Chapter Outline

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To begin our exploration of culture, we want to address four issues. First, when most people think of culture, they tend to think of it as something involving other people—wearing unusual clothes, eating strange foods, participating in odd customs, living in unique structures (bamboo huts, Roman temples, Chinese pagodas), and doing strange things with coconuts and tulips.

However, what is considered abnormal by one culture is normal to another. Actually, you perform cultural practices and communicate in ways that those from another culture might regard as odd, even though these practices and ways of communicating may seem to you to be natural and right. For instance, if you follow a traditional U.S. approach to time, what do you make of the fact that many cultures would view arriving at a very specific time quite strange, utterly obsessive, absurd, and valueless? After all, you should stop to smell the roses—or the tulips. In short, it seems just as normal and natural and right to the Japanese, the Italians, the Serbo Croatians, and the Tutsi to act the way they do as it does to you to do what you do.

Believing that your culture is the benchmark for all others is called ethnocentric bias: Your own cultural way of acting is right and normal, and all other ways of acting are variations of the only really good way to act (yours!). If this manner of thinking seems familiar, you are not alone, and it does not necessarily make you a bad person. However, appreciating and recognizing the value of other cultures will assist you personally and professionally, especially given an ever-expanding multicultural world. Doing so will also increase your appreciation for and understanding of your own culturally limited behaviors. Adolf Hitler, the Ku Klux Klan, the New Black Panthers, and the Muslim Brotherhood are obvious examples of ethnocentric bias but are so extreme that they might close your mind to the possibility that ethnocentric bias is less obvious in many cases and simply closes one’s mind to reception of other views from different cultures.

Now we are not saying that if you have ethnocentric bias you are a new Hitler or Eva Braun, but we are pointing out the danger of taking ethnocentric bias to an extreme. We all have some degree of such bias in our worlds of meaning. If we are able to recognize it, then we can perhaps cut it away and become more open-minded. Few Americans question politicians who claim that the United States is “the best country in the world” or that “the U.S. education system is the best in the world,” but they could not—and neither

### FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to view culture as structured?
2. What does it mean to view culture as transacted?
3. How is communication organized to reflect cultural beliefs about context, collectivism/individualism, time, and conflict?
4. What does it mean to say that cultural groups are created through communication?
5. How do people enact cultural membership through communication?

ethnocentric bias: believing that the way one’s own culture does things is the right and normal way to do them
The view that one’s own cultural styles of communication are the normal ways of communicating and that other ways of communicating are variations of normal communication is known as what type of bias?

The view that one’s own cultural styles of communication are the normal ways of communicating and that other ways of communicating are variations of normal communication is known as ethnocentric bias.

could the politicians—tell you how the education system works in Denmark or Mongolia, so the comparison claim is misleading without specific evidence.

Second, many people think of culture as something that is possessed or something to which a person belongs. Actually, you do not just have or belong to a culture; you transact and perform culture. This notion is similar to that discussed when examining identities. Identities and cultures are transacted (or constructed) symbolically and performed when interacting (or relating) with other people. Culture is created symbolically, not through positioning in a physical location.

Third, and accordingly, culture is not necessarily geographical, although that is the way we most often think of it. Within the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, or even the Seven Kingdoms, there are many different styles and cultures. As the chapter proceeds, we indicate that such classifications as “gender” can be cultures, and so can “bikers”; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities; “Beliebers”; political groups; and religious congregations. Each of these sets has a code of meaning, a bank of key terms, rituals, beliefs, and practices or styles that constitute a “culture” that is not bound by nationality alone. We discuss later that even working class is a label referencing culture embodied in styles of speech and codes of practice. So your passport does not define your cultural identity—your communication does.

Fourth, relationships remain fundamental to the actual creation and maintenance of culture. Using the relational perspective to examine identities, we noted that the only way you ever meet society is through other people. Similarly, your exposure to culture, whether your own or another, is not exposure to an abstraction. You meet culture when you encounter people performing that culture; you perform your own culture when you communicate with other people. Society’s (and Culture’s) Secret Agents are the very friends you meet; other people on the streets; human beings you observe, read about, or see online or on television; and everyone who communicates with you.

In what follows, therefore, we examine the two primary approaches to identifying and studying culture: structured and transacted. From a structural approach, we discuss cultural differences concerning context, individualism/collectivism, time, and conflict. Examining culture as a transaction, we further explore the connection between culture and communication using a relational perspective. Specifically, we examine how culture is embedded in communication and how cultural membership is enacted or denied through communication.

As you study the material in this chapter, it is important to be as detached as possible and to treat your own culture as objectively as you treat others—as far as that can be achieved. Cultural influences run so deep within your routine talk and relational performance that you do not recognize them at first, but this chapter shows you how. Also note the importance these days that is placed on diversity. It is not just other people who benefit from diversity—we all have our minds opened by exposure to other cultures.
How Can Culture Be Identified and Studied?

We begin our exploration by examining how culture has been identified and studied. As mentioned, the two primary ways in which culture has been examined are as a structure and as a transaction. The most common approach to studying culture has been to view it as a “national” structure. Increasingly, however, the limitations of this perspective have become more obvious. Nevertheless, this approach has provided a wealth of information about culture and should not be shoved aside without full consideration.

Culture as Structure

Viewing culture from a structural standpoint has a long history in the communication discipline. This way of seeing culture focuses on large-scale differences in values, beliefs, goals, and preferred ways of acting among nations, regions, ethnicities, and religions. We could therefore differentiate Australian, Indian, Japanese, Dutch, and Canadian cultures. Clear and simple distinctions could be made between Eastern and Western cultures and the communication styles displayed among people of these areas.

Cross-Cultural Communication and Intercultural Communication

A great deal of valuable research has been conducted from a structural standpoint, examining communication within and among nations or physical regions. This research is usually referred to as cross-cultural communication or intercultural communication.

Cross-cultural communication compares the communication styles and patterns of people from very different cultural/social structures, such as nation-states. For example, Tianyuan Li and Sheung-Tak Cheng (2015) examined differences in the influence of friends and family on personal well-being among Eastern and Western cultural groups. Exploring the influence of social networks on romantic relationships, Borae Jin and Sohyun Oh (2010) discovered that Americans tend to involve their friends and family in romantic relationships more often than Koreans do. Social networks among Americans also provide more support for romantic relationships.

Intercultural communication deals with how people from these cultural/social structures speak to one another and what difficulties or differences they encounter, over and above the different languages they speak.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do you agree with what is stated in this box?
2. If you identify as a member of a minority group, did you compare yourself with White cultural norms when you were growing up? If you are White, were you aware of cultural norms of minority groups?
encounter, over and above the different languages they speak. Shiao-Yun Chiang (2009), for instance, examined office-hour linguistic and cultural issues evident during interactions involving international teaching assistants and American college students and offered strategies for improving communication among these groups. Saras Henderson, Michelle Barker, and Anita Mak (2015) examined strategies used by health care practitioners and educators to overcome intercultural communication challenges.

**Limitations and Benefits**

This view of culture has provided a better understanding of different groups and has improved interactions among people, but it is not without its limitations. For example, when you start looking at cultures as identifiable national or regional groups, you rapidly notice some important points: First, multiple “cultures” exist in one national or regional group. The United States contains old and young cultures, rural and urban cultures, and Republican and Democrat cultures, among many others. Second, multiple social communities coexist in a single culture and talk among themselves as part of their conduct of membership (for example, bikers, car mechanics, vegetarians, and ballet dancers all exist within “American culture”). Nevertheless, there is a certain benefit from such a broad perspective. From a communication point of view, we can study how all members of a nation partake of the customs or beliefs of the nation and its communication patterns and styles. Although broad, such distinctions seep down to the individual way of thinking and are built into meaning systems used in everyday communication. Accordingly, even though a social community of construction workers (or any other group) may communicate in unique ways, members’ styles of communication are still affected by the larger social structure in which they are embedded (for example U.S. construction workers communicate in ways different from how U.K. construction workers communicate and expect cups of tea—“tea breaks”—much less often).

**Culture as Transacted**

As we have maintained throughout this book, most of social life is transacted through communication (or symbolically). Culture is no exception. You belong to sets of people who share meanings and styles of speaking, systems of beliefs, and customs. In other words, you live your life in the context of communicating sets of individuals who transact universes of thought and behavior, which are supported through unique cultural styles of communication.

Cultural beliefs and values are established and reinforced through everyday communication. You are constantly reminded of them by your contacts with other people (Society’s/Culture’s Secret Agents). Your conformity to culture is constantly reinforced by the way...
and invisibly reinforced in the daily talk that happens informally in the interactions with such agents and even strangers. The nature of culture and your connection to society takes place through the specific relationships you have with others whom you meet frequently or with whom you interact daily.

Cultural groups are recognized as such when some consistency and distinctiveness are observed in their behavior or communication. For example, the shared relational use by Goths, punks, and emos of symbols such as hairstyles, body piercing, cutting, and self-harm along with a relevant music genre and vocabulary transacts their identity and collectively forms the Goth, punk, or emo culture. Similarly, rednecks and redneck culture have been identified and caricatured through particular stories and jokes (for example, by Jeff Foxworthy, Larry the Cable Guy, and David T. McMahan).

**Coded Systems of Meaning**

What makes this approach to studying culture different from a structural approach is that culture is seen as a **coded system of meaning**. Culture is not just a structured bureaucratic machine but a set of beliefs, a heritage, and a way of being that is transacted in communication. From this point of view, then, you can think of culture as a meaning system, and any group with a system of shared meaning is a culture. Farmers, athletes, gamers, members of business organizations, comic book fans, health professionals, truckers, fast-food employees, and musicians could all be considered members of a unique culture. The list of unique cultural groups is virtually unending.

Although conventional “structural” views of culture can still provide a great deal of valuable information, they tend to overlook numerous, distinct meaning systems within larger structure-based labels such as *nation-state*. You cannot legitimately maintain that everyone in the United States communicates the same way, that everyone in Lithuania communicates the same way, that everyone in India communicates the same way, or that everyone in any other nation-state or region communicates the same way. There are many different cultures within the United States (and other nation-states) communicating in unique ways.

If we examine how culture is symbolically transacted, then we can explore how styles of communication include people in or exclude people from cultural communities and groups. We can focus on how people “speak themselves into culture” and how membership in a particular culture is done through communication.

**Structure-Based Cultural Characteristics**

Although we have indicated that it is far too simplistic to equate culture *exclusively* with nation-states or regions, some very broad differences between such groups...
have been observed and should be considered. All members of a nation or citizens of a country are affected in some way by the most general communication styles. Children learn to view the world in culturally appropriate ways as they learn to communicate and interact with others. For example, small children may be rushed from the store by embarrassed parents who have just been asked loudly, “Why is that man so ugly?,” and they will certainly be taught a culture’s nonverbal rules: “Look at me when I’m talking to you” and “Don’t interrupt when someone is talking.” “Remember to say thank you” is another way children are taught culture’s rules about respect and politeness. During your childhood and introduction to culture (socialization), you learned how to behave, interact, and live with other people at the same time as you learned to communicate because culture is wrapped up in language. These styles of behavior readily became more and more automatic—and hence were automatically included in your later communication—as you grew up. If this did not happen, you could not communicate with other people in your society. Thus, learning to communicate includes learning the habits of your particular culture or society.

It makes sense to look at the rich list of differences uncovered among cultures—even if these sometimes amount to stereotypes that you hold about other nations when representing how people there typically act. In what follows, we examine the following cross-cultural characteristics: (a) context, (b) collectivism/individualism, (c) time, and (d) conflict. As these communication styles and meanings are discussed, keep in mind how they are learned and reinforced through interactions with friends, families, and others with whom relationships are shared.

**Context**
Context involves the emphasis placed on the environment, the situation, or relationships when people communicate. Some cultures tend to leave much unsaid, with the assumption that others will understand what is meant based on such influences as circumstances and the relationships among those communicating. Other cultures tend to be more explicit and straightforward when communicating, rather than relying on contextual factors. Cultures are accordingly categorized as being either high-context or low-context (Hall, 1976).

**High-Context Cultures**
Some societies, known as high-context cultures (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2013), place a great deal of emphasis on the total environment or context where speech and interaction take place. In a high-context society, spoken words are much less important than the rest of the context—for example, the relationships between the people communicating. It is much more important for people to indicate respect for one another in various verbal and nonverbal ways than it is for them to pay close attention to the exact words spoken.

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**ANALYZING EVERYDAY COMMUNICATION**

**Watch a Culture in Action**
Go to a public space where members of a unique cultural group are gathered and observe the ways they communicate. (Naturally, avoid dangerous places and situations. We do not want you injured and cannot send the Unsullied to rescue you.) There are many groups from which you may choose, but based on some of those mentioned here, you might observe farmers at a cattle auction barn, comic book fans at a comic book store, or truckers at a truck stop. (If you do not want to leave your comfortable couch, then write notes about the differences between Dothraki culture and the Qarth culture.)

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**
1. What is unique about their communication?
2. What does their communication tell you about their cultural beliefs and values?
In such countries as China and Iraq, for example, a person’s status in society is extremely important, and people tend to rely on shared history and their relationship to the speaker/audience. In Iraq and some African countries, additional importance may be attached to a person’s religious or tribal group to assign meanings to conversation. Such cultures greatly emphasize relationships among family members, friends, and associates. Therefore, it is regarded as ethical to favor one’s relatives or as fair to give contracts to friends rather than to the highest bidder. Everything is connected to this background context of relationships and other personal contexts of status, influence, and personal knowledge.

**Low-Context Cultures**

By contrast, when communicating in a low-context culture, the message itself is everything. It is much more important to have a well-structured argument or a well-delivered presentation than it is to be a member of the royal family or a cousin of the person listening (Samovar et al., 2013).

In a low-context society, therefore, people try to separate their relationships from the messages and to focus on the details and the logic. Detailed information must be given to provide the relevant context, and only the information presented that way counts as relevant to the message. In low-context societies, people usually recuse (remove) themselves from decision-making roles if a friend or family member is involved. Nepotism, or favoritism shown to a family member or friend, is evaluated negatively in low-context cultures.

**Collectivism/Individualism**

An entire chapter of this book (Chapter 3) is dedicated to identity, but the very notion of a personal identity is more of a Western than an Eastern idea. Some cultures stress collectivism/togetherness, and some stress individualism/individuality (Hofstede, 1980).

**Collectivist Cultures**

As traditionally noted, Eastern societies, such as Japan, tend to be collectivist—that is, to stress group benefit and the overriding value of working harmoniously rather than individual personal advancement. Collectivist cultures place importance on the whole group, stressing common concerns and the value of acting not merely for oneself but for the common good. Accordingly, in a collectivist culture, your value is based on your place in a system—portraying you as just a single bee in a beehive—more than your special and unique qualities as an individual.

These characteristics are developed and reinforced through personal relationships and interactions with others. Within a collectivist society, an individual who acts to achieve personal rather than collective goals would be viewed as simply selfish.
and disrespectful. He or she would be brought back into line and made to adopt the values of community and collectivity. Such reprimands, especially made by someone with whom a close relationship is shared, would bolster the prevailing view of that society.

One interesting example of a culture that stresses the importance of not being outstanding is originally a fictional culture created by the Scandinavian author Aksel Sandemose through his imagination of a village called Jante. The law of Jante (Table 6.1) expresses the importance of not rising above the group as an individual, a sort of anti–tall-poppy law, with 10 rules that over time have come to be real in many parts of Scandinavia, which has adopted them as a cultural norm.

**Table 6.1  Definition of the Law of Jante**

There are 10 rules in the law as defined by Sandemose, all expressing variations on a single theme: *You are not to think you’re anyone special or that you’re better than us.*

The 10 rules state the following:

1. You’re not to think you are anything special.
2. You’re not to think you are as good as us.
3. You’re not to think you are smarter than us.
4. You’re not to convince yourself that you are better than us.
5. You’re not to think you know more than us.
6. You’re not to think you are more important than us.
7. You’re not to think you are good at anything.
8. You’re not to laugh at us.
9. You’re not to think anyone cares about you.
10. You’re not to think you can teach us anything.

In the book, the Janters who break this unwritten “law” are treated with suspicion or actual hostility because their behavior breaks the town’s wish to preserve harmony, social stability, and uniformity. In short, the individual must uphold the collective uniformity. Important from our perspective is the fact that the “law” was transacted in speech: “The Law of Jante was not merely a set of laws, *it was the very core of the speech of the people, all they ever said could be traced straight back to the Law of Jante*” (Sandemose, 1936, p. 28, italics added).

**Individualist Cultures**

Western societies, such as the United States, are generally characterized as **individualist**, or focusing on the individual personal dreams, goals and achievements, and right to make choices. Individual desires and freedoms are emphasized, and your value is measured according to your personal accomplishments.

As with collectivist cultures, these characteristics are reinforced through relationships. Contrary to collectivist cultures, within individualistic cultures, personal achievement is lauded and reinforced through conversations with others. For instance, supervisors may talk with employees about the development of personal goals and post “employee of the month” placards to single out individual achievements.

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. Have you ever experienced a conflict of culture as described? If so, how was it managed?
2. In what ways can conflicts of culture be both beneficial and negative?
Next time you see such a placard, think of it as an example of American cultural ideals being transacted before your very eyes!

**Time**

Cultures are also categorized and differentiated according to their views of time. Consider how time is perceived in the United States: *Time is money*. Time is valuable, and so it is important to not waste it. Therefore, showing up on time helps create a positive impression. Many employees are required to punch in on a time clock or log into a computer system when arriving and leaving work, so precise time at work can be measured. If a person consistently arrives late for work, he or she will likely lose the job. Of course, there is a range of views about this in any culture, and some progressive companies such as Google and Apple explicitly replace this (obsessive?) attitude about time with something else (relaxed attitudes to time in the workplace, although they do not totally abandon the idea that time at work is a key notion). However, the fact that they explicitly abandoned a culturally normative way of treating time is a statement about the usual importance of time and the culture, such that they emphatically replace it as evidence of their special way of doing work.

Because cultures differ in how they view time, the importance of brisk punctuality compared with that of leisurely relationship building, is also given different weight. This broad difference of emphasis on time is labeled as a distinction between monochronic and polychronic cultures (Hall, 1966).

**Monochronic Culture**

If you think of time as a straight line from beginning to end, you are thinking in terms of *monochronic time*, where people do one thing at a time or carry out connected tasks only because it helps them work toward particular goals with tasks in sequence and communication fitting into a particular order.

**Monochronic cultures**, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, view time as a valuable commodity and punctuality as very important. People with a monochronic view of time will usually arrive at an appointment a few minutes early as a symbol of respect for the person they are meeting. In the United States, after first establishing a pleasant atmosphere with a few brief courtesies, people will likely bring up the matter of business fairly early in the conversation.

**DISCIPLINARY DEBATE**

Is Culture an Overall Ethnic or National Concept?

Some research presents a sharp distinction between individualist and collectivist cultures. Other scholars are becoming skeptical about such hard-and-fast distinctions, noting that although some large-scale differences exist, there is a lot more subtlety and distinctiveness within a culture that is identified only by nationality or ethnicity. Not all Japanese people behave in identical ways or have exactly the same priorities, although a tendency toward collectivism is much stronger there than in some other national cultures. Two different popular authors have tried to identify what is special about being English, and they reached different conclusions. Jeremy Paxman (1999) wrote that the English were “polite, unexcitable, reserved, and had hot-water bottles instead of a sex-life,” whereas Kate Fox (2005) emphasized the underlying importance to the English of humor and not taking anything too seriously.

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. Can you think of examples in U.S. culture where the individual is required to subordinate personal goals to the collective good?
2. If you can, does this undercut the whole idea of the great distinction between collectivism and individualism?
Polychronic Culture

If you think of time as the ever-rolling cycle of the seasons or something more open-ended, you are thinking in terms of *polychronic time*, where independent and unconnected tasks can be done simultaneously and where people may carry out multiple conversations with different people at the same time.

*Polychronic cultures* have a relaxed attitude toward time. Indeed, as Henry Calero (2005) noted, the predominant U.S. notion of time translates as “childishly impatient” to polychronic cultures. This notion of time is true even in relation to food, specifically in, say, Italy or France where two-course meals can take three hours. In polychronic societies, “promptness” is not particularly important, and as long as the person shows up sometime during the right day, that will count as doing what was required. Some Mediterranean and Arab countries do not regard as impolite being late to an appointment or taking a very long time to get down to business. Indeed, placing so much emphasis on time that people’s relationships are ignored is regarded as rude and pushy; instead, time should be taken to build the relationships. In the same way, it is important in some countries not to get to the point too quickly, and a lot of time is spent talking about relational issues or other matters before it is polite to bring up a business question.

Future and Past Orientations

Cultures also differ in the way they pay attention to the past, the present, and the future. Different cultures tend to assume that the present is influenced either by one’s goals and the future or by past events. In the latter case, fatalism and preordained destiny are seen as the controlling forces over what happens in the present. Some Asian societies pay more attention to the distant future and, like South American and Mediterranean cultures, tend to assume a greater influence of the past on the present. Destiny or karma affects what happens to us in the present moment (Martin & Nakayama, 2007).

**Conflict**

Cultures can also be compared according to their understanding of and approach to *conflict*, which involves real or perceived incompatibilities of processes, understandings, and viewpoints between people. Communication scholars Judith Martin and Thomas Nakayama (2007, pp. 404–413)—drawing from the work of David Augsburger (1992)—differentiate two cultural approaches to conflict: conflict as opportunity and conflict as destructive.

**Conflict-as-Opportunity Cultures**

*Conflict-as-opportunity cultures* tend to be individualist, such as the United States. This approach to conflict is based on the four assumptions listed in Table 6.2 (Martin & Nakayama, 2007, p. 404).
From this view, conflict is a normal and useful process, an inherent part of everyday life. Naturally experienced when interacting with people, conflict will lead, if handled constructively, to the enhancement of personal and relational life. This cultural view of conflict also understands all issues as subject to change, meaning that all personal or relational processes, goals, or outcomes can be altered. When a person wants to make changes in his or her relationships or personal life, he or she is expected to fully express and work with others to achieve these desires. Finally, members of these cultures view conflict not only as normal and useful but also as a necessary requirement for renewing relationships and for achieving overall well-being.

**Conflict-as-Destructive Cultures**

Stressing group and relational harmony above individual needs and desires, **conflict-as-destructive cultures** tend to be collectivist or community-oriented such as many Asian cultures. Religious groups, such as the Amish and Quakers, also view conflict as destructive. David’s dad attended Quaker meetings as a child and adhered to pacifist ideals even on the playground. He has told stories of other children hitting him, knowing he would not fight back. As instructed in the Bible, he would literally turn the other cheek, and the other children would promptly hit that cheek as well. Nevertheless, David’s dad remained steadfast in his culturally based belief in the destructive nature of conflict. As with conflict-as-opportunity cultures, four assumptions guide this approach to conflict, as listed in Table 6.3 (Martin & Nakayama, 2007, p. 406).

Contrary to conflict-as-opportunity cultures, this cultural approach views conflict not as a natural part of everyday experience but rather as unnecessary, detrimental, and to be avoided. Also contrary to conflict-as-opportunity cultures and reflective of collectivist cultures in general, members of conflict-as-destructive cultures do not view individual desires as more important

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<tr>
<th>Table 6.3</th>
<th>The Four Assumptions of Conflict-as-Destructive Cultures</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Conflict is a destructive disturbance of the peace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The social system should not be adjusted to meet the needs of members; rather, members should adapt to established values.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Confrontations are destructive and ineffective.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Disputants should be disciplined.</td>
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*Source: Martin & Nakayama (2007, p. 406).*

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**Make your case**

**Do Smartphones Alter Cultural Perceptions of Time?**

The United States is typically regarded as monochronic, focused on time, dedicated to the steadfast accomplishment of the task at hand, and generally industrious and focused. However, the increased use of smartphones has tended to alter our perception of time. For instance, schedules are frequently loosened as a result of being able to contact someone immediately and alter plans. People often use smartphones to multitask (for example, sending texts while participating in a class).

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. Do you believe that it makes sense for communication scholars to treat the United States as essentially monochronic, or has technology overtaken that perception?
2. How have smartphones affected your own views of time?
than group needs and established norms. Furthermore, rather than valuing direct confrontation, members consider confrontations futile and harmful to relationships and the group as a whole. Accordingly, those who engage in confrontation should be disciplined to discourage such destructive behaviors.

However, even within particular cultures there are gender differences in the treatment of conflict, which raises once again the possibility that genders are themselves a particular kind of culture. On top of the broad nationalistic cultural analysis, we can easily find differences in discourses of conflict. In broad terms, women see conflict as an opportunity and prefer to discuss issues and resolve them, whereas, equally broadly speaking, men see conflict as a battle for power, where one of them wins and the other is humiliated (Nelson & Brown, 2012).

Managing Conflict
Of course, conflict occurs in all relationships and among all groups, even those viewing conflict as destructive. However, the management of conflict will also differ among cultural groups. When conflict occurs, people generally engage in one of five styles of conflict management: (1) dominating, (2) integrating, (3) compromising, (4) obliging, and (5) avoiding (Rahim, 1983; Ting-Toomey, 2004).

**Dominating.** Dominating styles involve forcing one’s will on another to satisfy individual desires regardless of negative relational consequences. For example, you and a friend decide to order a pizza, and as you call in the order, your friend mentions a desire for pepperoni. You would rather have sausage and reply, “Too bad. I’m making the call, and we are having sausage.”

**Integrating.** Integrating styles necessitate a great deal of open discussion about the conflict at hand to reach a solution that completely satisfies everyone involved. You and your friend differ on what pizza topping you would like, so you openly discuss your positions and the options available until you reach a solution that fulfills both of your desires—perhaps getting both toppings or half sausage and half pepperoni.

**Compromising.** Compromising styles are often confused with integrating styles because a solution is reached following discussion of the conflict. However, making a compromise demands that everyone must give something up to reach the solution, and as a result, people never feel fully satisfied. Returning to the pizza quagmire, you and your friend discuss the conflict and decide to get mushrooms instead of sausage or pepperoni.
Obliging. Obliging styles of conflict management involve giving up one’s position to satisfy another’s. This style generally emphasizes areas of agreement and deemphasizes areas of disagreement. Using this style of conflict management, as you and your friend discuss what topping to include on your pizza, you probably mention that the important thing is you both want pizza and then agree to order pepperoni instead of sausage.

Avoiding. Finally, avoiding styles of conflict are just that: People avoid the conflict entirely either by failing to acknowledge its existence or by withdrawing from a situation when it arises. So, your friend expresses a desire for pepperoni on that pizza, and even though you really want sausage, you indicate that pepperoni is fine and place the order.

Skills You Can Use: Using Culture to Persuade

When attempting to persuade someone or to develop a positive relationship with someone, communicating in a manner consistent with his or her culture will increase your chances of success.

Transacting Culture

You may have noticed that although we said culture was not equivalent to nation or geography, many of the features we have focused on so far do actually make exactly that equation of culture and geography. This is because that is what the research is focused on, instead of what we think is most important. If you think geography defines cultures, then you can look for geographic differences in such things as attitudes to time or conflict. If, however, you treat culture as based in language and meaning practices rather than geography, then you will look for a different sort of difference. You will ask, for example, what are the differences between the meanings found in discourses of heterosexual and homosexual people, men and women, Baptists and Mormons, Republicans and Democrats. What markers in their speech identify them as members of a particular community?

The preceding section emphasized a set of broad and general differences resulting from seeing culture in structural or geographical terms. Structural discussions of cultural characteristics treat culture very broadly and categorically: If you are a Westerner, you will behave and communicate in the Western way. Although such broad-brush ideas are sometimes helpful, especially when traveling to other countries, dealing with international relationships, or discussing the clash of cultures and/or diversity, it is important to go beyond the broad ideas and add some finer detail.

Indeed, a lot of who you are depends on where you are, or at least on where you come from, as well as on the groups you belong to and how they expect people to behave. You are not alone: You belong and do not always have a choice.
many groups, some small (groups of friends or neighbors), some large (your citizenship or your ethnic group), some central to your life (family, friends), and some probably peripheral (your tax group, your shoe size). Somewhere in there, somewhere in your sense of yourself, however, is the culture(s) that you see as yours.

Studying culture as a transaction focuses on how culture is created symbolically through communication and is reinforced through your relationships with others and your everyday experiences. Cultural codes are embedded within your communication, and you “speak” culture each time you communicate. Accordingly, cultural groups are established and cultural membership is achieved through communication.

Culture Is Embedded Within Your Communication

Your culture is coded in your communication in the language you speak, in the thoughts you express, and in the assumptions you make. Obviously, talk accomplishes this in the straightforward sense: French men and women speak French. But they also speak “being French.” Accordingly, every time a person communicates, other people know something about his or her culture. When someone is seen wearing “cultural clothes,” difference is assumed, but that person actually wears his or her culture in talk and behavior, too.

Your two authors, Steve and David, are different. Steve is English; David is American. When we travel in the United States, people say to Steve, “I love your accent,” but when we travel in the United Kingdom, they say it to David. So which of us has an accent? No one in either place ever says with marvel to us, “You speak good English,” though when we go to France, people might say, “You speak good French” (if we did). In the United Kingdom, people can tell that Steve is from “the West country,” and in the United States, they know David is not from “the South.” All of them can tell, even on the phone, that we are not ethnic Dutch or Indonesian. They also know we are not women or 5 years old. This is not only a result of vocalic differences but also a result of what we say and how we say it.

When Steve first met a new colleague (an Eastern European), the conversation lasted only briefly before the colleague said, “You’re not American.” Steve said, “Oh, the old accent gives me away yet again!” but the colleague said, “No, actually. I’m not a native English speaker, and I can’t tell the difference between English and American accents. It was something in your style that announced you as ‘other.’”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Cultural norms may change, but this change does not come easily or quickly. How might norms be changed within a culture?
2. What norms within your own culture have changed, and are there some cultural norms that will never change?
David grew up on a farm in rural Indiana, and like everyone, his communication styles and assumptions about the world were influenced and informed by people around him. He views the world differently and communicates differently than someone who was raised in the city, someone who grew up wealthy, or someone who has never worked the land. His rural Indiana cultural beliefs and values are displayed by what he says and how he says it. Rural Indiana communication styles and patterns are embedded in his talk.

Culture Goes Beyond Physical Location

Notwithstanding the importance of a person’s place of origin, Steve is not just “West country,” and David is not just “rural Indiana.” Steve is a coxswain. David is a radio announcer. Steve is a father. David is a bartender/bouncer. Steve is a genealogist. David is a singer. Both of us are academics. These cultural activities and roles—past and present—have influenced our views of the world and our communication styles. Furthermore, each is cultural in its own right. Steve communicates coxswain culture, father culture, genealogy culture, and academic culture. David communicates radio announcer culture, bartender/bouncer culture, singer culture, and academic culture. At times, one culture may be more pronounced than others. Also at times, it may be more important to enact membership into one culture than another. For instance, at academic conferences, we tend to communicate academic culture rather than coxswain or bartender/bouncer culture—although doing the latter may be a way to liven up future conferences!

What ultimately becomes clear—other than we have just spent too much time talking about ourselves—is that people belong to multiple cultures and that cultural membership is enacted through communication.

Cultural Groups Are Created Through Communication

As we have discussed in great detail, a structural understanding of culture as being encompassed by a nation-state, a region, an ethnicity, or a religion is restrictive. It does not give an entirely accurate depiction of culture in everyday life. For instance, several cultures may exist within one country (Houston & Wood, 1996). These cultural groups are recognized and differentiated through their unique communication and meaning systems.

Co-Cultures

Co-cultures are smaller groups of culture within a larger cultural mass. For instance, most countries have regions regarded as different and distinctive...
How might break time at a factory be an opportunity to learn about and enact cultural membership within this culture?

Speech Communities

A more communication-based view labels these cultures as speech communities (Hymes, 1972; Philipsen, 1975, 1997). Speech communities are cultures defining membership in terms of speaking patterns and styles that reinforce beliefs and values of the group. Essentially, cultural groups are set apart based on their unique communication styles. In this way, various speech (communication) codes, or a culture’s verbalizations of meaning and symbols, tend to have built into them certain ways of understanding the world that guide the particular talk patterns people use in conversation with one another.

One characteristic of any culture is what it takes for granted. For example, in a particular culture, certain topics can be talked about and certain ideas are taken for granted, even during persuasion. Kristine Muñoz (Fitch, 2003) has written about these taken-for-granted assumptions as cultural persuadables, certain topics that people in a society never bother to persuade anyone else about because their arguments are always raised against a background of common understanding and shared beliefs. For instance, some speech communities adhere to very traditional notions of gender roles. Accordingly, it is unnecessary to say anything directly about these gender roles because they are implicit in everything that is communicated. Also, in the United States, people may just say, “because it is the right thing to do” without elaborating on why something is the right thing for the principle on which the judgment is based (life, liberty, pursuit of happiness).

Cultural Membership Is Enacted Through Communication

Enacting membership in a cultural group means communicating and assigning meaning in ways similar to other members of that group. For instance, musicians enact membership into a musician culture by communicating like members (the South, the Midwest, Yorkshire, the Valley). The belief systems in these small and diverse groups are often recognized as distinct from those within the larger society or nation. A large group such as “Americans” can be broken down into smaller groups (“Northern Americans” and “Southern Americans”) containing smaller sets of both nations and societies, such as Irish Americans, Southerners, Sioux, African Americans, Iowans, or Republicans.

Sociologically and demographically, discussions of co-cultures are significant because they underscore the vast number of cultures that can be explored and that encompass a person’s life. However, there is still the tendency to take on a structural approach to their study. Accordingly, someone might say, “Republicans communicate this way, while Democrats communicate that way.”

speech communities: sets of people whose speech codes and practices identify them as a cultural unit, sharing characteristic values through their equally characteristic speech

speech (communication) codes: sets of communication patterns that are the norm for a culture, and only that culture, hence defining it as different from others around it

cultural persuadables: the cultural premises and norms that delineate a range of what may and what must be persuaded (as opposed to certain topics in a society that require no persuasive appeal because the matters are taken for granted)
of that culture. It can be broken down further, and we can distinguish musician cultures related to jazz, blues, death metal, hip-hop, rhythm and blues, country, bluegrass, rockabilly, and barbershop just to name a few. Once again, each cultural group communicates in unique ways, and enacting membership requires communicating as such.

However, enacting membership into a cultural group is more complicated and restrictive than it may initially appear. If you want to be a rapper, you cannot just talk like a rapper and suddenly become one. It is not just the act of communicating that establishes membership into a cultural group; it is also, and more important, knowing the meaning of that communication that does so. A cultural understanding is required. If you do not know how to perform membership in a particular community, you are excluded from it. Membership in a culture can be represented in and restricted by one’s knowledge of speech (communication) codes.

The unique ways of communication and the underlying meaning of that communication create a sense of otherness or separateness. Some cultural groups may rejoice in their exclusivity. For instance, certain clubs or organizations may have secret ways of communicating concealed from everyone but their members, such as their secret handshake. When “outsiders” attempt to enact membership into certain cultural groups, they may be referred to as “fakes” or “wannabes.” Members of rural communities often view people who move into the area with suspicion. These new people may be living in the same area, but they do not automatically become members of the culture.

Cultural speech (communication) codes must be learned and understood before a person can fully enact membership into a group. Doing so requires interacting and forming relationships with members of that cultural group. Through relating, cultural understanding is transferred and maintained. Cultural understanding is fundamental to enacting cultural membership, and this understanding is learned through relationships.

**ETHICAL ISSUE**

Is it unethical to attempt to enact membership into a cultural group if you are not a legitimate member?

**FOCUS QUESTIONS REVISITED**

What does it mean to view culture as structured?

Viewing culture from a structural standpoint has a long history in the communication discipline. This way of seeing culture focuses on large-scale differences in values, beliefs, goals, and preferred ways of acting among nations, regions, ethnicities, and religions. Research using this perspective is often referred to as either cross-cultural communication or intercultural communication.

**By the way . . .**

**Speaking Like a Man in Teamsterville**

Communication scholar Gerry Philipsen (1975) explored the talk in Teamsterville, a pseudonym for a working-class community in Chicago showing a “man’s communication style.” For members of this community, the style of speech occasionally prefers action to words and is based on talking only when power is equal or symmetrical. In this community, a man demonstrates power by punching someone rather than talking about a problem. Speech is regarded as an inappropriate and ineffective way of communicating in situations when demonstrating power. For example, if a man were insulted by a stranger, the culturally appropriate way to deal with the insult would be to inflict physical damage rather than discuss the issue. In Teamsterville, speech in such a situation would be characterized as weak. Conversely, when a man in Teamsterville is among friends, his speech is permitted to establish his manliness. If a man’s friend made a derogatory remark about the man’s girlfriend, the man would either take the remark as a tease or simply tell the friend not to say such things, and violence would not result as it would in the case of strangers saying the same thing.

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. Can a specific way of speaking be attributed to men or women regardless of culture?
2. What does it mean to speak like a man (and a woman) in some of your cultural groups?
What does it mean to view culture as transacted?

When viewing culture from a transactional standpoint, culture is seen as a coded system of meaning. Culture is a set of beliefs, a heritage, and a way of being that is transacted in communication. When viewing culture as a system of norms, rituals, and beliefs, any group with a system of shared meaning can be considered a culture.

How is communication organized to reflect cultural beliefs about context, collectivism/individualism, time, and conflict?

Cultures can be categorized as either high context or low context. High-context cultures place a great deal of emphasis on the total environment or context where speech and interaction take place. In a low-context culture, people try to separate their relationships from the messages and to focus on the details and the logic.

Cultures can be categorized as either individualist or collectivist. Collectivist cultures place greater importance on the whole group, stressing common concerns and the value of acting not merely for oneself but for the common good. Individualist cultures focus on the individual person and his or her personal dreams, goals, and achievements, and right to make choices.

Cultures can be categorized as either monochronic or polychronic. Monochronic cultures view time as valuable and adhere to schedules. Polychronic cultures view time more holistically and have a much more relaxed attitude toward schedules. Cultures also differ in their orientation to past, present, and future events.

Cultures can be categorized as viewing conflict as either opportunity or destructive. Cultures viewing conflict as opportunity perceive conflict as a normal and useful process, an inherent part of everyday life. Cultures viewing conflict as destructive perceive conflict as unnecessary, detrimental, and something to be avoided.

What does it mean to say that cultural groups are created through communication?

Multiple cultural groups are recognized and differentiated through their unique communication and meaning systems. Speech communities are cultures defining membership in terms of speaking patterns and styles that reinforce beliefs and values of the group. Essentially, cultural groups are set apart based on their unique communication styles.

How do people enact cultural membership through communication?

Enacting membership in a cultural group means communicating and assigning meaning in ways similar to other members of that group. However, it is not just the act of communicating that establishes membership into a cultural group; it is also, and more important, knowing the meaning of that communication that does so. Membership in a culture can be represented in and restricted by one’s knowledge of speech (communication) codes.

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QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR FRIENDS

1. As you did in the Analyzing Everyday Communication box, have your friends tell you about their favorite children’s stories, and then discuss the themes demonstrated by those stories and connect them to the cultural ideals.

2. Ask your friends in how many cultures they view themselves as having established membership. In what ways do they establish these memberships?

3. Ask your friends to describe a recent intercultural experience. What did they find most challenging? What did they find most rewarding?

MEDIA CONNECTIONS

1. Select and analyze a movie with intercultural themes to show how individuals from different cultures build relationships and develop understanding. Describe how culturally relevant concepts and ideas from this chapter are shown in the movie’s characters, plot, setting, script, and acting styles.

2. How are different cultures represented on television and in movies? Compare current with 30- or 40-year-old shows and movies. What differences do you see?

3. How are other cultures represented by newspapers, television news, or online news sources? Can you identify any ethnocentric bias in these reports?

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