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Now that we have examined some sociohistorical contexts that shape culture and communication, let us turn to a discussion of identity and its role in intercultural communication. Identity serves as a bridge between culture and communication. It is important because we communicate our identity to others, and we learn who we are through communication. It is through communication—with our family, friends, and others—that we come to understand ourselves and form our identity. Issues of identity are particularly important in intercultural interactions.

Conflicts can arise, however, when there are sharp differences between who we think we are and who others think we are. For example, a female college student living with a family in Mexico on a homestay may be treated protectively and chaperoned when she socializes, which may conflict with her view of herself as an independent person. In this case, the person's identity is not confirmed but is questioned or challenged in the interaction.

In this chapter, we describe a dialectical approach to understanding identity, one that includes perspectives from psychology and communication. We then turn to the development of specific aspects of our social and cultural identity including those related to gender, race or ethnicity, class, religion, and nationality. We describe how these identities are often related to problematic communication—stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. We also examine how various identities develop, including an increasingly important identity—that of multicultural individuals. Finally, we discuss the relationship among identity, language, and communication.

A DIALECTICAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY

How do we come to understand who we are? What are the characteristics of **identity**? In this section, we employ both the static–dynamic and the personal–contextual dialectic in answering these questions. There are three main contemporary perspectives on identity. (See Table 5-1.) The social psychological perspective views the self in a static fashion, in relation to the community to which a person belongs—including comparative studies of identity. The communication perspective is more dynamic and recognizes the role of interaction with others as a factor in the development of the self. Finally, the critical perspective views identity even more dynamically—as the result of contexts quite distant from the individual. As you read this chapter, keep in mind that the relationship between identity and intercultural interaction involves both static and dynamic, and both personal and contextual, elements.

A Social Psychological Perspective

The social psychological perspective emphasizes that identity is created in part by the self and in part in relation to group membership. According to this perspective, the self is composed of multiple identities, and these notions of identity are culture bound. How, then, do we come to understand who we are? That de-

TABLE 5-1 THREE PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITY AND COMMUNICATION

Social psychological	Communication	Critical
Identity created by self (by relating to groups)	Identity formed through communication with others	Identity shaped through social, historical forces
Emphasizes individualized, familial, and spiritual self (cross-cultural perspective)	Emphasizes avowal and ascribed dimensions	Emphasizes contexts and resisting ascribed identity

pends very much on our cultural background. According to Western psychologists like Erik Erikson, our identities are self-created, formed through identity conflicts and crises, through identity diffusion and confusion (Erikson, 1950, 1968). Occasionally, we may need a moratorium, a time-out, in the process. Our identities are created not in one smooth, orderly process but in spurts, with some events providing insights into who we are and long periods intervening during which we may not think much about ourselves or our identities.

Cross-Cultural Perspectives In the United States, young people are often encouraged to develop a strong sense of identity, to “know who they are,” to be independent and self-reliant, which reflects an emphasis on the cultural value of individualism. However, this is not the case in many other countries, in which there is a more collectivistic orientation. Cross-cultural psychologist Alan Roland (1988) has identified three universal aspects of identity present in all individuals: (1) an individualized identity, (2) a familial identity, and (3) a spiritual identity. Cultural groups usually emphasize one or two of these dimensions and downplay the other(s). Let’s see how this works. The **individualized identity** is the sense of an independent “I,” with sharp distinctions between the self and others. This identity is emphasized by most groups in the United States, where young people are encouraged to be independent and self-reliant at a fairly early age—by adolescence.

In contrast, the **familial identity**, evident in many collectivistic cultures, stresses the importance of emotional connectedness to and interdependence with others. It also involves a strong identification with the reputation and honor of others in hierarchical groups. For example, in many African and Asian societies, and in some cultural groups in the United States, children are encouraged and expected to form strong, interdependent bonds, first with the family and later with other groups. As one of our students explains,

to be Mexican American is to unconditionally love one’s family and all it stands for. Mexican-Americans are an incredibly close-knit group of people, especially when it comes to family. We are probably the only culture that can actually recite the names of our fourth cousins by heart. In this respect our families are like clans,



POINT OF VIEW

Communication scholar Ge Gao contrasts the Western idea of the independent self with the Chinese notion of the interdependent self.

In the Western world, an “individual” signifies an independent entity with free will, emotions and personality. An individual, however, is not conceptualized in this way in the Chinese culture. . . . The incomplete nature of the self is supported by both Taoism and Confucianism even though they differ in many fundamental ways. Taoism defines self as part of nature. Self and nature together complete a harmonious relationship. Self in the Confucian sense is defined by a person’s surrounding relations, which often are derived from kinship networks and supported by cultural values such as filial piety, loyalty, dignity, and integrity. . . .

The other-orientation thus is key to an interdependent self. Congruous with the notion of an interdependent self, the Chinese self also needs to be recognized, defined, and completed by others. The self’s orientation to others’ needs, wishes, and expectations is essential to the development of the Chinese self.

Source: From “Self and Other: A Chinese Perspective on Interpersonal Relationships,” by Ge Gao, 1996, *Communication in Personal Relationships Across Cultures*, edited by W. G. Gudykunst, S. Ting-Toomey, and T. Nishida, pp. 83–84.

they go much further than the immediate family and very deep into extended families. We even have a celebration, Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) that honors our ancestors.

In these societies, educational, occupational, and even marital choices are made by individuals with extensive family guidance. The goal of the developed identity is not to become independent from others, but rather to gain an understanding of and cultivate one’s place in the complex web of interdependence with others. Communication scholar Ge Gao (1996) describes the Chinese sense of self:

The other-orientation thus is key to an interdependent self. Congruous with the notion of an interdependent self, the Chinese self also needs to be recognized, defined, and completed by others. The self’s orientation to others’ needs, wishes, and expectations is essential to the development of the Chinese self. (p. 84)

In addition, the understanding of the familial self may be more connected to others and situation bound. According to studies comparing North Americans’ and East Asians’ senses of identity, when asked to describe themselves, the North Americans give more abstract, situation-free descriptions (“I am kind,” “I am outgoing,” “I am quiet in the morning”), whereas East Asians tend to describe their memberships and relationships to others rather than themselves (“I am a mother,” “I am the youngest child in my family,” “I am a member of tennis club”) (Cross, 2000).

The third dimension is the **spiritual identity**, the inner spiritual reality that is realized and experienced to varying extents by people through a number of outlets. For example, the spiritual self in India is expressed through a structure of gods and goddess and through rituals and mediation. In Japan, the realization of the spiritual self tends more toward aesthetic modes, such as the tea ceremony and flower arranging (Roland, 1988).

Clearly, identity development does not occur in the same way in every society. The notion of identity in India, Japan, and some Latino/a and Asian American groups emphasizes the integration of the familial and the spiritual self, but very little of the more individualized self.

This is not to say that there is not considerable individuality among people in these groups. However, the general identity contrasts dramatically with the predominant mode in most U.S. cultural groups, in which the individualized self is emphasized and there is little attention to the familial self. However, there may be some development of the spiritual self among devout Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or Muslim individuals.

Groups play an important part in the development of all these dimensions of self. As we are growing up, we identify with many groups, based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, religion, and nationality (Tajfel, 1981, 1982). And depending on our cultural background, we may develop tight or looser bonds with these groups. By comparing ourselves and others with members of these groups, we come to understand who we are. Because we belong to various groups, we develop multiple identities that come into play at different times, depending on the context. For example, in going to church or temple, we may highlight our religious identity. In going to clubs or bars, we may highlight our sexual orientation identity. Women who join social groups exclusive to women (or men who attend social functions just for men) are highlighting their gender identity.

A Communication Perspective

The communication perspective builds on the notions of identity formation discussed previously but takes a more dynamic turn. That is, it emphasizes that identities are negotiated, co-created, reinforced, and challenged through communication with others; they emerge when messages are exchanged between persons (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993). This means that presenting our identities is not a simple process. Does everyone see you as you see yourself? Probably not. To understand how these images may conflict, the concepts of avowal and ascription are useful.

Avowal is the process by which individuals portray themselves, whereas **ascription** is the process by which others attribute identities to them. Sometimes these processes are congruent. For example, we (Judith and Tom) see ourselves as professors and hope that students also see us as professors. We also see ourselves as young, but many students do not concur, ascribing an “old person” identity to us. This ascribed identity challenges our avowed identity. And these conflicting views influence the communication between us and our students.

Different identities are emphasized depending on the individuals we are communicating with and the topics of conversation. For example, in a social conversation with someone we are attracted to, our gender or sexual orientation identity is probably more important to us than other identities (ethnicity, nationality). And our communication is probably most successful when the person we are talking with confirms the identity we think is most important at the moment. In this sense, competent intercultural communication affirms the identity that is most salient in any conversation (Collier & Thomas, 1988). For example, if you are talking with a professor about a research project, the conversation will be most competent if the interaction confirms the salient identities (professor and student) rather than other identities (e.g., those based on gender, religion, or ethnicity).

How do you feel when someone does not recognize the identity you believe is most salient? For example, suppose your parents treat you as a child (their ascription) and not as an independent adult (your avowal). How might this affect communication? One of our students describes how he reacts when people ascribe a different identity than the one he avows:

Pretty much my entire life I was seen not as American but as half Mexican. In reality I am 50% Mexican and 50% Dutch. So technically I am half Mexican and half Dutch American. I always say it like that but it was obvious that not everybody saw it like that. I was asked if I was Hawaiian, Persian, and even Italian, but I was able to politely tell them about myself.

Central to the communication perspective is the idea that our identities are expressed communicatively—in core symbols, labels, and norms. **Core symbols** (or cultural values) tell us about the fundamental beliefs and the central concepts that define a particular identity. Communication scholar Michael Hecht and his colleagues (Hecht, 1998; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993) have identified the contrasting core symbols associated with various ethnic identities. For example, core symbols of African American identity may be positivity, sharing, uniqueness, realism, and assertiveness. Individualism is often cited as a core symbol of European American identity. Core symbols are not only expressed but also created and shaped through communication. Labels are a category of core symbols; they are the terms we use to refer to particular aspects of our own and others' identities—for example, *African American*, *Latino*, *White*, or *European American*.

Finally, some norms of behavior are associated with particular identities. For example, women may express their gender identity by being more concerned about safety than men. They may take more precautions when they go out at night, such as walking in groups. People might express their religious identity by participating in activities such as going to church or Bible study meetings.

A Critical Perspective

Contextual Identity Formation The driving force behind a critical approach is the attempt to understand identity formation within the contexts of history, economics, politics, and discourse. To grasp this notion, ask yourself: How and why



FIGURE 5-1 We have many different identities—including gender, ethnicity, age, religion, nationality, and sexuality—that we express in different ways at different times. Celebrations are one way to highlight identity. Here, Sikhs in the northern Indian city of Chandigarh light candles in a temple to celebrate Diwali. Diwali marks the age-old culture of India and celebrates knowledge and the vanquishing of ignorance. (© *Dipak Kumar/Reuters/Getty Images*)

do people identify with particular groups and not others? What choices are available to them?

We are all subject to being pigeonholed into identity categories, or contexts, even before we are born. (See Figure 5-1.) Many parents ponder a name for their unborn child, who is already part of society through his or her relationship to the parents. Some children have a good start at being, say, Jewish or Chicana before they are even born. We cannot ignore the ethnic, socioeconomic, or racial positions from which we start our identity journeys.

To illustrate, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1977) offers the example of two children on a train that stops at a station. Each child looks out a window and identifies the location: One says that they are in front of the door for the ladies' bathroom; the other says they are in front of the gentlemen's. Both children see and use labels from their seating position to describe where they are; they are on the same train, but they describe their locations differently. Just as we are never "out" of position, we are never "outside" of language and its system that helps define us. And, like the two children, where we are positioned—by language and by society—influences how and what we see and, most importantly, what it means.

The identities that others may ascribe to us are socially and politically determined. They are not constructed by the self alone. We must ask ourselves what drives the construction of particular kinds of identities. For example, the label “heterosexual” is a relatively recent one, created less than a hundred years ago (Katz, 1995). Today, people do not hesitate to identify themselves as “heterosexuals.” A critical perspective insists on the constructive nature of this process and attempts to identify the social forces and needs that give rise to these identities.

Resisting Ascribed Identities When we invoke such discourses about identity, we are pulled into the social forces that feed the discourse. We might resist the position they put us in, and we might try to ascribe other identities to ourselves. Nevertheless, we must begin from that position in carving out a new identity.

French philosopher Louis Althusser (1971) uses the term **interpellation** to refer to this process. He notes that we are pushed into this system of social forces

by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: “Hey you there!” . . . Experience shows that the practical telecommunication of hailings is such that they hardly ever miss their man: verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed. And yet it is a strange phenomenon, and one which cannot be explained solely by “guilt feelings.” (p. 163)

This hailing process that Althusser describes operates in intercultural communication interactions. It establishes the foundation from which the interaction occurs. For example, occasionally, someone will ask Tom if he is Japanese, a question that puts him in an awkward position. He does not hold Japanese citizenship, nor has he ever lived in Japan. Yet the question probably doesn’t mean to address these issues. Rather, the person is asking what it means to be “Japanese.” How can Tom reconfigure his position in relation to this question?

The Dynamic Nature of Identities The social forces that give rise to particular identities are never stable but are always changing. Therefore, the critical perspective insists on the dynamic nature of identities. For example, the emergence of the European Union has given new meaning to the notion of being “European” as an identity. Similarly, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, have caused many Americans to reconsider what it means to be “American.” And the various and sometimes contradictory notions of what it means to be an American highlights the fluidity and dynamic nature of identities. For some, being “American” now means having a renewed patriotism, as described by one of our students:

To be an American is to be proud. After September 11, a sense of patriotism swept through this country that I have never felt before. Growing up I heard about how patriotic the United States was during WW I and WW II, but I had never experienced it personally. After that day, it was as if racial, religious, and democratic differences had stopped. Even if that tension only stopped temporarily, the point



POINT OF VIEW

Writer Philippe Wamba describes how his multicultural identity developed across several continents and languages. His father (from the Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaire) and mother (an African American midwesterner) met and married while attending college in Michigan. His father's career took the family first to Boston (where Phillippe was one of only a few Blacks in his school), then to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where he learned flawless Swahili and added a third heritage to his cultural background: "half American, half Zairean, and half Tanzanian." Now an adult, he describes his answer to the question "Where are you from?"

I used to try to find succinct ways of responding to the question "Where are you from"—simple one-word answers that would satisfy the curious. I envied my friends their ability to state one place confidently and simply say "New York" or "Kenya." . . . For a period, I even referred to myself as a "a citizen of the world," a high-minded moniker, bred of my own boredom and frustration, that used to annoy people. . . . Now I have decided that the succinct answer is always inadequate and that the story of origin is always a complex saga. . . . I have come to reject the idea of a simple, dualized family heritage and the simple bicultural understanding of self I internalized as a child. . . . For a time I lived as a sophisticated cultural chameleon, attempting to blend with my shifting surroundings by assuming the appearance and habits of those around me. . . . In the end I am both African and African American and therefore neither. I envy others their hometowns and unconflicted patriotism, but no longer would I exchange them for my freedom to seek multiple homes and nations and to forge my own.

Source: From "A Middle Passage," by P. Wamba, 1998, *Half and Half: Writers on Growing Up Biracial + Bicultural*, edited by C. C. O'Hearn, pp. 150–169.

is that it did stop. Our country came together to help, pray, and donate. The feeling of being an American is a sense of feeling and strength and pride.

For others, the events of 9/11 led to more ambivalence about being "American":

The media showed negative responses that other countries displayed toward Americans. This makes me ponder what I've done, as a White mut American to make people feel this way. I know it is not necessarily my fault but actually American beliefs as a whole. . . . The "cop in the head" feeling occurs in me whenever I see a group of people gathered around speaking a foreign language and staring at me. Maybe it is an insecurity issue within me, aided by rumors I've heard, that initiates this uneasy feeling. I really hope Americans, as a whole, become more accepting of each other so that other countries will see that we can work together with such diversity.

For another example, look at the way that identity labels have changed from "colored" to "Negro" to "Black" to "Afro-American" to "African American."

Although the labels seem to refer to the same group of people, the political and cultural identities of those so labeled are different. Indeed, the contexts in which the terms developed and were used vary considerably.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES

People can identify with a multitude of groups. This section describes some of the major types of groups.

Gender Identity

We often begin life with gendered identities. When newborns arrive in our culture, they may be greeted with clothes and blankets in either blue for boys or pink for girls. To establish a **gender identity** for the newborn, visitors may ask if the baby is a boy or a girl. But gender is not the same as biological sex. This distinction is important in understanding how our views on biological sex influence gender identities.

What it means to be a man or a woman in our society is heavily influenced by cultural notions. For example, some activities are considered more masculine or more feminine. Thus, whether people hunt or sew or fight or read poetry can transform the ways that others view them. Similarly, the programs that people watch on television—soap operas, football games, and so on—affect how they socialize with others, contributing to gendered contexts.

As culture changes, so does the notion of what we idealize as masculine or feminine. Cultural historian Gail Bederman (1995) observes:

Even the popular imagery of a perfect male body changed. In the 1860s, the middle class had seen the ideal male body as lean and wiry. By the 1890s, however, an ideal male body required physical bulk and well-defined muscles. (p. 15)

In this sense, the male body, as well as the female body, can be understood not in its “natural” state but in relation to idealized notions of masculinity and femininity. To know that this man or that woman is particularly good-looking requires an understanding of the gendered notions of attractiveness in a culture.

Our notions of masculinity and femininity change continually, driven by commercial interests and other cultural forces. For example, there is a major push now to market cosmetics to men. However, advertisers acknowledge that this requires sensitivity to men’s ideas about makeup:

Unlike women, most men don’t want to talk about makeup, don’t want to go out in public to shop for makeup and don’t know how to use makeup. The first barrier is getting men to department stores or specialty shops to buy products. (Yamanouchi, 2002, p. D1)

Our expression of gender not only communicates who we think we are but also constructs a sense of who we want to be. Initially, we learn what masculinity and femininity mean in our culture. Then, through various media, we monitor

how these notions shift and negotiate to communicate our gendered selves to others.

Consider, for example, the contemporary trend in the United States for women to have very full lips. If one's lips are not naturally full, there is always the option of getting collagen injections or having other body fat surgically inserted into the lips. In contrast, our Japanese students tell us that full lips are not considered at all attractive in Japan. The dynamic character of gender reflects its close connection to culture. Society has many images of masculinity and femininity; we do not all seek to look and act according to a single ideal. At the same time, we *do* seek to communicate our gendered identities as part of who we are.

Gender identity is also demonstrated by communication style. Women's and men's different communication styles sometimes lead to misunderstanding and conflict. For example, sometimes U.S. women make sympathetic noises in response to what a friend says, whereas men say nothing out of respect for the other person's independence. And women may interpret men's silence as not caring. Another area of misinterpretation is the reaction to "troubles talk." Typically, women commiserate by talking about a similar situation they experienced. However, men who follow cultural rules for conversational dominance interpret this as stealing the stage.

Yet another difference arises in storytelling. Men tend to be more linear in telling stories; women tend to give more details and offer tangential information, which men interpret as an inability to get to the point (Tannen, 1990). Men and women also often misinterpret relationship talk. Women may express more interest in the relationship process and may feel better simply discussing it. Men who are problem-solving oriented may see little point in discussing something if nothing is identified as needing fixing (Wood, 1994, pp. 145–148).

Age Identity

As we age, we also play into cultural notions of how individuals our age should act, look, and behave; that is, we develop an **age identity**. As we grow older, we sometimes look at the clothes displayed in store windows or advertised in newspapers and magazines and feel that we are either too old or too young for that "look." These feelings stem from an understanding of what age means and how we identify with people that age.

Some people feel old at 30; others feel young at 40 or 50. There is nothing inherent in age that tells us we are young or old. Rather, our notions of age and youth are all based on cultural conventions. These same cultural conventions also suggest that it is inappropriate to engage in a romantic relationship with someone who is too old or too young.

Our notions of age often change as we grow older ourselves. When we are quite young, someone in college seems old; when we are in college, we do not feel so old. Yet the relative nature of age is only one part of the identity process. Social constructions of age also play a role. Different generations often have different philosophies, values, and ways of speaking. For example, recent data show that today's college freshmen are more liberal politically and more inter-



STUDENT VOICES

I think that my being in college with kids just a little older than my son has helped me “learn the language” of the younger generation. So my college classmates have helped me acculturate into the younger generation at a more rapid speed than others my age. When I sit in class with these young people who have graduated from high school and are going to college, it is very easy to focus on these kids as being representative of the younger generation. Then there are the stereotypical “bad” teenagers—the gang members, the druggies, and so on. It isn’t fair to generalize the younger generation with these stereotypes, either.

Are the cultural differences of our two age groups just as approachable as in any other intercultural exchange? I believe that they are. By using the skills that I am learning in bridging cultural differences, I am getting better at bridging the generation gap between “old mom” and “18-year-old teenager.” Interpersonal skills, flexibility, motivation, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and love are all applicable when communicating interculturally with teenagers.

—Marcia

ested in volunteer work and civic responsibility than were Gen Xers. Scholars who view generations as “cultural groups” say that these characteristics make them similar to the World War I generation—politically curious and assertive, and devoted to a sense of personal responsibility (Sax, Lindholm, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney, 2001).

Sometimes these generational differences can lead to conflict in the workplace. For example, young people who entered the job market during the “dot com” years have little corporate loyalty and think nothing of changing jobs when a better opportunity comes along. This can irritate Baby Boomer workers, who emphasize the importance of demonstrating corporate loyalty, of “paying one’s dues” to the establishment while gradually working one’s way “up the corporate ladder.” Although not all people in any generation are alike, the attempt to find trends across generations reflects our interest in understanding age identity.

Racial and Ethnic Identities

Racial Identity Race consciousness, or **racial identity**, is largely a modern phenomenon. In the United States today, the issue of race is both controversial and pervasive. It is the topic of many public discussions, from television talk shows to talk radio. Yet many people feel uncomfortable talking about it or think it should not be an issue in daily life. Perhaps we can better understand the contemporary issues if we look at how the notion of race developed historically in the United States.

Current debates about race have their roots in the 15th and 16th centuries, when European explorers encountered people who looked different from themselves. The debates centered on religious questions of whether there was “one

family of man.” If so, what rights were to be accorded to those who were different? Debates about which groups were “human” and which were “animal” pervaded popular and legal discourse and provided a rationale for slavery. Later, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the scientific community tried to establish a classification system of race, based on genetics and cranial capacity. However, these efforts were largely unsuccessful.

Today, most scientists have abandoned a strict biological basis for classifying racial groups, deferring instead to a social science approach to understanding race. They recognize that racial categories like White and Black are constructed in social and historical contexts.

Several arguments refute the physiological basis for race. First, racial categories vary widely throughout the world. In general, distinctions between White and Black are fairly rigid in the United States, and many people become uneasy when they are unable to categorize individuals. In contrast, Brazil recognizes a wide variety of intermediate racial categories in addition to White and Black. These variations indicate a cultural, rather than a biological, basis for racial classification (Omi & Winant, 1998). Terms like *mulatto* and *Black Irish* demonstrate cultural classifications; terms like *Caucasoid* and *Australoid* are examples of biological classification.

Second, U.S. law uses a variety of definitions to determine racial categories. A 1982 case in Louisiana reopened debates about race as socially created rather than biologically determined. Susie Phipps applied for a passport and discovered that under Louisiana law she was Black because she was $\frac{1}{32}$ African (her great-grandmother had been a slave). She then sued to be reclassified as White. Not only did she consider herself White, inasmuch as she grew up among Whites, but she also was married to a White man. And because her children were only $\frac{1}{64}$ African, they were legally White. Although she lost her lawsuit, the ensuing political and popular discussions persuaded Louisiana lawmakers to change the way the state classified people racially. It is important that the law was changed, but this legal situation does not obscure the fact that social definitions of race continue to exist (Hasian & Nakayama, 1999).

A third example of how racial categories are socially constructed is illustrated by their fluid nature. As more and more southern Europeans immigrated to the United States in the 19th century, the established Anglo and German society tried to classify these newcomers (Irish and Jewish, as well as southern European) as non-White. However, this attempt was not successful because, based on the narrower definition, Whites might have become demographically disempowered. Instead, the racial line was drawn to include all Europeans, and people from outside of Europe (e.g., immigrants from China) were designated as non-White (Omi & Winant, 1998).

Racial categories, then, are based to some extent on physical characteristics, but they are also constructed in fluid social contexts. It probably makes more sense to talk about racial *formation* than racial *categories*, thereby casting race as a complex of social meanings rather than as a fixed and objective concept. How people construct these meanings and think about race influences the ways in which they communicate.

Ethnic Identity In contrast to racial identity, **ethnic identity** may be seen as a set of ideas about one's own ethnic group membership. It typically includes several dimensions: (1) self-identification, (2) knowledge about the ethnic culture (traditions, customs, values, and behaviors), and (3) feelings about belonging to a particular ethnic group. Ethnic identity often involves a shared sense of origin and history, which may link ethnic groups to distant cultures in Asia, Europe, Latin America, or other locations.

Having an ethnic identity means experiencing a sense of belonging to a particular group and knowing something about the shared experience of group members. For instance, Judith grew up in an ethnic community. She heard her parents and relatives speak German, and her grandparents made several trips back to Germany and talked about their German roots. This experience contributed to her ethnic identity.

For some U.S. residents, ethnicity is a specific and relevant concept. They see themselves as connected to an origin outside the United States—as Mexican American, Japanese American, Welsh American, and so on—or to some region prior to its being absorbed into the United States—Navajo, Hopi, and so on. As one African American student told us, “I have always known my history and the history of my people in this country. I will always be first African American and then American. Who I am is based on my heritage.” For others, ethnicity is a vague concept. They see themselves as “American” and reject the notion of **hyphenated Americans**. One of our students explains:

I am American. I am not German American or Irish American or Native American. I have never set foot on German or Irish land. I went to Scotland a couple years ago and found a Scottish plaid that was my family crest. I still didn't even feel a real connection to it and bought it as more of a joke, to say, “Look! I'm Scottish!” even though in my heart I know I'm not.

We'll discuss the issues of ethnicity for White people later.

What, then, does *American* mean? Who defines it? Is there only one meaning, or are there many different meanings? It is important to determine what definition is being used by those who insist that we should all simply be “Americans.” If one's identity is “just American,” how is this identity formed, and how does it influence communication with others who see themselves as hyphenated Americans (Alba, 1985, 1990; Carbaugh, 1989)?

Racial Versus Ethnic Identity Scholars dispute whether racial and ethnic identity are similar or different. Some suggest that ethnic identity is constructed by both selves and others but that racial identity is constructed solely by others. They stress as well that race overrides ethnicity in the way people classify others (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998). The American Anthropological Association has suggested that the U.S. government phase out use of the term *race* in the collection of federal data because the concept has no scientific validity or utility.

On the one hand, discussions about ethnicity tend to assume a “melting pot” perspective on U.S. society. On the other hand, discussions about race as shaped



POINT OF VIEW

This press release from the American Anthropological Association questions the utility of the term *race* and suggests that the government eliminate it from their data gathering.

The government should phase out use of the term “race” in the collection of federal data because the concept has no scientific justification in human biology, according to a statement released today by the American Anthropological Association (AAA).

Instead of race, ethnic categories, which better reflect the diversity of the US population, should be used. The AAA statement includes five recommendations for changes in the way the government collects information about its citizens. It addresses the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Directive 15, which designates racial and ethnic categories used in the US census and in innumerable other public and private research projects.

The recommendations outlined by the AAA include the immediate need for the OMB to combine the now-separate “race” and “ethnicity” questions into one question for the 2000 Census and to eliminate “race” by the time planning begins for the 2010 Census. Respondents should be allowed to identify more than one category in reporting their ancestry. Additionally, the AAA advocates more research to determine what terms best capture human variability in ways best understood by the American people.

. . . Probably the clearest data on human variation come from genetic studies. Genetic data do show differences between groups and these can potentially trace an individual’s likely geographic origin. This can be helpful in such applications as health screening. Nevertheless, the data also show that any two individuals within a particular population are as different genetically as any two people selected from any two populations in the world. . . .

Source: From “AAA Recommends Race Be Scrapped; Suggests New Government Categories,” press release/OMB15, September 1997, www.aaanet.org/gvt/obmnews.htm.

by U.S. history allow us to talk about racism. If we never talk about race, but only about ethnicity, can we consider the effects and influences of racism?

Bounded Versus Dominant Identities One way to sort out the relationship between ethnicity and race is to differentiate between bounded and dominant (or normative) identities (Frankenburg, 1993; Trinh, 1986/1987). Bounded cultures are characterized by groups that are specific but not dominant. For most White people, it is easy to comprehend the sense of belonging in a bounded group (e.g., an ethnic group). Clearly, for example, being Amish means following the *ordnung* (community rules). Growing up in a German American home, Judith’s identity included a clear emphasis on seriousness and very little on communicative expressiveness. This identity differed from that of her Italian American friends at college, who seemed much more expressive.

However, what it means to belong to the dominant, or normative, culture is more elusive. *Normative* means “setting the norm for a society.” In the United States, Whites clearly are the normative group in that they set the standards for appropriate and effective behavior. Although it can be difficult for White people to define what a normative White identity is, this does not deny its existence or importance. It is often not easy to see what the cultural practices are that link White people together. For example, we seldom think of Thanksgiving or Valentine’s Day as White holidays.

Our sense of racial or ethnic identity develops over time, in stages, and through communication with others. These stages seem to reflect our growing understanding of who we are and depend to some extent on the groups we belong to. Many ethnic or racial groups share the experience of oppression. In response, they may generate attitudes and behaviors consistent with a natural internal struggle to develop a strong sense of group identity and self-identity. For many cultural groups, these strong identities ensure their survival.

Religious Identity

Religious identity can be an important dimension of many people’s identities, as well as an important site of intercultural conflict. Often, religious identity is conflated with racial or ethnic identity, which makes it difficult to view religious identity simply in terms of belonging to a particular religion. For example, when someone says, “I am Jewish,” does it mean that he practices Judaism? That he views Jewish identity as an ethnic identity? Or when someone says, “She has a Jewish last name,” is it a statement that recognizes religious identity? With a historical view, we can see Jews as a racial group, an ethnic group, and a religious group.

Drawing distinctions between various identities—racial, ethnic, class, national, and regional—can be problematic. For example, Italians and Irish are often viewed as Catholics, and Episcopalians are frequently seen as belonging to the upper classes. Issues of religion and ethnicity have come to the forefront in the war against Al-Qaeda and other militant groups. Although those who carried out the attacks against the Pentagon and the World Trade Center were Muslims and Arabs, it is hardly true that all Muslims are Arabs or that all Arabs are Muslims (Feghali, 1997).

Religious differences have been at the root of contemporary conflicts from the Middle East to Northern Ireland, and from India and Pakistan to Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the United States, religious conflicts caused the Mormons to flee the Midwest for Utah in the mid-19th century. And, more recently, religious conflicts have become very real for some Arab Americans as the U.S. government presses the war against terrorism, with many of those people subject to suspicion if not persecution. And militant Muslims in the Middle East and elsewhere see their struggle against the United States as a very serious endeavor and are willing to die for their religious beliefs.

In the United States, we often believe that people should be free to practice whatever religion they wish. Conflicts arise, however, when the religious beliefs of some individuals are imposed on others who may not share those beliefs. For

example, some Jews see the predominance of Christmas trees and Christian crosses as an affront to their religious beliefs.

People in some religions communicate and mark their religious differences by their clothing. For example, Hassidic Jews wear traditional, somber clothing, and Muslim women are often veiled according to the Muslim guideline of female modesty. Of course, most religions are not identified by clothing. For example, you may not know if someone is Buddhist, Catholic, Lutheran, or atheist based upon the way he or she dresses. Because religious identities are less salient, everyday interactions may not invoke religious identity.

Class Identity

We don't often think about socioeconomic class as an important part of our identity. Yet scholars have shown that class often plays an important role in shaping our reactions to and interpretations of culture. For example, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1987) studied the various responses to art, sports, and other cultural activities of people in different French social classes. According to Bourdieu, working-class people prefer to watch soccer whereas upper-class individuals like tennis, and middle-class people prefer photographic art whereas upper-class individuals favor less representational art. As these findings reveal, class distinctions are real and can be linked to actual behavioral practices and preferences.

English professor Paul Fussell (1992) shows how similar signs of **class identity** operate in U.S. society. According to Fussell, the magazines we read, the foods we eat, and the words we use often reflect our social class position. At some level, we recognize these class distinctions, but we consider it impolite to ask directly about a person's class background. Therefore, we may use communication strategies to place others in a class hierarchy. Unfortunately, these strategies don't always yield accurate information. For example, people may try to guess your class background by the foods you eat. Some foods are seen as "rich folk's food"—for instance, lamb, white asparagus, brie, artichokes, goose, and caviar. Do you feel as if you are revealing your class background if you admit that these foods are unfamiliar to you? Perhaps not admitting your unfamiliarity is a form of "passing," of representing yourself as belonging to a group you really don't belong to. Another strategy that people may use to guess a person's class background is to ask where that person did her or his undergraduate work.

Most people in the United States recognize class associations even as they may deny that such class divisions exist. What does this apparent contradiction indicate? Most importantly, it reveals the complexities of class issues, particularly in the United States. We often don't really know the criteria for inclusion in a given social class. Is membership determined by financial assets? By educational level? By profession? By family background? These factors may or may not be indicators of class.

Another reason for this apparent contradiction is that people in the majority or normative class (the middle class) tend not to think about class, whereas those in the working class are often reminded that their communication styles and lifestyle choices are not the norm. In this respect, class is like race. For ex-

ample, terms like *trailer trash* or *white trash* show the negative connotations associated with people who are not middle class (Moon & Rolison, 1998).

A central assumption of the American Dream is that, with hard work and persistence, individuals can improve their class standing, even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. For example, census data show that the disparity between top and bottom income levels is actually increasing. In 1970, households in the top 20% of the income distribution earned about 44% of all income; by 1998, this figure had increased to 50%. The share of total income received by households in every other income group declined over the same period (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). Scholar Donna Lanston (1995) explains:

In the myth of the classless society, ambition and intelligence alone are responsible for success. The myth conceals the existence of a class society, which serves many functions. One of the main ways it keeps the working-class and poor locked into a class-based system in a position of servitude is by cruelly creating false hope . . . that they can have different opportunities in life. (p. 101)

Lanston goes on to suggest that another outcome of this myth is that, when poverty persists, the poor are blamed. They are poor because of something they did or didn't do—for example, they were lazy or didn't try hard enough, or they were unlucky. It is a classic case of blaming the victim. And the media often reinforce these notions. As Leonardo DiCaprio's character in the movie *Titanic* shows us, upward mobility is easy enough—merely a matter of being opportunistic, charming, and a little bit lucky.

Working-class individuals who aren't upwardly mobile are often portrayed in TV sitcoms and movies as unintelligent, criminal, or unwilling to do what they have to do to better their lot in life. (Consider, for example, the TV show *Marrried With Children*.) And members of the real working class, as frequent guests on television talk shows like *Rikki Lake*, *Jerry Springer* and on court shows like *Judge Judy* and *Judge Joe Brown*, are urged to be verbally contentious and even physically aggressive with each other.

The point is that, although class identity is not as readily apparent as, say, gender identity, it still influences our perceptions of and communication with others. Race, class, and sometimes gender identity are interrelated. For example, statistically speaking, being born African American, poor, and female increases one's chances of remaining in poverty. But, of course, race and class are not synonymous. There are many poor Whites, and there are increasing numbers of wealthy African Americans. In this sense, these multiple identities are interrelated but not identical.

National Identity

Among many identities, we also have a **national identity**, which should not be confused with racial or ethnic identity. Nationality, unlike racial or ethnic identity, refers to one's legal status in relation to a nation. Many U.S. citizens can trace their ethnicity to Latin America, Asia, Europe, or Africa, but their nationality, or citizenship, is with the United States.



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What is Japanese national identity? I have to say that many things are in the very psyche, the Japanese psyche. They are more than feelings—the way you feel when the spring is around and see cherry blossoms everywhere. You become grateful to the cycle of nature and the promise that spring always comes. Such a feeling that you believe that you share with others, as people talk about it, is a big part of national identity, I think. It is also in big sport events, where you can feel one with others by sharing emotions. It is in the fixation to the food, the meticulous attention and kodawari (fixation) about food. And it is felt in many folk songs (douyou), which sing a lot about nature, living creatures, etc. In sum, there are so many things about Japanese national identity. But, to me, they are never about the national flag or pledging allegiance to your country.

—Tamie

Although national identity may seem to be a clear-cut issue, this is not the case when the nation's status is unclear. For example, bloody conflicts erupted over the attempted secession in the mid-1800s of the Confederate States of America from the United States. Similar conflicts erupted in more recent times when Eritrea tried to separate from Ethiopia, and Chechnya from Russia. Less bloody conflicts that involved nationhood led, in the former Czechoslovakia, to the separation of Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Contemporary nationhood struggles are being played out as Quebec attempts to separate from Canada and as Corsica and Tahiti attempt to separate from France. Sometimes nations disappear from the political map but persist in the social imagination and eventually reemerge, such as Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Other times national identity may shift in significant ways, as in the United States after the attacks of September 11, 2001, when ideas about national identity seemed to incorporate increased expressions of patriotism. One of our Japanese graduate students explains how her feeling of national identity is much different from what she sees in the United States:

I have seen so many “God bless America,” “Proud to be American” messages EVERYWHERE as I have lived here as a Japanese sojourner. . . . Coming from Japan, I don’t think I have the same notion of “I am proud about my country.” I love my culture, the beauty, the meanings, the spirituality that surround it. But I feel that I have been consciously or subconsciously taught that being proud of your country can be dangerous, misleading, blinding. Look at what happened before 1945—how many people in my country thought about their country and framed the “cause” which led to a disaster (WW II). In fact, I have talked to my Japanese friends about this sentiment and mixed emotion I feel about the concept of “patriotism,” and almost all of them agreed with me—we were not taught to be proud of our country in the post-WW II era. Of course, each country has a different his-

tory, political situation, so what I am saying here doesn't necessarily translate to other people in other cultures.

It may sound funny, but one thing I would say I am proud of about my country is that I don't have to say I am proud of my country. I am proud that I can see both beautiful and ugly sides of my country's history. I feel free there, for not being pressured by anyone to say that I am proud of my country.

In sum, people have various ways of thinking about nationality, and they sometimes confuse nationality and ethnicity. Thus, we have overheard students asking minority students, “What is your nationality?” when they actually meant, “What is your ethnicity?” This confusion can lead to—and perhaps reflects—a lack of understanding about differences between, say, Asian Americans (ethnic group) and Asians (nationality groups). It can also tend to alienate Asian Americans and others who have been in the United States for several generations but are still perceived as foreigners.

Regional Identity

Closely related to nationality is the notion of **regional identity**. Many regions of the world have separate, but vital and important, cultural identities. The Scottish Highlands is a region of northern Scotland that is distinctly different from the Lowlands, and regional identity remains strong in the Highlands.

Here in the United States, regional identities remain important, but perhaps less so as the nation moves toward homogeneity. Southerners, for example, often view themselves, and are viewed by others, as a distinct cultural group. Similarly, Texas advertises itself as “A Whole Other Country,” promoting its regional identity. Although some regional identities can fuel national independence movements, they more often reflect cultural identities that affirm distinctive cuisines, dress, manners, and language. These identities may become important in intercultural communication situations. For example, suppose you meet someone who is Chinese. Whether the person is from Beijing, Hong Kong, or elsewhere in China may raise important communication issues. After all, Mandarin is not understood by Cantonese speakers, although both are dialects of the Chinese language. Indeed, there are many dialects in China, and they certainly are not understood by all other Chinese speakers.

One fairly recent variation in regional identities has to do with the degree of diversity within certain parts of the United States. Data from the 2000 census reveal that the South and the West are the most diverse, along with the coastal Northeast. The Midwest, in contrast, with a few exceptions, remains relatively homogenous (Brewer & Suchan, 2001, pp. 22–23). In addition, the overwhelming majority of multiracial individuals (67%) live in the South and the West (pp. 87–89). What are the implications for identity and intercultural communication? It could mean that people in these areas have more opportunities for understanding and practicing intercultural communication, and so benefit from the diversity. Or they may withdraw into their own groups and protect their racial and ethnic “borders.”

Personal Identity

Many issues of identity are closely tied to our notions of self. Each of us has a **personal identity**, but it may not be unified or coherent. A dialectical perspective allows us to see identity in a more complex way. We are who we think we are; at the same time, however, contextual and external forces constrain and influence our self-perceptions. We have many identities, and these can conflict. For example, according to communication scholar Victoria Chen (1992), some Chinese American women feel caught between the traditional values of their parents' culture and their own desire to be Americanized. From the parents' point of view, the daughters are never Chinese enough. From the perspective of many people within the dominant culture, though, it is difficult to relate to these Chinese American women simply as "American women, born and reared in this society" (p. 231). The dialectical tension related to issues of identity for these women reveals the strain between feeling obligated to behave in traditional ways at home and yet holding a Western notion of gender equality. A dialectical perspective sees these contradictions as real and presenting challenges in communication and everyday life.

Our personal identities are important to us, and we try to communicate them to others. We are more or less successful depending on how others respond to us. We use the various ways that identity is constructed to portray ourselves as we want others to see us.

IDENTITY, STEREOTYPES, AND PREJUDICE

The identity characteristics described previously sometimes form the basis for stereotypes, prejudice, and racism. The origins of these have both individual and contextual elements. To make sense out of the overwhelming amount of information we receive, we necessarily categorize and generalize, sometimes relying on **stereotypes**—widely held beliefs about some group. Stereotypes help us know what to expect from others. They may be positive or negative. For example, Asian Americans have often been subjected to the positive "**model minority**" stereotype, which characterizes all Asians and Asian Americans as hard-working and serious. This stereotype became particularly prevalent in the United States during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, Asian Americans were seen as the "good" minority—in contrast to African Americans, who were often confrontative and even militant in their fight for equality.

Even positive stereotypes can be damaging in that they create unrealistic expectations for individuals. Simply because someone is Asian American (or pretty, or smart) does not mean that he or she will excel in school or be outgoing and charming. Stereotypes become particularly detrimental when they are negative and are held rigidly. Research has shown that, once adopted, stereotypes are difficult to discard. In fact, people tend to remember information that



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This essay describes how one group, a basketball team with several Native American players, resists an ascribed identity and a stereotype they feel is offensive.

Unable to persuade a local school to change a mascot name that offends them, a group of American Indian students at the University of Northern Colorado named their intramural basketball team “The Fighting Whities.”

The team chose a white man as its mascot to raise awareness of stereotypes that some cultures endure. “The message is, let’s do something that will let people see the other side of what it’s like to be a mascot” said Solomon Little Owl, a member of the team and director of Native American Student Services at the university.

The team, made of American Indians, Hispanics and Anglos, wears jerseys that say “Every thang’s going to be all white.”

The students are upset with Eaton High School for using an American Indian caricature on the team logo. The team is called the Reds.

“It’s not meant to be vicious, it is meant to be humorous,” said Ray White, a Mohawk American Indian on the team. “It puts people in our shoes.”

Eaton School District superintendent John Nuspl said the school’s logo is not derogatory and called the group’s criticism insulting. “There’s no mockery of Native Americans with this,” he said.

Source: From Associated Press, “Fighting Whities’ Mock School’s Indian Mascot,” March 11, 2002, www.azcentral.com/news/articles/0311fightingwhities-ON.html.

supports a stereotype but may not retain information that contradicts it (Hamilton, Sherman, & Ruvolo, 1990).

We pick up stereotypes in many ways, including from the media. In TV shows and movies, older people often are portrayed as needing help, and Asian Americans, African Americans, or Latino/as rarely play leading, assertive roles. Communication scholar Bishetta D. Merritt (2000) analyzes portrayals of African American women on television shows and decries the lack of multi-dimensional roles. She identifies the kinds of roles that perpetuate stereotypes:

Portrayals that receive little or no attention today are the background characters that merely serve as scenery on television programs. These characters include the homeless person on the street, the hotel lobby prostitute, or the drug user making a buy from her dealer. They may not be named in the credits or have recurring roles, but their mere appearance can have an impact on the consciousness of the viewer and, as a result, an impact on the imagery of the African American women. (p. 52)

We may learn stereotypes from our families and peers. One student described how she learned stereotyping and prejudice from her classmates:

One of my earliest experiences with a person ethnically diverse from me was when I was in kindergarten. A little girl in my class named Adelia was from Pakistan. I noticed that Adelia was a different color from me, but I didn't think it was a bad thing. I got along with her very well. We played the same games, watched the same cartoons, and enjoyed each other's company. Soon I discovered that my other friends didn't like Adelia as much as I did. They didn't want to hold hands with her, and they claimed that she was different from us. When I told them that Adelia was my friend, they didn't want to hold hands with me either. They started to poke fun at me and excluded me from their games. This hurt me so much that I stopped playing with Adelia, and I joined my friends in avoiding her. As a result, Adelia began to resent me and labeled me prejudiced.

Stereotypes can also develop out of negative experiences. If we have unpleasant encounters with people, we may generalize that unpleasantness to include all members of that group, whatever group characteristic we focus on (e.g., race, gender, or sexual orientation). This was demonstrated repeatedly after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Many people of Middle Eastern descent became victims of stereotyping, particularly when traveling. For example, one Arab American software developer from Dallas who was waiting for his flight home from Seattle to leave the gate was told by a flight attendant to take his belongings and get off the plane. Apparently, the pilot had been suspicious of his looks. He was questioned for more than an hour by authorities before being allowed to proceed.

Because stereotypes often operate at an unconscious level and so are persistent, people have to work consciously to reject them. First, they must recognize the stereotype, and then they must obtain information to counteract it. This is not easy because, as noted previously, we tend to “see” behavior that fits our stereotypes and to ignore that which doesn't. For example, if you think that most women are bad drivers, you will tend to notice when a female motorist makes a mistake but to ignore bad male driving. To undo this stereotype, you have to be very vigilant and do something that isn't “natural”—to be very conscious of how you “see” and categorize bad driving, and to note bad driving by both males and females.

Prejudice is a negative attitude toward a cultural group based on little or no experience. It is a prejudgment of sorts. Whereas stereotypes tell us what a group is like, prejudice tells us how we are likely to feel about that group (Newberg, 1994). Scholars disagree somewhat on the origins of prejudice and its relationship to stereotyping. Prejudice may arise from personal needs to feel positive about our own groups and negative about others, or it may arise from perceived or real threats (Hecht, 1998). Researchers Walter Stephan and Cookie Stephan (1996) have shown that tension between cultural groups and negative previous contact, along with status inequalities and perceived threats, can lead to prejudice.

Why do people hold prejudices? Psychologist Richard Brislin (1999) suggests that, just as stereotyping arises from normal cognitive functioning, holding prejudices may serve understandable functions. These functions may not excuse



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I fell in love with a first-generation Mexican American. It took many arguments and lots of time before he was accepted into my family. Once everyone saw what an incredible person Gabe is, I think they favored him more than me. . . . He and I had been together for a year and a half and the time had come for me to meet his family. I was extremely nervous because his parents spoke only Spanish and I only spoke English. How was I going to communicate with my boyfriend's family? To my surprise, this was the least of my worries. When we were introduced, I thought his parents were going to faint. I am "white." I am not the same race as this family, and they resented my having a relationship with their son. I must be very naïve, but I never thought prejudices would be directed toward me. This was quite an eye-opener for me. . . .

Unfortunately, Gabriel's sisters spoke English. They made quite a point to be rude and neglect me in every conversation they had. I felt terrible. Before I knew it, Gabe's sister, Amelia, pulled me into her room. She began explaining to me how I would never be part of their family. Because I was not of Hispanic descent, I was not worthy to be with her brother. She went on to tell me that her parents hated me. . . . This was really difficult for me to swallow. This family hated me because of something I have absolutely no control over, my race.

I sat there, not sure of what to say or do. I was so hurt and upset, I stood up and yelled. I told her that this is the problem with society. Why, when we have a chance to change what we hate, do we resist? How can we consciously continue doing these things? Basically, the same countless arguments I had with my parents, I had with Gabe's sister. Whatever happened in that room was the most rewarding experience. We continued discussing the problem. By the end of the conversation, we were such good friends. Shortly after that, Gabe's family felt like my family.

The slight taste of prejudice I felt has to be minimal compared to other people's experiences. I am thankful I was fortunate enough to have such an experience early in my life. I honestly have to admit, Amelia changed me for the better.

—Jennifer

prejudice, but they do help us understand why prejudice is so widespread. He identifies four such functions:

1. The utilitarian function. People hold certain prejudices because they can lead to rewards. For example, if your friends or family hold prejudices toward certain groups, it will be easier for you simply to share those attitudes, rather than risk rejection by contradicting their attitudes.
2. The ego-defensive function. People hold certain prejudices because they don't want to believe unpleasant things about themselves. For example, if either of us (Judith or Tom) is not a very good teacher, it will be useful

for us to hold negative stereotypes about students, such as that they are lazy and don't work hard. In this way, we can avoid confronting the real problem—our lack of teaching skills. The same kind of thing happens in the workplace: It is easier for people to stereotype women and minorities as unfit for jobs than to confront their own lack of skill or qualifications for a job.

3. The value-expressive function. People hold certain prejudices because they serve to reinforce aspects of life that are highly valued. Religious attitudes often function in this way. Some people are prejudiced against certain religious groups because they see themselves as holding beliefs in the one true God, and part of their doctrine is the belief that others are wrong. For instance, Judith's Mennonite family held prejudices against Catholics, who were viewed as misguided and wrong. This may also be operating today as some U.S. Americans search for validation of prejudices against Muslims. A more extreme example involves the atrocities committed against groups of people by others who want to retain the supposed values of a pure racial stock (e.g., "ethnic cleansing" by Serbs against Muslims in the former Yugoslavia).
4. The knowledge function. People hold certain prejudices because such attitudes allow them to organize and structure their world in a way that makes sense to them—in the same way that stereotypes help us organize our world. For example, if you believe that members of a certain group are flaky and irresponsible, then you don't have to think very much when meeting someone from that group in a work situation. You already know what they're like and so can react to them more automatically.

Prejudices can serve several of these functions over the life span. Thus, children may develop a certain prejudice to please their parents (utilitarian) and continue to hold the prejudice because it helps define who they are (value-expressive). Brislin (1999) points out that many remedial programs addressing the problem of prejudice fail because of a lack of recognition of the important functions that prejudice fill in our lives. Presenting people with factual information about groups addresses only one function (knowledge) and ignores the more complex reasons that we hold prejudices.

The behaviors that result from stereotyping or prejudice—overt actions to exclude, avoid, or distance—are called **discrimination**. Discrimination may be based on race (racism), gender (sexism), or any of the other identities discussed in this chapter. It may range from subtle nonverbal behavior such as lack of eye contact or exclusion from a conversation, to verbal insults and exclusion from jobs or other economic opportunities, to physical violence and systematic exclusion. Discrimination may be interpersonal, collective, or institutional. In recent years, interpersonal racism has become not only more subtle and indirect but also more persistent. Equally persistent is institutionalized or collective discrimination whereby individuals are systematically denied equal participation in society or equal access to rights in informal and formal ways (Maluso, 1995). Researcher John Lambeth (1998) has investigated the systematic discrimination

against African Americans on the nation's highways. In several rigorous controlled studies in numerous states, he has shown that Blacks are much more likely to be stopped by police officers than are non-Blacks (e.g., 4.85 times as likely on the New Jersey Turnpike). This is in spite of evidence from the National Institute of Drug Abuse indicating that African Americans are no more likely than Whites to possess or traffic in drugs.

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Minority Identity Development

As mentioned previously, minority group members in the United States tend to develop a sense of racial and ethnic identity much earlier than majority group members. Whites tend to take their culture for granted; although they may develop a strong ethnic identity, they often do not really think about their racial identity (Ferguson, 1990). There probably is a hierarchy of salient identities that change over time and place.

Social psychologists have identified four stages in **minority identity** development. Although these stages center on racial and ethnic identities, they may also apply to other identities such as class, gender, or sexual orientation (Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993). It is also important to remember that, as with any model, this one represents the experiences of many people, but it is not set in stone. That is, not everyone experiences these phases in exactly the same way. Some people spend more time in one phase than do others; individuals may experience the phases in different ways; and not everyone reaches the final phase.

Stage 1: Unexamined Identity This stage is characterized by the lack of exploration of ethnicity. At this stage, ideas about identity may come from parents or friends. Minority group members may initially accept the values and attitudes of the majority culture, including negative views of their own group. They may have a strong desire to assimilate into the dominant culture, and they may express positive attitudes toward the dominant group. Or they may simply lack interest in the issue of ethnicity. As one woman in the African American community put it, "Why do I need to learn about who was the first black woman to do this or that? I'm just not too interested" (quoted in Phinney, 1993, p. 68).

Stage 2: Conformity This stage is characterized by the internalization of the values and norms of the dominant group and a strong desire to assimilate into the dominant culture. Individuals in this phase may have negative, self-deprecating attitudes toward both themselves and their group. A Mexican American writer describes an experience in his youth:

I went to the beach quite often—always to the “white” beach at Santa Monica, staying away from the pier, where the Mexicans hung out. But after a long day in the sun I’d come home and notice my skin, which was no longer just brown, but verging on chocolate. I clearly remember one time standing in the shower with

a bar of Irish Spring soap, scrubbing as hard as I could, raking nails across skin, hoping to soften the darkness. (Martinez, 1999, p. 257)

Individuals who criticize members of their own group may be given negative labels such as “Uncle Tom” or “oreo” for African Americans, “banana” for Asian Americans, “apple” for Native Americans, and “Tio Taco” for Chicanos. Such labels condemn attitudes and behaviors that support the dominant White culture. This stage often continues until they encounter a situation that causes them to question predominant culture attitudes, which initiates the movement to the next stage—an ethnic identity search.

Stage 3: Resistance and Separatism Many kinds of events can trigger the move to the third stage, including negative ones such as encountering discrimination or name-calling. A period of dissonance, or a growing awareness that not all dominant group values are beneficial to minorities, may also precede this stage. For writer Roben Martinez (1998), a defining moment was when he was rather cruelly rejected by a White girl whom he had asked to dance at a high school prom:

I looked around me at the dance floor with new eyes: Mexicans danced with Mexicans, blacks with blacks, whites with whites. Who the hell did I think I was? Still, it would take a while for the gringo-hater in me to bust out. It was only a matter of time before I turned away from my whiteness and became the ethnic rebel. It seemed like it happened overnight, but it was the result of years of pent-up rage in me. (p. 256)

Sometimes the move to the next phase happens because individuals who have been denying their racial heritage meet someone from that racial group who exhibits strong cultural connections. This encounter may result in a concern to clarify the personal implications of their heritage. One member of an ethnic group explained the rationale behind attending ethnic fairs: “Going to festivals and cultural events helps me to learn more about my own culture and about myself” (quoted in Phinney, 1993, p. 71). Another person explained: “I think people should know what black people had to go through to get to where we are now” (p. 71).

This stage may be characterized by a blanket endorsement of one’s group and all the values and attitudes attributed to the group. At the same time, the person may reject the values and norms associated with the dominant group.

Stage 4: Integration According to this model, the ideal outcome of the identity development process is the final stage—an achieved identity. Individuals who have reached this stage have a strong sense of their own group identity (based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on) and an appreciation of other cultural groups. In this stage, they come to realize that racism and other forms of oppression occur, but they try to redirect any anger from the previous stage in more positive ways. The end result is individuals with a confident and secure identity characterized by a desire to eliminate all forms of injustice, and not merely oppression aimed at their own group.



POINT OF VIEW

This essay describes some of the controversy surrounding the increasing diversity in dolls.

One girl is black, the second white. But Allister Byrd and Samantha Arvin say the same thing when it comes to playing with dolls. They love them in any color—black, white, brown, you name it.

Toy makers are taking note with new doll lines that are more diverse than ever, including the first multiracial Barbie, which was on display last week at the American International Toy Fair in New York. A Mattel spokeswoman says the new Barbie could be viewed as black, Asian and Hispanic—a “mix of cultures in one doll.”

. . . Some dolls of different races and ethnicities, including black Barbie, have been around for years, but industry experts say an increased demand and awareness of other cultures has spawned a new wave of diverse dolls.

. . . At least one line, called the Ghetto Kids, was criticized by some parents and TV commentators because its packaging included hard-bitting doll “biographies” that mentioned parents who were drug addicts or who abandoned and even sold their children.

Officials at Chicago-based Teddi’s Toys, who created the dolls, have since removed some of the made-up doll background. But they’re keeping the Ghetto Kids name as an attention grabber. They also hope information on their Website, including a cartoon series, will spur parents to talk to kids about such topics as smoking, guns, and teen-age pregnancy.

Majority Identity Development

Rita Hardiman (1994), educator and pioneer in antiracism training, presents a model of **majority identity** development for members of the dominant group that has some similarities to the model for minority group members. She outlines five stages.

Stage 1: Unexamined Identity The first stage is the same as for minority individuals. In this case, individuals may be aware of some physical and cultural differences, but they do not fear other racial or ethnic groups or feel a sense of superiority.

Stage 2: Acceptance The second stage represents the internalization, conscious or unconscious, of a racist (or otherwise biased) ideology. This may involve passive or active acceptance. The key point is that individuals are not aware that they have been programmed to accept this worldview.

In the passive acceptance stage, individuals have no conscious identification with being White. However, some assumptions, based on an acceptance of inequities in the larger society, are subtly racist. Consider the following assumptions:

“It’s real life, real time,” says company founder Tommy Perez, who unveiled a Jewish Ghetto Kid at the New York toy fair. “It doesn’t pull many punches.”

Some parents say the race issue alone can be touchy, even if diversity among dolls is expanding.

Rob Whitehouse, a father from Akron, Ohio, says he’s noticed the looks his fair-haired, fair-skinned 5 year old gets when she totes around her favorite companion, a black Addy doll. . . . “I just say, ‘yeah, she loves it’” Whitehouse says. “It’s best just to be very matter-of-fact about it.”

Marguerite Wright, a clinical psychologist from Oakland, Calif., says that’s a good way to handle it. But sometimes, she says, parents insist that their children play with dolls of a certain race, usually their own. “It’s just a small step between forcing children to choose dolls according to skin color and forcing them to choose friends according to skin color,” say Wright, who addresses the doll issue in her book “I’m Chocolate, You’re Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World.”

Some parents say their children still don’t have much choice in dolls because the selection remains overwhelmingly white. Phyllis Redus, who is black, says she often has a hard time finding anything but white dolls in her hometown of Huntsville, Ala. . . .

Source: From “Dolls Getting More Racially Diverse,” *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, February 20, 2002, www.pittsburghlive.com/x/tribune-review/entertainment/s_18297.html.

- Minority groups are culturally deprived and need help to assimilate.
- Affirmative action is reverse discrimination because people of color are being given opportunities that Whites don’t have.
- White culture—music, art, and literature—is “classical”; works of art by people of color are folk art or “crafts.”
- People of color are culturally different, whereas Whites have no group identity or culture or shared experience of racial privilege.

Individuals in this stage usually take one of two positions with respect to racial issues and interactions with minorities: (1) They avoid contact with minority group members, or (2) they adopt a patronizing stance toward them. Both positions are possible at the same time.

In contrast, Whites in the active acceptance stage are conscious of their whiteness and may express their feelings of superiority collectively (e.g., join the White Student Union). Some people never move beyond this phase—whether it is characterized by passive or active acceptance. And if they do, it is usually a result of a number of cumulative events. For example, Judith gradually came to realize that her two nieces, who are sisters—one of whom is African American and one of whom is White—had very different experiences growing up. Both

girls lived in middle-class neighborhoods, both were honor students in high school, and both went to Ivy League colleges. However, they often had very different experiences. On more than one occasion, the African American girl was followed by security while shopping; she also was stopped several times by police while driving her mother's sports car. Her White sister never had these experiences. Eventually, awareness of this reality prodded Judith to the next stage.

Stage 3: Resistance The next stage represents a major paradigm shift. It involves a move from blaming minority members for their condition to naming and blaming their own dominant group as a source of racial or ethnic problems. This resistance may take the form of passive resistance, with little behavioral change, or active resistance—an ownership of racism. These individuals may feel embarrassed, try to distance themselves from other Whites, or gravitate toward people of color.

Stage 4: Redefinition In the fourth stage, people begin to refocus or redirect their energy toward redefining whiteness in nonracist terms. They realize they don't have to accept the definition of White that society has instilled in them. They can move beyond the connection to racism to see positive aspects of being European American and to feel more comfortable being White. Hardiman (1994) states:

One of the greatest challenges in all this is to identify what White culture is. Because Whiteness is the norm in the United States society, it is difficult to see. Like fish, whose environment is water, we are surrounded by Whiteness and it is easy to think that what we experience is reality rather than recognizing it as the particular culture of a particular group. And like fish who are not aware of water until they are out of it, White people sometimes become aware of their culture only when they get to know, or interact with, the cultures of people of color. Difficult as this process is, it is necessary to "see the water" before it can be possible to identify ways in which the culture of Whites needs to be redefined beyond racism. (pp. 130–131)

Stage 5: Integration As in the final stage of minority identity development, majority group individuals now are able to integrate their whiteness into all other facets of their identity. They not only recognize their identity as White but also appreciate other groups. This integration affects other aspects of social and personal identity, including religion and gender.

Characteristics of Whiteness

What does it mean to be White in the United States? What are the characteristics of a White identity? Is there a unique set of characteristics that define whiteness, just as other racial identities have been described? The film *The Color of Fear*, produced in the early 1990s, addresses these issues by examining the real-life experiences of men from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. Let's look at the dialogue between Victor, who is African American, and David, who is White.

Victor: What I hear from White people is, they talk about being human. They don't talk about themselves as White people. What I want to know is what it means to be White.

David: We don't look at ourselves as part of an ethnic group. I think that's what you're looking for and you're not going to find it.

Victor: Do you know that that means something? The fact that you have no answer to that?

It may be difficult for most White people to describe exactly what cultural patterns are uniquely White, but scholars have tried to do so. For example, scholar Ruth Frankenburg (1993) says that whiteness may be defined not only in terms of race or ethnicity but also as a set of linked dimensions. These dimensions include (1) normative race privilege, (2) a standpoint from which White people look at themselves, others, and society, and (3) a set of cultural practices (often unnoticed and unnamed).

Normative Race Privilege Historically, Whites have been the normative (dominant) group in the United States and, as such, have benefited from privileges that go along with belonging to the dominant group. However, not all Whites have power, and not all have equal access to power. In fact, at times during U.S. history, some White communities were not privileged and were viewed as separate, or different, if not inferior. Examples include the Irish and Italians in the early 20th century and German Americans during World War II. And as scholars point out, the memory of marginality outlasts the marginality. For example, memories of discrimination may persist in the minds of some Italian Americans although little discrimination exists today. There also are many White people in the United States who are poor and so lack economic power.

There is an emerging perception that being White no longer means automatic privilege, particularly as demographics change in the United States and as some Whites perceive themselves to be in the minority. (See Figure 5-2.) This has led some Whites to feel threatened and “out of place.” Charles A. Gallagher (1994), a sociologist, conducted a study in the early 1990s on what it means to be White in the United States today. He surveyed students at Temple University in Philadelphia, asking them how they felt about being White. He also asked the students to estimate the ratio of Whites to Blacks on campus. Many students reported that they thought the ratio was 30% White and 70% Black; that is, they perceived themselves to be in the minority. The actual ratio was 70% White and 30% Black. Students' perceptions affected their sense of identity, which, in turn, can affect intercultural communication.

Gallagher found that many of the students, mostly from working-class families, were very aware of their whiteness. Further, they believed that being White was a liability, that they were being prejudged as racist and blamed for social conditions they personally did not cause. They also claimed that they were denied opportunities that were unfairly given to minority students. One of our White students describes this feeling:



FIGURE 5-2(A) White culture is difficult to define. White people do not often think of some of their activities as White cultural practices. Sunbathing, for example, is particularly important to some White people. These sunbathers at a resort in Cancun, Mexico, are using their tans to communicate messages to other members of White culture. What kinds of messages might their tans send? (© Bill Bachmann/The Image Works)

When I was trying to get into college I had to fight for every inch. I didn't have a lot of money to go to school with, so to get a scholarship was of great importance to me. So I went out and bought a book titled The Big Book of Scholarships. Ninety percent of the scholarships that this book contained didn't apply to me. They applied to the so-called minorities. . . . I think this country has gone on so long with the notion that white equals wealth or with things like affirmative action, that it has lost sight of the fact that this country is not that way any longer.

In addition, due to corporate downsizing and the movement of jobs overseas in recent decades, increasing numbers of middle-age White men have not achieved the degree of economic or professional success they had anticipated.



FIGURE 5-2(B) Not all cultural groups place a high value on suntans. In this photo, a Chinese man holds an umbrella to shield his wife from the sun as she takes a photo of her parents at Tiananmen Square. In this culture, darker skin, particularly on a woman, is seen as more negative than light skin. Gender and racial identities function together to place a low cultural value on suntanning. (© Reuters/Getty Images)

They sometimes blame their lack of success on immigrants who will work for less or on the increasing numbers of women and minorities in the workplace. In these cases, whiteness is not invisible; it is a salient feature of the White individuals' identities.

The point is not whether these perceptions are accurate. Rather, the point is that identities are negotiated and challenged through communication. People act on their perceptions, not on some external reality. As the nation becomes increasingly diverse and Whites no longer form a majority in some regions, there will be increasing challenges for all of us as we negotiate our cultural identities. There may be many Whites who feel like the students in Gallagher's study: threatened and outnumbered. How can Whites in the United States incorporate the reality of not belonging to a majority group? Will Whites find inclusive and productive ways to manage this identity change? Or will they react in defensive and exclusionary ways?

One reaction to feeling outnumbered and being a "new member" of an ethnic minority group is to strengthen one's own ethnic identity. For example, White people may tend to have stronger White identities in those U.S. states that have a higher percentage of non-Whites (e.g., Mississippi, South Carolina, Alabama). In these states, the White population traditionally has struggled to protect its racial privilege in various ways. As other states become increasingly

TABLE 5-2 VIEWPOINTS OF MIDDLE-CLASS BLACKS AND WHITES*

Viewpoint	Percentage of Black respondents agreeing	Percentage of White respondents agreeing
“During the last ten years, tensions between racial and ethnic groups have decreased.”	23%	30%
“African Americans have about the same opportunities as whites.”	23	58
“African Americans are just about as well off as the average white person—in income.”	15	38
“There is only a little or no discrimination against African Americans in our society today.”	11	26

*Of the total number of respondents, 323 were Black and 779 were White.

Source: Based on a Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University survey, reported in *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2001, p. A1.

less White, we are beginning to see various moves to protect whiteness, as in California with a series of propositions (187, prohibiting undocumented workers from receiving public services; 209, making affirmative action programs illegal in public universities; and 227, banning bilingual education in public schools) and increasing concerns about immigration. Historically, California has enacted measures to ensure that Whites retained dominance in population, as well as in politics, economics, and so on. It is unclear what will happen in California and other states if, as predicted, Whites become a demographic minority group. How do you think that Whites will respond?

A Standpoint From Which to View Society Opinion polls reveal significant differences in how Whites and Blacks view many issues. For example, according to polls, most African Americans doubted O. J. Simpson’s guilt or had no faith in the legal system, whereas most Whites thought Simpson was guilty of murdering two people.

According to a 2001 survey, 34% of Whites, as compared with only 9% of Blacks, think we have overcome the major problems facing racial minorities in the United States (Morin, 2001). How can the perception of race relations be so different for Whites and Blacks? Something about being White and something about being African American influence how we view the world and, ultimately, how we communicate with others. Other results of the survey bear this out. (See Table 5-2.) The researchers concluded that,

whether out of hostility, indifference or simple lack of knowledge, large numbers of white Americans incorrectly believe that blacks are as well off as whites in terms



POINT OF VIEW

These quotes demonstrate the extent to which Whites and Blacks view the world differently and have very different ideas about race relations in the United States. Two Whites offered the following views:

I just feel as though the white person is being blamed for everything that goes wrong with the African Americans. Nobody owes any of us anything. Let's get on with our lives and make the best of it. . . . Come on. Everything in the world can't be racial.

—Merle Barone, 64, retired department store clerk

The percentage of black people that are middle class and the percentage of white people that are middle class I would say are equal.

—Gloria Jane Smith, 46, nurse

Three African Americans offered these views:

Whites do not want to get it. The reason they don't acknowledge the problems is because then they would have to admit that the system is corrupt and that it's working for their benefit and then they would have to give up something they have and would have to share.

—Kolima David Williams, 39, chemist

You give an opportunity to a black kid in a corporation and he's supposed to hold his head down, but the manager's sons and daughters don't hold their heads down when they walk around the place. . . . Black kids, they're supposed to be saddened by the fact that they got their jobs because the government said so. What difference does it make if the government said so or if daddy said so?

—Ed Smith, director, Leaders for the 21st Century

I can't escape the thought that white America, which stopped short of embracing middle-class blacks at the moment we most wanted inclusion, may have already lost its opportunity. The refusal of the larger society to accept us, on our own terms, combined with our unwillingness to return to the ghetto, is likely to result in even more isolation, frustration, and desperation. And, worst of all, more anger.

—Sam Fulwood, III, 39, correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*

Source: From "Across the Racial Divide," by R. Morin, *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, October 16–22, 1995, pp. 6–10.

of their jobs, incomes, schooling and health care. . . . These results defy conventional wisdom. They indicate that many whites do not broadly view blacks as particularly disadvantaged or beset by problems that demand immediate attention. Instead, these whites believe exactly the opposite—that African Americans already have achieved economic and social parity. (Morin, 2001, p. A1)

In another study, Frankenburg (1993) interviewed a number of White women, some of whom reported that they viewed being White as less than positive—as artificial, dominant, bland, homogeneous, and sterile. These

respondents also saw White culture as less interesting and less rich than non-White culture. In contrast, other women viewed being White as positive, representing what was “civilized,” as in classical music and fine art.

A Set of Cultural Practices Is there a specific, unique “White” way of viewing the world? As noted previously, some views held consistently by Whites are not necessarily shared by other groups. And some cultural practices and core symbols (e.g., individualism) are expressed primarily by Whites and significantly less by members of minority groups. These cultural practices are most clearly visible to those who are not White, to those groups who are excluded (Helms, 1994). For example, in the fairy tale of Snow White, the celebration of her beauty—emphasizing her beautiful, pure white skin—is often seen as problematic by people who are not White.

Multiracial and Multicultural People

Multicultural people are those who grow up “on the borders” of two or more cultures. They often struggle to reconcile two very different sets of values, norms, and lifestyles. Some are multicultural as a result of being born to parents from different cultures or adopted into families that are racially different from their own family of origin. Others are multicultural because their parents lived overseas and they grew up in cultures different from their own, or because they spent extended time in another culture as an adult or married someone from another cultural background. Let’s start with those who are born into biracial or multi-racial families.

According to the most recent census, the United States has almost 7 million multiracial people—that is, people whose ancestry includes two or more races (Brewer & Suchan, 2001). (See Figure 5-3.) The 2000 census was the first one in which people were given the option of selecting several categories to indicate their racial identities. This rapidly growing segment of our population must be understood in its historical context. The United States has a long history of forbidding miscegenation (the mixing of two races). The law sought not to prevent *any* interracial marriage but to protect “whiteness”; interracial marriage between people of color was rarely prohibited or regulated (Root, 2001). Thus, in 1957, the state of Virginia ruled the marriage of Mildred Jeter (African American and Native American heritage) and Peter Loving (White) illegal. The couple fought to have their marriage legalized for almost 10 years. Finally, in 1967, the Supreme Court ruled in their favor, in *Loving v. Virginia*, overturning 200 years of antimiscegenation legislation.

The development of racial identity for the children of parents like the Lovings is a fluid process of complex transactions between the child and the broader social environment (Nance & Foeman, 2002). Whereas majority and minority identities seem to develop in a fairly linear fashion, biracial children may cycle through three stages: (1) awareness of differentness and resulting dissonance, (2) struggle for acceptance, and (3) self-acceptance and -assertion. And as they mature, they may experience the same three phases with greater intensity and awareness.



FIGURE 5-3 There are increasing numbers of multiracial individuals and families in the United States. For the first time, the 2000 census included the option of individuals marking multiple backgrounds, although many multiracial people still chose to mark one race only. Some multiracial people identify more strongly with one of their racial identities than the others, while other multiracial people try to balance their identification with multiple racial identities. (© Tom Stewart Photography/Corbis)

In the first stage, multiracial children realize that they are different from other children—they may feel that they don't fit in anywhere. Tiffany, whose mother is White and father is Black, describes her experience:

Growing up I had kids make fun of me because they said I did not know what color I was. That really hurt me as a kid because even at a young age, I started questioning my own race.

At the next stage, struggle for acceptance, multiracial adolescents may feel that they have to choose one race or the other—and indeed this was Tiffany's experience:

During my teenage years I still was a little confused about my race because I would only choose one side. When people asked me what color I was I would tell them I was black because I was embarrassed about being mixed. I was afraid of not being accepted by the black community if I said I was mixed. . . . I would go around telling people that I am black and would get mad if someone said I was white. I never thought about being mixed with both black and white.

After being torn between the two (or more) races, multiracial individuals may reach the third stage, of self-acceptance and self-assertion. Tiffany describes how this happened for her:



POINT OF VIEW

This essay describes some of the complexities and controversies surrounding the “new” multiracial category used for the first time in the 2000 census, illustrating how race is a dynamic notion that changes depending on individuals and context.

The 2000 Census marked a fundamental change in how we measure race in the United States. Rather than insist that every person in the country identify with only one racial group, as have all previous U.S. censuses, it invited multiracial identification. . . . Yet the first census count of the multiracial population will be far from definitive.

My reasons for believing this are both personal and professional. Consider the following reactions to my 3 year old daughter. When she and my wife were at a hospital in New Mexico, a white nurse asked if she spoke Spanish. While they waited in line at a grocery store in Ann Arbor, an African American bagger leaned over to my daughter and said, “I know you’ve got soul.” As they made their way through O’Hare International Airport in Chicago, a white airline worker commented to my wife that our daughter “has a great tan.”

The nurse in New Mexico saw a white woman with a bronze-skinned child and concluded that, like many people in the Southwest, our daughter was part Latino. In the predominantly black-and-white context of Michigan, the grocery store bagger interpreted these same cues as indicative of black heritage. By contrast, the white airline worker, who for historical reasons has probably had little personal experience with multiracial children, used the more salient frame of sun tanning to reconcile the incongruity between my wife and daughter’s physical characteristics.

Now consider the results from a national survey of adolescents. When more than 10,000 middle and high school students were asked to report their race on separate school and home surveys, about 12 percent failed to provide consistent responses. Seven percent reported being multiracial on only one of the surveys and nearly 3 percent of the youth switched between single-race groups. Multiracial reports were almost twice as likely on the school survey,

I can recall a time when I had to spend Christmas with my mother’s side of the family. This was the first time I met her side of the family and I felt myself being scared. Honestly, I have never been around a lot of white people, and when I was there I realized that I am mixed and this is who I am and I cannot hide it anymore. . . . From then on I claimed both sides.

And she goes on to demonstrate her self-acceptance and -assertion:

Being mixed is wonderful, and most importantly, being mixed taught me many things especially growing up. It taught me how to be strong, not to worry about what other people think and to just be myself. It also taught me not to like only one color and that all colors are beautiful. My race made me who I am today.

which was self-administered, as on the home survey, which was administered by an interviewer.

These examples illustrate that rather than being a fixed characteristic, one's race is constantly being negotiated. Race depends not just on ancestry—my wife identifies as white and I as black—but also on the verbal, physical and cultural cues we project to others, their interpretation of these cues and the setting in which this exchange occurs. . . . Although most people who answered the 2000 Census probably did not give the race question much thought, its new wording certainly caused some people to contemplate which response they should give for the racially mixed members of their household. . . .

So as the Census Bureau begins releasing its official count of multi-racial Americans, we should all be a little skeptical about the numbers. If the 2000 race question had specifically asked for all of the racial groups known to be in a person's background, the count of multiracials would be much larger. Alternatively, if it had asked for the race or races that others most often consider this person to be, then the count of multiracials would almost certainly be much smaller.

This is not to say that the limited space available on the census could have been used to capture all of the complexities of race. Rather, my point is that because race can and, from people like my daughters, does vary across observers and contexts, we must employ more sophisticated ways of measuring race if we hope to understand the multiracial population. More complex approaches will likely show that the size and characteristics of the multiracial population vary significantly from Census 2000 estimates. We should all keep this in mind before using the census count of multiracials to support statements about the social, political and legal consequences of race in contemporary American society.

Source: From "The Multiracial Count," by D. R. Harris, *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2001, p. A21

I am strong and I know my race. I no longer have to deny what my race is or who I am.

In addition to growing up in biracial or multiracial homes, individuals develop multicultural identities for other reasons. For example, **global nomads** grow up in many different cultural contexts because their parents moved around a lot (e.g., missionaries, international business employees, or military families). Children of foreign-born immigrants may also develop multicultural identities. Foreign-born immigrants in the United States represent one of the fastest-growing segments—almost a third of the current foreign-born population arrived in the United States since 1990. These include refugees from war zones like Kosovo and the Balkans, and migrants who come to the United States to

escape dire economic conditions. They often struggle to negotiate their identities, torn between family expectations and their new American culture. Khoa, a first-generation Vietnamese American, describes how important his family's values are:

What does it mean to be "Asian" then? Being Asian is being proud of my heritage, my family, and the values that they have passed down to you. I am proud of my parents' discipline upon me. . . . I learned very early in life the differences between right and wrong. . . . I am proud that my parents taught me to respect my elders. I value the time I spend with my grandparents. I love the time I spend with my uncles and aunts, and my cousins. Having a deep love and honest respect for my family, both immediate and extended, is what being "Asian" means to me.

Then he recounts the struggle to reconcile being both Vietnamese and American:

There are a few things, though, that my parents believe in that I do not agree with. I think it is important that you know where you came from and to have pride in your nationality. However, I do not think that just because I am Vietnamese I am obligated to marry a Vietnamese girl. A Vietnamese girl is not any better or worse than any other girl of another nationality.

Like Khoa, multicultural adolescents often feel pulled in different directions as they develop their own identities.

A final category of multicultural people includes those who have intense intercultural experiences as adults—for example, people who maintain long-term romantic relationships with members of another ethnic or racial group or who spend extensive time living in other cultures. All multicultural people may feel as if they live in cultural margins, struggling with two sets of cultural realities: not completely part of the dominant culture but not an outsider, either.

Social psychologist Peter Adler (1974) describes the multicultural person as someone who comes to grips with a multiplicity of realities. This individual's identity is not defined by a sense of belonging; rather, it is a new psychological form of consciousness. Milton Bennett (1993) describes how individuals can develop an "ethnorelative" perspective based on their attitudes toward cultural difference. The first, and most ethnocentric, stage involves the denial or ignoring of difference. The next stage occurs when people recognize difference but attach negative meaning to it. A third stage occurs when people minimize the effects of difference—for example, with statements like "We're really all the same under the skin" and "After all, we're all God's children." Bennett recognizes that minority and majority individuals may experience these phases differently. In addition, minority individuals usually skip the first phase. They don't have the option to deny difference; they are often reminded by others that they are different.

The remainder of the stages represent a major shift in thinking—a paradigm shift—because positive meanings are associated with difference. In the fourth phase (acceptance), people accept the notion of cultural difference; in the fifth phase (adaptation), they may change their own behavior to adapt to others. The

final phase (integration) is similar to Peter Adler's (1974) notion of a "multicultural person."

According to Adler, multicultural individuals may become **culture brokers**—people who facilitate cross-cultural interaction and reduce conflict. And, indeed, there are many challenges and opportunities today for multicultural people, who can reach a level of insight and cultural functioning not experienced by others. One of our students, who is Dutch (ethnicity) and Mexican (nationality), describes this:

Being the make-up I am to me means I come from two extremely proud cultures. The Dutch in me gives me a sense of tradition and loyalty. The Mexican side gives me a rich sense of family as well as closeness with not only my immediate family, with my aunts, uncles, and cousins as well. My unique mix makes me very proud of my identity. To me it means that I am proof that two parts of the world can unite in a world that still believes otherwise.

However, Adler (1974) also identifies potential stresses and tensions associated with multicultural individuals:

They may confuse the profound with the insignificant, not sure what is really important.

They may feel multiphrenic, fragmented.

They may suffer a loss of their own authenticity and feel reduced to a variety of roles.

They may retreat into existential absurdity. (p. 35)

Communication scholar Janet Bennett (1993) provides insight into how being multicultural can be at once rewarding *and* challenging. She describes two types of multicultural individuals: (1) *encapsulated marginals*, who become trapped by their own marginality, and (2) *constructive marginals*, who thrive in their marginality.

Encapsulated marginals have difficulty making decisions, are troubled by ambiguity, and feel pressure from both groups. They try to assimilate but never feel comfortable, never feel "at home." In contrast, constructive marginal people thrive in their marginal existence and, *at the same time*, recognize the tremendous challenges. They see themselves (rather than others) as choice makers. They recognize the significance of being "in between," and they are able to make commitments within the relativistic framework. Even so, this identity is constantly being negotiated and explored; it is never easy, given society's penchant for superficial categories. Writer Ruben Martinez (1998) describes the experience of a constructive marginal:

And so I can celebrate what I feel to be my cultural success. I've taken the far-flung pieces of myself and fashioned an identity beyond that ridiculous, fraying old border between the United States and Mexico. But my "success" is still marked by anxiety, a white noise that disturbs whatever raceless utopia I might imagine. I feel an uneasy tension between all the colors, hating and loving them all, perceiving and speaking from one and many perspectives simultaneously. The key word

here is “tension”: nothing, as yet, has been resolved. My body is both real and unreal, its color both confining and liberating. (p. 260)

IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE

The labels that refer to particular identities are an important part of intercultural communication. These labels do not, of course, exist outside of their relational meanings. It is the relationships—not only interpersonal but social—that help us understand the importance of the labels.

Communication scholar Dolores Tanno (2000) describes her own multiple identities reflected in the various labels applied to her. For instance, the label “Spanish” was applied by her family and designates an ancestral origin in Spain. The label “Mexican American” reflects two important cultures that contribute to her identity. “Latina” reflects cultural and historical connectedness with others of Spanish descent (e.g., Puerto Ricans and South Americans), and “Chicana” promotes political and cultural assertiveness in representing her identity. She stresses that she is all of these, that each one reveals a different facet of her identity: symbolic, historical, cultural, and political.

In emphasizing the fluidity and relational nature of labels, communication scholar Stuart Hall (1985) notes that,

at different times in my thirty years in England, I have been “bailed” or interpellated as “coloured,” “West-Indian,” “Negro,” “black,” “immigrant.” Sometimes in the street; sometimes at street corners; sometimes abusively; sometimes in a friendly manner; sometimes ambiguously. (p. 108)

Hall underscores the dynamic and dialectic nature of identity and the self as he continues:

In fact I “am” not one or another of these ways of representing me, though I have been all of them at different times and still am some of them to some degree. But, there is no essential, unitary “I”—only the fragmentary, contradictory subject I become. (pp. 108–109)

These and other labels construct relational meanings in communication situations. The interpersonal relationships between Hall and the other speakers are important, but equally important are such labels’ social meanings.

IDENTITY AND COMMUNICATION

Identity has a profound influence on intercultural communication processes. We can employ some of the dialectics identified in earlier chapters to illuminate this relationship. First, we can use the individual–cultural dynamic to examine the issues that arise when we encounter people whose identities we don’t know. In intercultural communication interactions, mistaken identities are often exacerbated and can create communication problems.

Sometimes we assume knowledge about another person’s identity based on his or her membership in a particular cultural group. When we do so, we are ig-

noring the individual aspect. Taking a dialectical perspective can help us recognize and balance both the individual and the cultural aspects of another's identity. This perspective can guide the ways that we communicate with that person (and conceivably with others). "The question here is one of identity: Who am I perceived to be when I communicate with others? . . . My identity is very much tied to the ways in which others speak to me and the ways in which society represents my interests" (Nakayama, 2000, p. 14).

Think about the assumptions you might make about others based on their physical appearance. What do you "know" about people if you know only that they are from, say, the South, or Australia, or Pakistan? Perhaps it is easier to think about the times that people have made erroneous assumptions about you based on limited information—assumptions that you became aware of in the process of communication. Focusing solely on someone's nationality, place of origin, education, religion, and the like can lead to mistaken conclusions about the person's identity.

Now let's turn to the static–dynamic dialectic. The problem of erroneous assumptions has increased during the information age, due to the torrent of information about the world and the dynamic nature of the world in which we live. We are bombarded daily with information from around the globe about places and people. This glut of information and intercultural contacts has heightened the importance of developing a more complex view of identity.

Given the many identities that we all negotiate for ourselves in our everyday interactions, it becomes clear how our identities and those of others make intercultural communication problematic. We need to think of these identities as both static and dynamic. We live in an era of information overload, and the wide array of communication media only serve to increase the identities we must negotiate. Consider the relationships that develop via e-mail, for example. Some people even create new identities as a result of online interactions. We change who we are depending on the people we communicate with and the manner of our communication. Yet we also expect some static characteristics from the people with whom we communicate. We expect others to express certain fixed qualities; these help account for why we tend to like or dislike them and how we can establish particular communication patterns with them. The tensions that we feel as we change identities from e-mail to telephone to mail to fax and other communication media demonstrate the dynamic and static characters of identities.

Finally, we can focus on the personal–contextual dialectic of identity and communication. Although some dimensions of our identities are personal and remain fairly consistent, we cannot overlook the contextual constraints on our identity.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we explored some of the facets of identity and the ways in which identities can be problematic in intercultural communication. We used several dialectics to frame our discussion. Identities are both static (as described by social psychologists) and dynamic (as described by communication and critical

scholars). They are created by the self and by others in relation to group membership. They may be created for us by existing contexts and structures. When these created identities are incongruent with our sense of our own identity, we need to challenge and renegotiate them.

Identities are multiple and reflect gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, race, religion, class, nationality, and other aspects of our lives. Identities also develop in relation to minority and majority group membership. The development of such identities may follow several stages for individuals of either group.

Identity is expressed through language and labels. Keeping in mind the many dynamics in people's lives can help minimize faulty assumptions about their identities. It is important to remind ourselves that identities are complex and subject to negotiation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do our perceptions of our own cultural identity influence our communication with others?
2. What are some ways in which we express our identities?
3. How does being White affects one's experience in the United States?
4. What are the roles of avowal and ascription in the process of identity formation?
5. What are some of the ways in which members of minority cultures and members of majority cultures develop their cultural identities?



Go to the self-quizzes on the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/martinnakayama to further test your knowledge.

ACTIVITIES

1. *Stereotypes in Your Life*. List some of the stereotypes you have heard about U.S. Americans. Then answer the following questions:
 - a. How do you think these stereotypes developed?
 - b. How do they influence communication between U.S. Americans and people from other countries?
2. *Stereotypes in Prime-Time TV*. Watch four hours of television during the next week, preferably during evening hours when there are more commercials. Record the number of representatives of different identity groups (ethnic, racial, gender, age, class, and so on) that appear in the commercials; also record the role that each person plays. Answer the following questions:
 - a. How many different groups were represented?
 - b. What groups were most represented? Why do you think this is so?
 - c. What groups were least represented? Why do you think this is so?

- d. What differences (if any) were there in the roles that members of the various groups played? Did one group play more sophisticated or more glamorous roles than others?
- e. In how many cases were people depicted in stereotypical roles—for example, African Americans as athletes, or women as homemakers?
- f. What stereotypes were reinforced in the commercials?
- g. What do your findings suggest about the power of the media and their effect on identity formation and intercultural communication? (Think about avowal, ascription, and interpellation.)

KEY WORDS

age identity	gender identity	national identity
ascription	global nomads	personal identity
avowal	hyphenated Americans	prejudice
class identity	identity	racial identity
core symbols	individualized identity	regional identity
culture brokers	interpellation	religious identity
discrimination	majority identity	spiritual identity
ethnic identity	minority identity	stereotypes
familial identity	model minority	



The Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/martinnakayama features flashcards and crossword puzzles based on these terms and concepts.

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