Chapter 2: Building Identities

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

Laina Dawes: Identity assumptions sometimes go astray

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

◊ Audio / Transcript of NPR story about Laina

Cultural identity

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

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

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

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

Cultural identities tend to be constructed differently depending on whether an individual is a member of a co-culture or a representative of the mainstream. Often,

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

> **White Privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack**
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> I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and time of work cannot count on most of these conditions.
> 1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
> 2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
> 3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
> 4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
> 5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
> [Note: the full text contains 50 items]

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

likely to be a necessary conversation in white households. Members of a minority need to balance issues of adaptation and assimilation into the dominant culture with the need to retain identification with their own communities.

One of the issues with which microcultures often have to contend is language. The major institutions of a country – schools, government, industry – use predominantly or exclusively the language of the dominant culture. This means that members of a microculture who either speak a different language or use a dialectical variety of the standard language may be at a disadvantage. In fact, "**muted group theory**" suggests that those with less power in a society often have difficulty communicating effectively, as they must re-encode their thoughts to make them understood (Ardener, 1975). One response to this phenomenon is the creation of a unique language. African American Vernacular English, or **Ebonics**, is an example of that (Perry & Delpit, 1998). **Spanglish** – **code-switching** between English and Spanish – is characteristic of many Latinos in the US (Stavans, 2004). In Germany *Kiezdeutsch* (also "kanaksprach") is a version of German that integrates Turkish terms (Freywald et al, 2011). Similar language hybrid phenomena can be observed in other cultures. We will be exploring issues around minority language use in chapter three.

Integration and marginalization

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

In the US, second and third generation immigrant families often have a quite different attitude toward their ethnic heritage than was the case for their parents or grandparents (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). They may express considerable interest and pride in that heritage, its customs, and language. The degree to which descendants of immigrant families or representatives of indigenous minorities are able to blend successfully their family/ethnic backgrounds into the dominant culture depends on the extent of social acceptance. Some groups have been systematically **marginalized**, that is, denied the same basic rights and privileges as granted to other populations. They may face discrimination in areas such as housing, access to education, or employment opportunities. Examples are the indigenous populations of North America or Australia, the Romani in Europe, the Palestinians in the Middle

East, or the "Untouchables" (Lower Castes or *Dalit*) in India. There are as well counter-examples of societies, such as Canada, which have embraced multiculturalism, enabling newcomers to maintain their original cultural identities, as they adjust to the new Canadian environment (Peach, 2005).

Countries vary considerably in ethnic diversity. Japan and the Koreas, for example, are ethnically homogeneous, with small minority populations. That is characteristic as well of island nations, for understandable reasons. One of the main methodologies used to measure diversity is linguistic variation (Fearon, 2003).

Women in Japan: a largely homogeneous

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

Although European countries have tended to be largely homogeneous, there are exceptions such as Switzerland or Belgium. While the Swiss have managed to create a common national identity, which has largely shielded the country from strife among the linguistically and culturally diverse cantons, Belgium has not been so successful in national integration. The Flemish and French parts of the country have had considerable trouble cooperating politically and economically. Conflict has arisen as well in Latin America, with struggles of indigenous populations in Guatemala, Mexico, Columbia, and other countries for equal rights. In some cases, ethnic strife has led to countries breaking apart into separate entities, such as happened in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s or in Sudan in 2011. Separatist movements have arisen in a number of countries, such as Catalonia in Spain or Scotland in the UK.

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

> **Smartphones and refugees**
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> In Germany, the hoped-for destination of many refugees, a number of apps have been created targeting the immigrant population. The Goethe Institute, along with federal agencies dealing with immigration and employment, have created Ankommen (*Arrival*), available in Arabic, English, Farsi, French, and German. As do other such apps, it is designed with minimal technical requirements, so as to be usable on older phones. It features three branched areas: German language study, German asylum procedures, and tips on living in Germany. Integreat offers a similar service for refugees in Germany. It is available in five languages and features information specific to one of the 80 German cities targeted. Daheim (*At Home*) offers a meeting platform for new arrivals and German natives, designed for language learning and intercultural exchange.
>
> Godwin-Jones, 2017, p. 11

PEGIDA demonstration in Dresden, Germany

Islamification of the West) have attracted popular support among some parts of the German population (Vorländer, Herold, & Schäller, 2015). As is the case in neighboring countries, that has also lead to political changes, with a new anti-immigrant and anti-EU party, the Alternative for Germany (AFD), which in 2018 entered the German parliament. In France, the National Front has attracted large numbers of French voters unhappy with economic stagnation and with the perceived

cultural changes in French society through the large numbers of immigrants from Northern Africa.

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

The degree to which particular groups maintain cultural ties to their family places of origin differs significantly according to both the group and the nature of the destination culture. In the US, for example, many people of European ancestry have largely integrated culturally into the mainstream, and have lost most of their association with their ancestral homeland and may not even be aware of their family backgrounds. They may not know about the stigma which used to be attached to immigrants to the US from countries such as Ireland, Italy, or Germany. Some white US Americans may have a **symbolic ethnicity**, a largely voluntary affiliation with a particular ethnic group which only surfaces in particular contexts, as in the celebration of a holiday such as St. Patrick's Day or Oktoberfest. While many microcultures become segregated due to prejudicial treatment by the mainstream culture, as has historically been the case with African-Americans, some microcultures choose to remain apart. The Amish community in

Amish family in New York farming

the US live apart from the non-Amish, with their religious beliefs leading them to reject many aspects of contemporary US culture. They dress differently, speak a German dialect, and shun modern technology. Because living in an Amish community isolates individuals so completely from mainstream US culture, young people are given an opportunity to experience the "English", i.e. non-Amish, world through a tradition called *rumspringa* (See sidebar).

> ***Rumspringa*: Amish youth exploring the world**
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> In many communities, *Rumspringa* is a period when some Amish youth, boys more than girls, experience greater freedom. They are no longer under the control of their parents on weekends and, because they are not baptized, they are not yet under the authority of the church. During this time, many Amish youth adhere to traditional Amish behavior. Others experiment with "worldly" activities—buying a car, going to movies, wearing non-Amish clothes, buying a television.
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> Kraybill, 2016

Social identity

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

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

Interactions and communication among group members may also be influenced by individuals' roles within groups. In some groups, roles may be formal

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

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

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

Women in the Sahara

If we think of the identity of gender in the Sahara, we can state that:
Scope: Sex has a much broader scope than, say, Jewish people
Salience: A woman might be a professional, a student, a researcher, or a Muslim. In some contexts, one identity will be more relevant or in the front of her mind than others.
Centrality: Because of the emphasis on gender in the Sahara, this identity is probably "salient" all or most of the time—thus, it has more centrality.
Intensity: Women may express their identity either more or less vocally. By wearing a head-covering, especially when such is optional, as it is in some countries, the women is expressing identity more explicitly. She is "out" about her religious identity.
Changeability: Clearly, as expressed in the photo above, gender identity in parts of the Saharan region is changing—but likely in other ways staying the same.

Baldwin (2013)

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

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

Worldviews and religions

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

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

Religious beliefs often play a central role in a person's worldview, i.e., the set of values and beliefs about acceptable human behavior and about mankind's relationship to a supreme being and to the natural world. In some cases, religion and worldview are tightly connected. This is the case in what are deemed "sacred cultures", where there is a religious doctrine that plays a determining role in expected personal behavior, fundamental values, and appearance (Dodd, 1998). In some cultures, such as in Saudi Arabia, there may be a state religion which exerts this kind of controlling influence. In other cases, the connection between religion and worldview is not as clear-cut, as in the case of the Puritan influence in the US (see sidebar). Secular societies, such as the US, draw a sharp distinction between

> **Pervasive Puritanism**
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> The influence of the Puritan settlers on US society can be seen in the fact that US Americans have rather conservative views about alcohol and nudity — something that many Europeans find rather prudish. This demonstrates the implicit influence of religion on worldview and perception — people in the United States who may not subscribe to Puritan or even Christian beliefs may still be influenced by that historical tradition and worldview.
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> Nakayama & Martin, 2002, p. 22

church and state. France has a long tradition of "*laïcité*" (secularity) which has been the expressed reason for controversial measures such as the banning of women wearing veils or headscarves in public schools (Caron, 2007). On the other hand, India, also a secular culture, has not banned religious symbols (Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr & Wegert, 2013).

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

- *Character of human nature* (basically good – a mixture of good and evil – basically evil)
- *Relation of humans to nature* (humans dominate–harmony of the two–nature dominates)
- *Time orientation* (future-oriented - present-oriented - past-oriented)
- *Activity orientation* ("doing"/action – "growing"/spiritual growth – "being"/who you are)
- *Relationships between people* (individual - group-oriented – collateral)

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

India offers a dramatically different profile. In this life, humans must accept restraints and limitations, but need to work towards enlightenment and perfection, but that may occur over successive lives. The human-nature relationship is seen quite differently, with an emphasis on harmony, not control, and a concern for the "welfare of all things" taking precedence over human concerns (Roa & Thombre, 2015, p. 67). Spiritual growth is highly valued and that may occur over successive reincarnations, so that both the past and the future are important and are not seen as distinctly different entities. From an Indian perspective, time is not linear but circular. Indians are "highly collectivistic in their local group, but are individualistic

in dealing with outsiders" (Rao & Thombre, 2015, p. 81). Starkly different regional characteristics in language and customs tend to lead Indians to feel most comfortable living in their home regions, and less likely than North Americans to accept moving far from home for education or employment (Rao & Thombre, 2015).

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

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

Intercultural communication and ideology

When we talk about worldviews, another term that frequently comes into play is **ideology**. Ideology is similar to worldview in that it references our conception of the order of the world and humans' role in society, but it places additional emphasis on what in an ideal world human relationships and behavior should be. This often involves political and socio-economic considerations, with a

central concern being the individual or groups who exercise power and control. From that perspective, the question arises as to who controls culture – that is where do our values and mores come from. Italian theorist, Antonio Gramsci (1971, originally 1935), uses the concept of **cultural hegemony** to describe how those in power manipulate the value system of a society so as to co-op and control beliefs and behaviors among the population at large. In this way, the ruling class worldview becomes the accepted cultural norm and establishes and justifies a social, political, and economic status quo.

Adrian Holliday (2010) sees the concept of culture itself as a form of ideology. Under the guise of culture, we (especially in the West) tend to establish and perpetuate static images of particular groups. Edward Said (1978) has shown, for example, how the West exoticized images of people from the East, creating a stereotype of "Orientals", which helped promote Western superiority and hence justify colonialism and subjugation. Holliday has shown that the terms of cultural differentiation often used in intercultural communication such as collectivism and individualism often in subtle ways denigrate particular cultures or peoples. For Holliday, the concept of culture, as usually understood, leads "easily and sometimes innocently to the reduction of the foreign Other as culturally deficient" (Holliday, 2010, ix).

If, in fact, as Holliday states, the world is governed by "unequal global politics in which ideology plays a major role" (2010, ix), that holds consequences for intercultural interactions. It makes it important to recognize our own ideological framework, both as individuals and groups. That includes a consideration of how our gender, socioeconomic class, and ethnic background affect our views of the

world and of others. This critical self-awareness can enable us to view others and their cultural values and behaviors with a clearer appreciation of how forces beyond an individual's control contribute to identity formation and particular worldviews. Developing a knowledge of the interaction between culture and political institutions can help in finding avenues for change that are feasible, given societal constraints.

Snake Charmer, example of image in the West of "Orientals"

We may see injustices which, given our own backgrounds, seem to be evidence of "backwards" beliefs or of a corrupt political culture. Rather than judge harshly an individual engaged in what we see as negative behavior, it is better to understand the constraints at work. Individuals do not always have the freedom to change

aspects of behavior that are controlled by institutional forces. It is also the case, that as outsiders, we are not likely to have a full understanding of what may be a quite complex interplay of factors which determine individual behavior.

Categorization and stereotyping

When we encounter someone for the first time, we may not be aware of their cultural or social identities. If we do not have any prior knowledge, we tend to assign individuals to categories based on appearance, age, and the context in which the encounter takes place. This is normal human behavior, as we make sense of the world by putting objects and people into categories. We tend to categorize based on perceived similarities and differences. Obviously, our ability to make viable choices depends on our own degree of experience and knowledge. The less knowledge we have, the more likely we are to fall back on general information we may have acquired informally from friends, family, or media reports. Our mind tries to connect the dots in order to create a complete picture based on the information it already has, which may be scant or faulty. This can provide a very limited, narrowly focused, and potentially distorted impression of the other.

Relying on faulty information leads us to make generalizations that may be far removed from reality. We can overcome the distortion of the "single story", as Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie puts it, in a number of ways (Adichie, 2009). The most effective antidote is to gain greater real knowledge of other cultures through direct contact. That can come from travel, study abroad, service learning, online exchanges, or informal means of making contact. Following news reports on what's happening outside our immediate area can also be valuable, particularly if we seek out reliable, objective reporting. What can be helpful in that regard is to try to find multiple sources of information. Another way to gain insight into other cultures is through stories, told in novels, autobiographies, or movies. The more perspectives we have on a given culture, the less likely it is that we will extrapolate from a single experience to make generalizations about an entire group.

In addition to seeking out opportunities for gaining knowledge about other cultures, what is also needed is to engage with others in a spirit of openness and curiosity. An unwillingness to view others as individuals whose real identity is yet to be discovered, means that we are assuming that everyone in that perceived category is the same, with identical characteristics shared by all. **Stereotyping** can be positive or negative. There may be, for example, a perception that all members of a given community are smart and hard-working, as is sometimes said of Asian-American students. Indian immigrants to the US are often seen in that light, as a "**model minority**" (Lee, 2015). More common are negative stereotypes; in the US race and gender groups are often stereotyped. In other cultures, stereotypes may be attached to those from certain regions or who follow particular religions. Even positive stereotypes can be problematic, as they lead us to depersonalize people,

treating them as members of a group, rather than as unique individuals. Stereotyping can lead to communication breakdowns, if ones stereotyping of a group is different from the view the group has of itself. We can distinguish between **ascribed identities** and **avowed identities**. The ascribed identity is one that we give to either people or groups. Ones avowed identity is the identity we claim as our own. Effective communication occurs when there is a match between the identity we ascribe to others and the identity they avow. Otherwise misunderstanding and conflict can arise.

Stereotyping in turn can lead to ethnocentric attitudes. **Ethnocentrism** is the tendency to place our own group above all others, while seeing out-groups negatively. Ethnocentrism can have positive effects, namely contributing toward solidarity and cooperation within a community and helping to build pride and patriotism. On the other hand, ethnocentrism can lead to prejudice and discrimination. In the most extreme cases, it can result in **racism**, which claims a biologically-based superiority for the in-group. While ethnocentrism is a universal and innate human behavior, racism is social and learned. We are more likely to see racism in difficult economic times, when out-groups such as immigrants become

scapegoats. Modern science has shown that there is no biological basis for racial categories, as the genetic make-up among humans differs very little (Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

Related to racism is xenophobia, the fear of strangers. Some scholars say that xenophobia is universal and biological. Others point to the fact that xenophobia is often racialized – it can be a fear of only those strangers with a particular racial profile. In German-speaking countries, the German equivalent of xenophobia, *Ausländerfeindlichkeit*, is used to the exclusion of the term racism (*Rassismus*). That is likely tied to the Nazi-era appropriation of the latter term. Teun van Dijk's research on racism in Europe points to the fact that

Protest against racism in the UK

although Europeans do admit there is xenophobia in their countries, they see it as a general reaction against foreigners (1987). In practice the xenophobia mostly arises for selected foreigners, namely those with different skin color and religions. The relations among different groups that give rise to prejudice and animosity often

have historical causes. The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, for example, have roots in tribalism and colonialism (see sidebar).

Addressing prejudice and intolerance

Prejudice "involves making a prejudgment based on membership in a social category. While prejudice can be positive or negative, there is a tendency for most of us to think of it as negative" (Gudykunst, 2004, p. 134). We can be prejudiced in favor of a group or against. Prejudice is tied to group identification. We all tend to

> **Tribalism in the Middle East**
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> The same north Arabian Bedouin tribes that accepted Islam and spread it by the sword also infused the region with a deeply tribal culture, impacting everything from family relations to governance and conflict. Tribal affiliation is based on descent from a common male ancestor; all descendants are deemed to share common interests and to have obligations of solidarity with one another. Descendants of other ancestors are deemed to have different interests and are seen to be opponents, sometimes enemies. The main principle of tribal life is absolute loyalty to one's lineage group visàvis other groups of the same order and scope: clan vs. clan, tribe vs. tribe, confederation vs. confederation, sect vs. sect, Muslim vs. infidels...Opposition, rivalry, and conflict are thus seen to be in the nature of social life. Success, power, wealth, and, above all, honour derives from triumphing over opposition groups. Failure to triumph means the loss of power, wealth, and, above all, honour.The pervasive and continuous conflict in the Middle East–between clans, tribes, sects, and religions–is a manifestation of this culture.
>
> Salzman, 2016

think of ourselves in terms of our group memberships, and it is natural to judge our own groups positively. The fact that prejudice is common and inborn is of course an explanation but not a justification. Prejudice can lead to **intolerance**, an active unwillingness to accept views or behavior different from one's own. Prejudice can take different forms. There is individual prejudice but also institutional prejudice, i.e. prejudice embedded in social policies or institutions. Today in the US we see less "overt prejudice", namely individuals expressing publically strong opinions against particular groups, and more "subtle prejudice", hidden in symbolic language, as when talking about gangs or welfare to really make racial comments. Hiding racism behind symbols or political attitudes is known as **symbolic racism** (Sears, 1988). Racism may be reflected in the language used by those in power, as in the repression of indigenous languages by colonial powers, for example, Arabic being suppressed in favor of French in Lebanon or in North Africa.

In recent years, there has also been attention paid to behaviors which may be unintended examples of prejudicial treatment, sometimes labeled **micro-aggressions** (Sue, 2010). Examples in the US context might include such questions as "Where are you from or where were you born?" or "You speak English very well." Yet, in different cultural contexts, a question as to the interlocutor's

Where are you from? Sometimes not easy to answer

"Where are you from?" As someone who was born and grew up in China, who has spent the last 15 years working in British higher education and lived in Newcastle and London, I often found it difficult to answer the above question in small talk. I can never get it right. If I say that I'm from London, I can guarantee that the next question would be 'But where are you really from?'. People expect to hear that I am from China or somewhere in Asia. But I feel that I am misleading them if I just give them what they want to hear. I am Chinese, but that is not all. I am a Chinese living in London, a professor in a British university and have two children of school age who were born and grew up in England.

origins or affinities may be seen as normal and inoffensive. In a community-oriented culture, such as that of India, such questions may indicate rapport building or a search for common ground on which to base future communication (Malik, 2017). The appropriateness of origins questions depends on context and individuals. It may be evident through intonation or body language that the question is well-intentioned and is being asked in a spirit of openness, curiosity, and good will.

Racism can be seen as an individual trait or as institutional and societal. How we frame the issue can be important in finding ways to address it. If racism is seen as individual, that tends to absolve the individual from personal responsibility in doing anything about it, such as encouraging societal changes (reallocation of resources, changing laws). If racism is seen in social terms, that makes society as a whole responsible, including ourselves. Many of the efforts used to address prejudice and intolerance involve education, that is, increasing intercultural awareness or sensitizing individuals to difference. However, intolerance is complex, involving not only a cognitive side, but also affective (emotional), behavioral, and structural/political components. One approach for addressing intolerance is **contact theory**, originally the "contact hypothesis," as developed by US psychologist Gordon Allport (1979). Allport suggested that direct contact between members of different groups – under certain conditions – could lead to reducing prejudice and conflict. The conditions for success he laid out, are that 1) there be equal status between the groups, 2) both groups have common goals for the encounter, 3) both groups focus on cooperation rather than competition, and finally 4) the process be supported by an authority of some kind, such as a government agency. This approach has been used effectively in such conflicts as the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland and in the reconciliation talks between whites and blacks in post-apartheid South Africa. It is the underlying assumption for the benefits derived from school exchanges.

Research by Allport and others has shown that bringing groups together into contact with one another does not in itself provide a guarantee of improved attitudes or enlightened views vis-à-vis the other group. Allport's contact theory shows that the context and conditions of the encounter will shape success or failure. Even encounters when conducted under ideal and carefully supervised conditions may still have mixed results. That might include benefits for some

students and adverse reactions from others, including reactions bordering on culture shock. A story in the public radio show *This American Life* reports on just such an experience, in which students from an inner-city New York City school, with predominantly Hispanic students from low-income families, visit an elite private school located nearby (see sidebar).

> **Three miles away and worlds apart**
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> There's a program that brings together kids from two schools. One school is public and in the country's poorest congressional district. The other is private and costs $43,000/year...These two schools were three miles from each other, but the students basically needed a foreign exchange program to meet each other...Lisa, the public school teacher, says the moment her kids got off the bus at Fieldston, the private school, they had a dramatic reaction to what they saw: "They couldn't believe the campus. They felt like everyone was looking at them. And one of the students started screaming and crying. Like, this is unfair. This is-- I don't want to be here. I'm leaving. I'm leaving right now. I'm going home."
>
> Melanie [the upset student]: "I know I looked at it and I said, well, I know that we're only being taught to flip burgers in Burger King or McDonald's or to hold doors for students like them that will probably live in those buildings on Madison Avenue. And we'll be wearing the uniform servicing these people."
>
> So that's what she found so upsetting. It seemed that the people around her must believe that this was the natural order of things. Melanie knew there was no innate difference between her and a kid born into wealth. She could see that this division we're all so inured to was not a reflection of her inferior worth or ability..
>
> Glass, 2015

One of the ways that as individuals we can contribute to understanding and tolerance towards other cultures is to engage in **critical reflectivity**, (Prayer, 1993), a practice often used in education and workplace settings. The idea is to leverage the knowledge of one's own value system to build a secure sense of identity, enabling greater willingness to accept others. The first step is to examine the norms and behaviors rising from her own racial/ethnic background, gender, and socio-economic status:

> The process highlights areas in which assumptions and interactions between oneself and others result in behaviors that perpetuate the marginalization of people who have been oppressed. This process reveals how power and

privilege are understood or misunderstood, and how assumptions make a difference in determining whether interactions are productive, hurtful, or destructive (Sisneros, Stakeman, Joyner & Schmitz, 2008, p. 24).

Developing a strong sense of self allows us to approach others with more understanding and empathy. This is especially important for those with a privileged status in a society

> **A self-narrative on whiteness**
>
> The most influential, factor in my lack of process for self-examination regarding my whiteness was what I now call the "luxury of whiteness." Because I have never been subject to discrimination on the basis of my race, I have the luxury of being able to easily disengage or distance myself from a discussion on race or racism. The logic of luxury was clear – because I had no race, I did not have to do the self-examining work on my racial identity. That is the ultimate luxury of whiteness: the ability to see myself as neutral and thus excuse myself from any responsibility for addressing racial issues in education, society in general, and most importantly, myself.
>
> Gorski, 2000

(see sidebar).

Language and identity

One of the ways we can have more understanding and appreciation of those with different cultures is to learn their language. This provides a view "from inside" that is difficult to achieve without knowledge of the language. In recent years, there has been substantial scholarly work on the relationship between language – especially second language or L2 – and identity. The common perception is that being proficient in another language can add a new personal identity which inherits traits from the culture in which the language is spoken. We may acquire, along with linguistic skills, nonverbal behaviors (i.e. learning how to bow in learning Japanese), cultural preferences in areas such as food or music, as well as a fundamental worldview shared by native speakers of the language. However, we should be aware of the complex relationship between language and culture, which is not the same for all languages. Learning English, for example, a language which encompasses many different cultures, is quite different culturally from learning Japanese, closely associated with just one country.

Modern theories of language and identity have moved away from the focus on the individual psychological effect of second language acquisition to a greater concern with sociological and cultural dimensions. Contemporary scholars study how language learners construct identity depending on the time and place in which they are using the L2. David Block, one of the leading scholars in the area of language and identity, points out that issues of self-identity arise often when individuals move across socio-cultural and language borders. In this sense, says Block, identity can be seen as "contested in nature as the new and varied input provided to the individual serves to disturb taken-for-granted points of reference"

(Block, 2007, p. 20). Block and Cameron (2002) used the term "critical experience" to refer to such periods in one's life:

> By critical experiences, I mean periods of time during which prolonged contact with an L2 and a new and different cultural setting causes irreversible destabilization of the individual sense of self. There is, in a sense, an element of before and after in critical experiences as the individual's socio-historical, cultural and linguistic environment, once well defined and delimited, becomes relatively ill-defined and open-ended (Block & Cameron, 2002, p. 4).

In such cases, argues Block, it's not a question of discarding one's identity and substituting something new. Rather the result is what has come to be known as "hybrid" or "third place" identities. This hybrid identity creates a subject position that provides insights into different linguistic and cultural worlds. However, it can also lead to feelings of uncertainty and ambivalence, in particular for migrants, who strive to keep aspects of their home culture while learning a new language and adapting to a new way of life. In order to construct a coherent life narrative, we seek to resolve internal conflict and assuage feelings of ambivalence. In that sense, there is a recognition that as individuals we can make choices in terms of self-identity (see sidebar). We tend to take on different available identities depending on need and context. Block points out, however, that in contrast to the open choice of products in a supermarket, we are constrained in our choice of identity by factors such as social hierarchies,

> **Shopping for identities at the "cultural supermarket"**
>
> The cultural anthropologist, Gordon Matthews, argues that identities are not entities into which one is "raised"; rather, one "assumes" an identity and then works on it. Identity is thus seen to develop in what Matthews calls the cultural supermarket: just as the modern supermarket offers foods form all over the world, in all shapes and sizes, so the international media and advanced technology together make available to individuals around the world a range of identities to be assumed.

educational systems, or government policies. The language choices we make are influenced by a variety of factors. Socio-economic and historical contexts may play significant roles. In formally colonized nations, the language of the colonizer acquired a hegemony over the local languages, which continued even after the colonizer had left. This in turn left a significant impact on the identity that the speakers of the language of the colonizer assumed or were attributed. The speakers of the language of the colonizer were considered to be socially superior or higher up in society than speakers of the local language.

The dynamics of identity formation has led to an interest within applied linguistics in what is called the **imagined community** that language learners may aspire to join when they learn a new language (see Anderson, 1991). The imagined community may be a reconstruction of a past culture or a construct of the imagination, a desired community that offers a range of possible identities for the

future. Often language learners are motivated by such imagined futures and may develop extensive fictional personae around these possible future selves: "An imagined community presupposes an imagined identity—one that offers an enhanced range of possibilities for the future" (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, p. 598). Learners of French might envision a future in which they live in Paris and are fluent enough in French to converse in cafés and to read French poetry in the original. The "imagined self" available through a second language might involve personal growth (Dörnyei, 2009). Pavlenko & Norton (2007) cite research that has shown that "many young Japanese women consider English to be intrinsically linked to feminism and thus are motivated to learn it as a language of empowerment" (p. 597). In fact, in many parts of the world English has become the language which represents opportunities for personal growth and professional advancement (see Lin & Byram, 2016). At the same time, English may be seen as an instrument of colonialism and imperialism and as a repressive force on the development of indigenous cultures. The ambiguous attitude towards the social role of English is particularly evident in former colonial countries in Africa (see Miller, 1996).

Another intersection of language, place, and identity is represented in the concept of **linguistic landscapes**, the often multilingual urban signage now encountered in cities throughout the world (see Shohamy & Gorter, 2008). An analysis of signs in particular neighborhoods can reveal the dynamics of different language and ethnic communities. Examining the changes over time, as Dutch

Chinese sign and "Chinglish" translation

scholar Jan Blommaert has done for his neighborhood in Amsterdam, can show not only how neighborhoods change but also how they identify themselves linguistically (2013). This interest in signs is a branch of **semiotics**, the science of signs and their significance. Increasingly linguists are looking beyond traditional uses of language to "multimodal" understanding of how communication takes place and how identities are created through language use in context and in combination with other modes of communication.

Food and culture

Language offers an avenue for involvement in another culture. There are many other opportunities we have to gain insight into other cultures through observation or participation in cultural activities, artifacts, or practices common in these cultures. We might gain interest in learning more about Brazilian or Portuguese cultures, for example, by being fans of famous soccer (football) players such as Pele or Ronaldo. We might be led to want to learn Korean if we are

immersed in the world of competitive video gaming. Listening to music from countries with rich musical traditions such as Mali or Argentina might be the path through which we become curious about other aspects of culture in those countries.

One of the things all cultures have in common is food. Eating has an important social function: "Food, like language, exists as a vehicle for expressing culture. It has the power of being both a biological necessity as well as a deeply symbolic cultural artifact, one that connects us to one another on several levels...Food is a mechanism for expressing identity that also has a social purpose" (Food & Identity, 2014). Our food choices are tied to our personal identities and our life trajectories: "The food choices made by people, either as individuals or as a group, can reveal views, passions, background knowledge, assumptions and personalities. Food choices tell stories of families, migrations, assimilation, resistance, changes over times, and personal as well as group identity. "(Almerico, 2014). Food studies is an emerging interdisciplinary field of study which examines the relationship among food, culture, and society from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (Hauck-Lawson, 2004).

Common culinary traditions can be an essential component of national or regional cultures. Familiar meals or dishes that one cannot find when abroad can be a major contributor to homesickness. On the other hand, adapting to the eating habits and food choices of the host country can also be stressful. Individuals vary of course and some people are more accepting and adventurous than others in trying new dishes. The extent to which food represents something more than necessary human sustenance varies among cultures. In the rest of the world, US eating habits are seen as centered on fast food, such as hamburgers at McDonald's. In fact, home cooking in the US is varied and regional specialties abound, such as North Carolina barbecue, Maine lobster, or New England clam chowder. Well-known is the regional richness of culinary traditions in countries such as China, India, France, or Italy. In some cultures, culinary practices are so highly valued, that they even make their way into institutional settings such as school cafeterias. School lunches, for example, tend to be rather simple and basic. In

McDonalds, a frequent stand-in for US culture and food

France, school lunches are different: "The variety on the menus is astonishing: no single meal is repeated over the 32 school days in the period, and every meal includes an hors d'oeuvre, salad, main course, cheese plate and dessert." (Walt, 2010). In France, as in other cultures, meals have a particular structure along with

must-have components. In addition, there may be certain ritualistic behaviors expected. In Japanese tea ceremonies, for example, there are expected actions for both host and guests.

In many parts of the world modern transportation and distribution have significantly changed the availability of foods. It used to be that fresh foods had limited distribution, restricted to particular times of the year or regions. It is not the case, however, that all have sufficient access to food even in prosperous countries. In the US and the UK, for example, "**food deserts**" exist in economically disadvantaged urban communities (and sometimes in isolated rural areas as well), where there is insufficient access to affordable and nutritious food sources (Walker, Keane & Burke, 2010). This tends to be in minority or immigrant communities and often leads to health and longevity issues, as inhabitants resort to unhealthy convenience foods or fast food meals. The TED talk by Mari Gallagher discusses the situation in the context of discrimination and social justice. The nutrition situation can be even more severe in areas of the world where drought or civil strife have led to significant increases in malnutrition and famine.

In many cultures, there are hybrid food dishes that are popular, created out of domestic remixing of a foreign dish or culinary traditions. In the US and India, for example, "Chinese" food is very popular, but differs markedly from what is found in China. The TED talk by Jennifer Lee, the Hunt for General Tso, recounts how Chinese food made its way into the US and how American inventions such as General Tso's chicken or fortune cookies are seen in the US as quintessentially Chinese. Another example is the popularity of Indian food in the UK. Then UK foreign minister Robin Cook extolled in a speech the multicultural significance of the Britons' fondness for chicken *tikka massala* (see sidebar). In Germany, the originally Turkish dish *doner kebab* has become one of the most popular street foods. Food can represent the kind of successful merging of cultures one hopes develop in

> *"Chicken Tikka Massala is now a true British national dish"*
>
> It isn't just our economy that has been enriched by the arrival of new communities. Our lifestyles and cultural horizons have also been broadened in the process. This point is perhaps more readily understood by young Britons, who are more open to new influences and more likely to have been educated in a multi-ethnic environment. But it reaches into every aspect of our national life. Chicken Tikka Massala is now a true British national dish, not only because it is the most popular, but because it is a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences. Chicken Tikka is an Indian dish. The Massala sauce was added to satisfy the desire of British people to have their meat served in gravy. Coming to terms with multiculturalism as a positive force for our economy and society will have significant implications for our understanding of Britishness.

communities as well.

Technically speaking: Online identities

One of the principal factors making personal identities complex today is the participation in online communities. For many people in developed economies, this is likely to be of substantial importance in their lives, with extensive time spent online, using computers or mobile devices, communicating with others. The mode of communication depends on individual preferences but also on the device used, the purpose of the message, and its length. Our group memberships and group roles will be determining factors as well. It is quite likely that an individual will belong to multiple real-life (RL) groups, each of which may be represented online through a particular service, website, or communication tool. For example, a university student may use telephone calls and email with her parents, text messaging and *Facebook* with her friends, text messaging and university-supplied services with classmates, email with professors, and letters to her grandparents. That last communication option may be questionable, as electronic communication becomes ubiquitous regardless of age.

With each of these relationships, the student is likely to use different communication tools or services, but also somewhat different language in terms of tone, grammar and vocabulary, being more informal and playful with friends, family, or classmates, while using more formal language with professors. The ability and appropriateness of mixing languages informally also vary with the context and individual. It is common today, to see code-switching in informal exchanges among friends. In India, it is common practice to use English script to converse in the local language online, as is using hybrid languages, e.g. *Kiddi sohni wind blowndi hai?* [Punjabi - How beautifully the wind is blowing]. The word 'blow' is combined with the Punjabi 'di' to make it a Punjabi-English hybrid word connoting 'blowing' (A. Malik, personal communication, August 1, 2017. In China, Pinyin is widely used in digital communications and many shorthand expressions have been invented such as 88 (pinyin: bābā) representing "bye bye" (English).

If the student is thinking about future employment, she may have a *LinkedIn* account, a popular service for jobseekers and employers. Her profile and interactions through *LinkedIn* will highlight her professional side, namely her academic preparation, work history, significant achievements, etc. In contrast, her *Facebook* profile and interactions will emphasize her personal interests and circle of friends/family and will likely include a rich exchange of photos and videos. In the process, she is constructing different identities corresponding with the different contexts.

For both *Facebook* and *LinkedIn*, there is likely to be a RL connection, that is, the student will be using her real name and authentic aspects of her personal life

and history. If she also participates in an online dating service, that is likely to be the case as well. That might not be true, however, in other online communities in which she participates. She may, for example, be a regular player in multiplayer online games, such as *World of Warcraft*. In that environment she may have created a game persona as well as an avatar, perhaps representing her RL identity, or perhaps an imagined or desired self. This could be the case in a virtual worlds environment such as *Second Life* or in fantasy-related online environments. The identities assumed are likely to have an impact on the communication style and language use. They might also have a determining effect on social interactions within the online environment, determining with whom she associates and how she presents herself in terms of values and behaviors.

> **Identity repertoires online: Opportunities & constraints**
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> Having to write oneself into being means that on many forums, one can start from scratch, and write into being the kind of being one wants to be. Here we of course encounter differences between anonymous and nonymous sites for identity construction for instance a social network site such as Facebook is a nonymous site; users present themselves there, in many if not most cases, with their real name, with a picture of themselves attached to that name to further authenticate their 'real' identity. On anonymous sites we perhaps see more room for manoeuvring and identity play – we are for instance able to present ourselves with a self-invented user name.
>
> Varis, Wang & Du, 2011, p. 268)

One of the situations in which the subject position is likely to be quite different from the normal RL self is in participation in online communities in a second language. To what extent this is the case will depend in part on the mode of communication–whether written or audio/video–and on the level of language proficiency. In any case, there are likely to be restrictions in possible topics of conversation, depending on the context, cultural sensitivity, and available vocabulary. The likely linguistic handicaps and cultural differences may change how she presents herself, possibly leading to some tentativeness or timidity in areas such as suggesting topic changes or asserting opinions.

The opportunities afforded by the Internet for language learning and personal development have been a subject of considerable interest in applied linguistics in recent years. There have been a number of studies, for example, on language and culture learning through students' participation in online exchanges, often as part of class-to-class activities (Belz & Thorne, 2006). There is growing interest in activities which occur outside of institutional settings, as that is increasingly the case for many young people today. Eva Lam (2004), for example, studied the experiences of several immigrant youth participating in online discussion forums and in creating webpages on Japanese *anime*, to provide out of class language learning opportunities. These experiences were particularly valued by the students, as in school they were stigmatized as immigrants and poor language learners.

Another study focused on the writing of "fanfiction" – original works of fiction based on popular media such as television, movies, or books. Rebecca Black (2006) describes the complex language and cultural situation of one young woman of Japanese descent ("Nanako") whose family settled in Canada. She became a successful fanfiction writer in English (see sidebar). The multilingual and multicultural dimensions of her experience with writing fanfiction is representative of many online Internet activities today. In this way, a second language enables more than just linguistic competence, as Ema Ushioda comments:

> **Active Fandom: Writing, re-mixing and learning**
>
> [Her] identity was negotiated, not only through English, but also through Nanako's pan-Asian linguistic and cultural knowledge and affiliations. Additionally, for Nanako's writing on Fanfiction.net she draws on a range of pop cultural resources from different countries, such as Japanese animation, music from the United Kingdom, and novels and motion pictures from the United States, to assist her in composing in English...these dialogic resources shifted over time as Nanako's facility with English as well as her comfort level in the online community increased...Nanako's participation in this online space helped her to develop confidence and motivation for continued writing and language learning in English; however, it also provided her with a sense of pride and a renewed emphasis on her linguistic background and ethnic identity as an Asian.
>
> Black, 2006, p. 174

A foreign language is not simply something to add to our repertoire of skills, but a personalized tool that enables us to expand and express our identity or sense of self in new and interesting ways and with new kinds of people; to participate in a more diverse range of contexts and communities and so broaden our experiences and horizons; and to access and share new and alternative sources of information, entertainment or material that we need, value or enjoy. (2011, p. 204).

Proficiency in a second language is not just an added skill. By broadening the range of activities in which we engage and the people with whom we interact, a new personal identity is created.

From theory to practice...

 – *Explore your own cultural identity*. An awareness of your cultural heritage can help make you aware of the sources of the values and behaviors you may take for granted. Being able to articulate our own views – and their origins – can be helpful in intercultural encounters.

 – *Consider the nature of your social identity*. Think about how the different groups you may belong to help constitute who you are – what you believe, how you behave, and how you interact with others.

 – *Evaluate your personal identity*. To what extent do your individual tastes and preferences lead you in directions away from your family background, ethnic heritage, or group affiliations? Consider how you envision your future self.

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