illness, which diseases are stigmatized and why, how illness and pain are experienced and expressed, where patients seek help and ask for help, and the acceptance of a diagnosis (Mayhew, 2018). As significant as culture can be, it is important to remember that within any given culture, there will be variations among individual members.

Dominant Models of the Healthcare Process

The healthcare process is often represented through different worldviews that we commonly call Eastern and Western medicine. **Eastern medicine** describes a disease as a signal that the body is out of balance. Instead of viewing illness as something to cure, Eastern medicine uses natural plants to work with the natural process of the body. **Western medicine** relies on the scientific method to understand what causes illness. For many, human beings are just like "machines" that need fixing or tuning to "eradicate the enemy" (Todd, 1999).

In the US, and other nations that practice *Western medicine*, the dominant healthcare model is based on **biomedical science.** According to the *biomedical model*, doctors look for physical signs of what is wrong. Once the symptom is identified, things like drugs and procedures are used to get rid of the problem. Providers who operate from a *biomedical model*, might communicate in ways that are efficient and logical. This approach uses relatively little time, and providers might see many patients in a day.



In nations that practice *Eastern medicine*, the dominant healthcare model is *biopsychosocial***.** The **biopsychosocial model** acknowledges that illness is not always just a physical thing. Disease and illness are often influenced by environment and social factors as well as emotions, stress, and lived experiences. Patients and providers may care deeply about communication and the "bigger picture" which often means spending significant amounts of time working through the illness together.

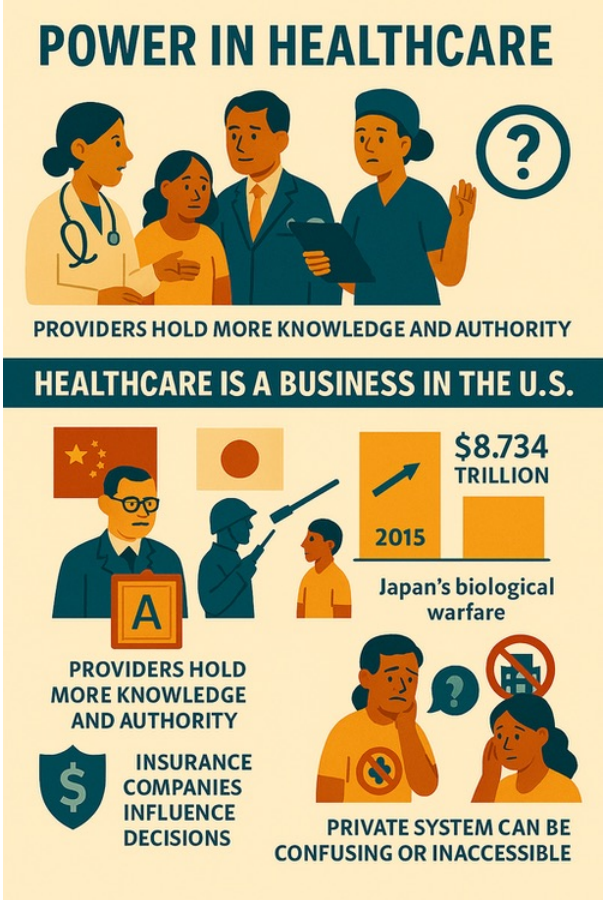
Healthcare provided outside the traditional *Western medical* system is often referred to as **alternative medicine** whether they fall within the *Eastern medical* system or not. *Alternative medicine* could mean returning to traditional cultural medicinal practices such as herbal remedies and sweat lodges, or it could also mean seeking out medical practices that are part of other cultural traditions rather than your own such as acupuncture and cupping.

Alternative medicine generally falls into four broad categories. The first is referred to as **mind-body medicine** which focuses on using the mind to influence the body. These types of approaches might include patient support-group therapy, meditation, and prayer. The second is **biologically-based practices** which refers to the use of products found in nature. These types of approaches include the use of herbal therapies, dietary supplements, and other natural products. The third category would be **manipulative** and **body-based practices.** This approach refers to the use of massage or chiropractic manipulation to promote health. And the last type is referred to as **energy medicine** which could include acupuncture, Reiki, and also certain types of massage.

Power in Healthcare

Healthcare is ripe with imbalances in power. Providers and patients are not equal in medical knowledge, nor can patients access treatment procedures without referral from a provider. Patients may encounter many healthcare workers within a short amount of

time without knowing why or how they are related to treatment. Questions may be seen as a challenge to authority.



In the United States, healthcare is a business. It's a HUGE business. Deloitt.com (ret. 8/11/19) estimates an annual growth rate of 5.4% between 2017 and 2022. In dollars this is 7.077 trillion in 2015 to 8.734 trillion in 2022. The insurance industry drives MOST healthcare decisions in the US. Costs impact how the US thinks about medical resources and their distribution. For people who come from other healthcare systems, the private healthcare system as practiced in the United States can be confusing or downright inaccessible.

Ethics and Health Issues

The insurance industry and the fear of malpractice suits guides many decisions regarding medical ethics in the United States. Some healthcare organizations use **ethics committees** staffed by healthcare professionals, religious leaders, social workers, and governmental agencies to help make decisions about medical ethics. Such committees could debate about providing or discontinuing care for terminally ill patients and the possible funding of drug rehabilitation programs for a long-term drug addict. If there are value-laden or value-dependent questions that go beyond what medical science can address, but there is a need for a decision to be made, the issue is most often referred to an *ethics committee* (Aulisio, 2016).

In the US, the **ethic committee** rose into prominence during the 1962 through 1990 time period (Aulisio, 2016). In Eastern and Central Europe, *ethics committees* were the result of fundamental political and societal change during 1989-1990. Whereas in Western Europe, *ethics committees* were common at the local level, but didn't become nationalized until the early 2000s (Steinkamp et. al, 2007).

Some medical procedures are very controversial, even among members of the same culture. In the United States, abortion and **euthanasia,** or assisting terminally ill people in committing suicide, are two prime examples. As a state, Oregon is often required to defend its 'Death With Dignity Law' from interest group law suits.

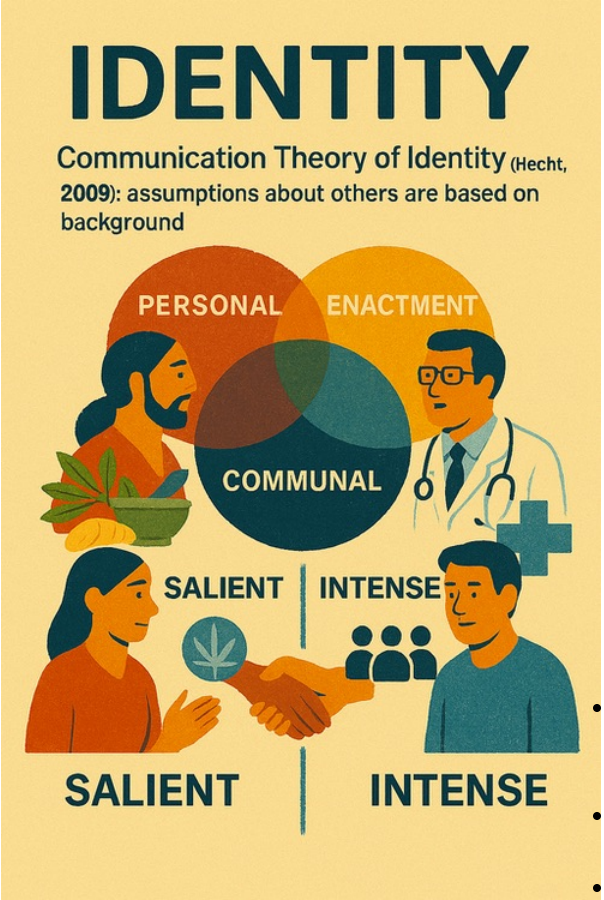
Communication and Healthcare

Knowing the appropriate way to communicate with families and patients in an intercultural context can be incredibly complex. In some cultures, the family is involved in the healthcare and medical treatment of its members. In other cultures, medical information is confidential and only given to the patient. Some patients may not want their families involved in their care if they have had a miscarriage, are suffering from certain types of cancer, or are depressed. All patients will act within a framework of cultural values.

Identity

Both patients and providers are concerned about their cultural identities. **Communication Theory of Identity** (Hecht, 2009) explains that people make assumptions about each other based on their backgrounds. The premise behind this theory can help to explain how misunderstandings occur in the intercultural healthcare setting (School, Wilson, & Hughes, 2011). Individuals use

their identities to affiliate themselves with groups and cultures. The extent to which people identify with specific groups and cultures varies based on the dimensions of salience and intensity (Hecht et al., 1993). **Identity salience** refers to the fact that people view their cultural identity as an important part of who they are, while **identity intensity** refers to the level of importance that people place on their cultural identity (Brown, 2006). When people from different cultures interact, they communicate according to the ways that people from their culture communicate, and by doing so, enact their identity with particular groups.



Hecht (1993) asserted that there are four frames that may overlap and occur in the same communicative interaction: personal, enactment, relational, and communal. Each identity frame has its own set of assumptions concerning how the intercultural provider-patient interaction negotiates identity (Brown, 2006). In a 2017 study on intercultural healthcare communication through the eyes of patients in the Netherlands, Patternotte et. al, found that a doctor's cultural background was not important as long as the doctor was a professional, but noted that all of the patients had already lived in the Netherlands for a significant amount of time. Some patients did have a clear preference for a doctor of a particular gender. Many patients felt that a competent doctor needed to be accessible, have enough time, treat them as unique people, and ask about cultural habits. Respect for cultural identity was an integral part of communication skills in a healthcare setting.

Information Sharing

In general, healthcare providers will give information regarding patient health in four general frameworks.

- **Strict Paternalism** – reflects a physician's decision to provide misinformation to the patient when he or she believes it is in the best interests of the patient.
- **Benevolent Deception** – occurs when the physician chooses to communicate only part of a patient's diagnosis.
- **Contractual Honesty** – refers to the practice of telling the patient only what he or she wants to hear or to know.
- **Unmitigated Honesty** – refers to when a physician chooses to communicate the entire diagnosis to a patient. (Martin & Nakayama, 2007)

In the United States, unmitigated honesty is the only one of these options that is legal for adults. When seen as too difficult or frustrating, cultural and legal differences between provider and patient can contribute to a patient's inability to understand the provider's directions. Communication problems resulting from conflicting identities and perceptions can be overcome with sensitivity and adaptation (Brown & School, 2006).

To Wrap It Up…

Communication is vitally important to the competent functioning of healthcare services. Patients and providers may not be satisfied with their healthcare interactions when they do not communicate effectively with one another. Although this chapter has just skimmed the surface of a vast and complicated topic, a knowledge of intercultural communication theories and skills can be the beginning of competence and success in the healthcare arena.

Key Terms

- **Medical terminology** – Specialized vocabulary used in healthcare to describe conditions, procedures, and anatomy.
- **Jargon** – Technical or specialized language understood primarily by members of a specific profession or group.
- **Lingo** – Informal or specialized language used within a particular community or field.
- **Prejudicial ideologies** – Biased belief systems that influence attitudes and behaviors toward certain groups.

- **Eastern medicine** – Holistic health practices that emphasize balance, energy flow, and natural remedies.
- **Western medicine** – A scientific, biomedical approach focused on diagnosing and treating physical symptoms.
- **Biomedical science** – A model of healthcare that explains illness through biological and physiological processes.
- **Biopsychosocial model** – A healthcare approach that considers biological, psychological, and social factors in illness.
- **Alternative medicine** – Health practices outside mainstream Western medicine, often rooted in cultural traditions.
- **Mind-body medicine** – Approaches that use mental or emotional techniques to influence physical health.
- **Biologically-based practices** – Treatments using natural substances such as herbs, supplements, or plant products.
- **Manipulative & body-based practices** – Therapies involving physical movement or touch, such as massage or chiropractic care.
- **Energy medicine** – Practices that aim to influence the body's energy fields, such as Reiki or acupuncture.
- **Ethics committees** – Groups that review complex medical decisions to ensure they align with ethical standards.
- **Euthanasia** – The act of intentionally ending a life to relieve suffering, raising significant ethical debate.
- **Communication Theory of Identity** – A framework explaining how identity is expressed through personal, relational, enacted, and communal layers.
- **Identity salience** – The importance a person places on a particular aspect of their identity in a given context.
- **Identity intensity** – The strength or depth of commitment a person feels toward a particular identity.
- **Strict paternalism** – A healthcare approach where providers make decisions for patients without their input.
- **Benevolent deception** – Withholding or altering information to protect a patient from distress.
- **Contractual honesty** – Sharing information based on an agreed-upon level of disclosure between provider and patient.
- **Unmitigated honesty** – Providing full, direct information to patients regardless of emotional impact.

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