

An Integrated Approach  
to Intercultural Communication



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By

Nataša Bakić-Mirić

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P U B L I S H I N G

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by Nataša Bakić-Mirić

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*There is something within me that might be illusion as it is often the case with young delighted people, but if I would be fortunate to achieve some of my ideals, it would be on the behalf of the whole of humanity. If those hopes would become fulfilled, the most exciting thought would be that it is a deed of a Serb.*

—Nikola Tesla (1856 – 1943)



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# INTRODUCTION

This book is the outcome of research conducted at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Faculty of English Studies in Greece. It represents a useful, concise and accessible discussion of intercultural communication that will help a reader to develop an understanding of cultures, appreciate the opportunities and challenges that each culture presents to people.

Chapter 1 sets out the main theme through a detailed exploration of the concepts of communication and culture where the author discusses the beginnings of communication study, contemporary maxims about communication as well as misinterpretations that occur during the communication process. Author, then, seamlessly moves on to discuss culture, its elements, beliefs, values and norms, popular culture, Confucian cultural patterns, Hall's, Hofstede's, and Bond's taxonomies of cultural patterns, and cultural intelligence. Moreover, she explores the concept of cultural diversity and cultural identity, and sheds new light on the notion of cultural diversity (or multiculturalism) which is in her view a broad way of looking at cultural groups at various levels, including assumptions, underlying values, social relations, and customs.

Chapter 2 focuses on the subject of intercultural communication that occupies the central position of the book. In this chapter, the author is keeping with the overall scope of the subject covering a wide array of topics within the field of intercultural communication encompassing overall characteristics of intercultural communication, meaning characteristics, practicing intercultural process thinking, intercultural communication competence and how to improve intercultural communication skills. The author also glimpses on culture shock, stages of culture shock and acculturation. In the last pages of this chapter, she discusses factors influencing intercultural communication, intercultural communication barriers, and basic rules of intercultural effectiveness only to conclude with intercultural training models.

In Chapter 3, the author turns to verbal and auditory intercultural communication and deals with the verbal codes and verbal communication styles. She defines various styles of verbal communication: direct versus indirect style, elaborate versus succinct style, personal versus contextual, instrumental versus affective style, treats the subject of listening, describes the HURIER model and discusses the importance of effective listening across cultures.

Chapter 4 draws the readers in with discussion of nonverbal intercultural communication that is, in the author's opinion, an indispensable and all-pervasive element in intercultural communication. She, then, moves to explore the importance of nonverbal communication in intercultural communication, the influence of nonverbal factors on intercultural communication and its classification.

Chapter 5 explores the significance of intercultural health communication that is very important if people are to interact with people coming from different cultures in the health care setting. The author debates that effective health care delivery is dependent upon clear and effective communication as an essential element in every form of medicine and health care between all of the individuals who are involved: patients, physicians, and other health care professionals. The author, also, discusses diverse health care belief systems, intercultural health care competence, and health care communication strategies.

Chapter 6 is the final piece of this intercultural communication puzzle where the author analyses main features of intercultural business communication. The focus is on the intercultural skills business people need to function effectively in the business arena. This means managing people in an intercultural setting, negotiation, meetings, language and questions to consider when doing business internationally.

The final pages of the book comprise selected intercultural awareness situations, practice activities and discussion ideas that should serve as an intercultural awareness incentive. The author also provides cultural interpretations for each situation written immediately after a possible response. Cultural dos and don'ts across the globe in the end are a sweepstake for all globetrotters.

Lastly, the author's academic vantage point is that this book is intended as an academic reference for undergraduate, graduate students, interdisciplinary researchers, business people, health care providers, tourists, sojourners, expatriates and their better understanding of the key concepts relevant to understanding issues in relation to intercultural communication. It is written in comprehensible English and covers the most important features of intercultural communication.

The author, however, does not propose to be comprehensive in terms of covering all aspects of the field of intercultural communication. This is an impossible task for any book or author. Rather, the purpose of this book is to delineate some of the choices (either explicit or tacit) that a scholar must make in an investigation of intercultural communication. Thus, the book includes the most important aspects of intercultural communication necessary to provide the reader with an understanding of the depth and breadth of intercultural communication theory and practice and to

introduce further research in the field of intercultural communication in a unique and interesting way.

Finally, the author believes that this book will provide a better understanding of intercultural communication, intercultural communication competence, and intercultural communication principles that is from the author's point of view crucial to the development of mutual understanding in the global world.





# CHAPTER ONE

## COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

### **The Beginnings of Communication Study**

The study of human communication has a long and distinguished history. We can easily say that, since humankind first acquired the ability to communicate through verbal and nonverbal symbols, people have “studied” communication, and so, the role communication plays in human society is very important for even longer than we can demonstrate through recorded history.

To begin with, we can say that the oldest piece of writing ever discovered is “The Instructions of Kagemni”. Written as a pragmatic guidebook of advice for the son of a vizier around 3000 BC, “The Instructions of Kagemni” is an ancient Egyptian instructional text of wisdom literature. Similarly, the oldest existing book “The Maxims of Ptahhotep” was composed in Egypt about 2675 BC by Ptahhotep (the city administrator and vizier during the reign of Djedkare Isesi in the 5th Dynasty) and represented a treatise on effective communication written as the guidance for the Pharaoh’s son.

The rhetorical tradition that began some 2500 years ago in Syracuse in Sicily was developed by a man named Corax of Syracuse (who is also considered one of the founders of ancient Greek rhetoric), after the overthrow of the tyrant Thrasybulus, and the establishment of a democratic regime. Corax devised an art of rhetoric to permit ordinary men to make their cases in the courts, and retrieve their confiscated properties. His chief contribution was in helping structure judicial speeches into various parts: prose, narration, statement of arguments, refutation of opposing arguments, and summary. This structure is the basis for all later rhetorical theory. Together with his student Tisias, Corax also developed the concept of message organization – an introduction, a body and a conclusion.

During the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC in Athens (Greece), there was a large group of wandering teachers, known as sophists, who established small schools and charged students for attending their lectures on rhetoric, literature, science and philosophy. Protagoras of Abdara, sometimes called the

“Father of Debate”, was one of the first and the most important of all scholars. His teachings argued that there were two sides of every proposition (a proposition is a debate subject that can be discussed from opposing points of view), and that speakers should be able to argue either side of the proposition equally well.

In about 330 BC, Aristotle, who is generally considered the foremost theorist in the history of the study of human communication from the rhetorical perspective, wrote his “Rhetoric” (TEXNH PHTOPIKH in Greek) – an ancient Greek treatise on the art of persuasion, and the most influential work on the topic. In this treatise, Aristotle criticized his contemporaries for considering irrelevant matters in their rhetorical theories rather than concentrating on proofs, particularly enthymemes (arguments from probabilities). He defined rhetoric as the faculty of discovering in a particular case what the available means of persuasion are. To Aristotle, the means of persuasion were primarily *ethos* (the nature of the source), *pathos* (the emotions of the audience), and *logos* (the nature of the message presented by the source). He focused his concern on three types of speaking: deliberative (speaking in the legislature), forensic (speaking in the law court) and epideictic (speaking in a ceremonial situation). He was concerned with formal public speaking settings and did not address what we would call today “everyday” or “interpersonal” communication.

Aristotle viewed rhetoric as a tool for anyone – a good person or a bad one, a person seeking worthy ends or one seeking unworthy ends. At the same time, he argued that rhetoric was a self-regulating art. By that he meant that the person who is unethical, or who advocated evil, is less likely to be successful than the moral person advocating something good. He justified his argument by claiming that good and right, by their very nature, are more powerful persuasive tools than their opposites. Although Aristotle acknowledged that evil might win out in the short-run, he firmly believed that evil would ultimately fail unless people arguing on behalf of good were incompetent rhetorical communicators.

During the Roman period, the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, Aristotle’s work was well-known and writers such as Cicero and Quintillion (often called “the greatest orator” and “the greatest teacher”) wrote works within the general perspective of his work, although they were not always in agreement with Aristotle’s ideas. In general, the Roman period applied rules of the rhetorical theory of ancient Greece. This was also the case in the Middle Ages. However, during the Renaissance, more attention was directed towards rhetoric and although Aristotle’s works were known to the scholars of the time, most of their writings centered on matters of style and not concerns Aristotle had advanced.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, writers such as George Campbell and Richard Whately in England resurrected Aristotelian view toward communication and advanced it with their own theories. In the United States, Professor John Quincy Adams (later to become the sixth President of the United States), who led the chair of rhetoric at Harvard University, presented a series of lectures which set forth, for the first time in America, a thoroughly classical view of the rhetoric. This view was extended by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century writers, such as James Winans, in what was to become the field of speech while today's teachers of argumentation and debate, consider Protagoras' view of rhetoric the foundation for communication in the United States legal and legislature systems which is the very basis of democratic government itself.

Suffice it to say, from ancient Greece to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rhetorical tradition was a central part of Western education, filling the need to train public speakers and writers to move audiences to action with arguments.

## What is Communication Today

It is very difficult to find an adequate definition of communication considering that there are over 126 definitions for the word communication alone. Nevertheless, we can easily say that communication or the ability to share beliefs, values, ideas and feelings is at the heart of every human contact. Albeit, the results produced when sending messages might be different, the reasons for communication tend to be the same.

As a start-up, there are several maxims about communication. Primarily, we can say that communication is a process. As such, it is symbolic, continuous, irreversible and unrepeatable. (Cooper and authors, 2007, 3) When we say that communication is *symbolic*, it means that people use symbols (verbal and nonverbal) to stand for things. Semanticists suggest this idea when they state that the word is not the thing. This means that the word table stands for, or symbolizes something we sit at when we eat. However, the word table is not the actual table because one symbol may have many meanings. For example, the word table has as many as seventeen meanings:

1. An article of furniture supported by one or more vertical legs and having a flat horizontal surface.
2. The objects laid out for a meal on this article of furniture.
3. The food and drink served at meals; fare
4. The company of people assembled around a table, as for a meal.

5. A plateau or tableland.
6. A flat facet cut across the top of a precious stone.
7. A stone or gem cut in this fashion.
8. The front part of the body of a stringed instrument.
9. The sounding board of a harp.
10. A raised or sunken rectangular panel on a wall.
11. A raised horizontal surface or continuous band on an exterior wall; a stringcourse.
12. A part of the human palm framed by four lines, analyzed in palmistry.
13. An orderly arrangement of data, especially one in which the data are arranged in columns and rows in an essentially rectangular form.
14. An abbreviated list, as of contents; a synopsis.
15. An engraved slab or tablet bearing an inscription or a device.
16. The inner or outer flat layer of bones of the skull separated by the diploe.
17. A system of laws or decrees; a code.

During the communication process, people communicate via symbols that are arbitrary, abstract and ambiguous representations of objects and ideas and they use these symbols (words and behaviors) to create meaning. In order for the people to communicate effectively, they must have common meaning for these symbols. One can say, "I despise you" (that is the message), but one cannot control meaning of those words.

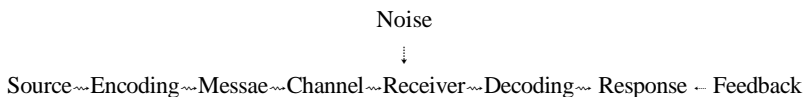
To this end, communication can become difficult when two people from two different cultures come together. Not only are their languages different, but the same gesture can mean different things. The meaning of patting a child on the head in the United States (a gesture of affection) is quite different from that same gesture in Thailand (the child's spirit, which resides in his/her head can be damaged). Showing open affection towards a child in public in the United States (sign of probable sexual abuse) is quite different from Serbia and Greece (sign of love).

Communication is not only symbolic it is a process that has no beginning or end. In other words, it is *continuous*. All the communicating that people have done up to that point affects communication they are engaged in now. Personal experience will tell you that when you meet someone for the first time, you immediately begin to gather information about him or her. That information serves two purposes. First, it enables you to learn about the other person. Second, it assists you in deciding how to present yourself. These judgments affect everything from the topics you select to talk about to whether you decide to continue the conversation or terminate it. This suggests another important idea about communication. Taking into consideration that

communication is symbolic and continuous, communication scholars suggest that a person cannot *not* communicate. Anytime a person perceives another person, he/she communicates – apparel, hairstyle, jewelry, body type, facial expressions, body movements, posture, tone of voice etc., all communicate. In other words, both nonverbal and verbal symbols communicate. (Samovar and authors 2007, 16-18)

In addition to being symbolic and continuous, the process of communication is also *irreversible* and *unrepeatable*. Once a person has said or done something, he/she cannot take it back. If a person says something bad to a friend or a child, he/she can say, I am sorry, but he/she cannot unsay or undo what he/she did. This is exactly what forces each person to think carefully about what he/she communicates to others. Because the process is unrepeatable and irreversible, it means that it is the point of no return.

When we refer to communication as a transactional process, it means that simultaneous role taking exists as well. This involves sending and receiving of information between a sender and a receiver. As indicated earlier, this happens not only with words, but also through nonverbal factors like gestures and facial expressions. The message received can be very different from the message sent. The following diagram illustrates this:



The idea or feeling comes from the source. This input into symbols (encoding) produces a message transmitted through a channel. The channel is the medium used for communication (e.g. speaking, writing). The message is then, interpreted by the receiver (decoding) who responds with either a positive or a negative feedback. Noise here means anything that distorts the message. Due to this complexity, many consider that communication largely depends upon the technique adopted by the person who is trying to communicate. (Bakić-Mirić 2008, 2)

In addition to being a multifaceted process, communication is also systemic and takes place within systems consisting of entities that interrelate with one another to form a unique whole. The first characteristic of systems is their complexity. This means that you cannot understand systems by simply summing its parts. The second characteristic of systems is interdependence meaning that every part is dependent on every part. Thus, a change in one part of the system causes a change throughout the system. A third characteristic of systems is that they are hierarchical or influenced by subsystems. In order to understand communication, we must

understand the systems in which communication takes place. (Cooper and authors 2007, Samovar and authors 2007, Lustig and Koester 1999)

The last characteristic of communication is that it has both content and relationship component. The content component is the information conveyed; the relationship component suggests how the information should be interpreted in terms of relationship between interlocutors. In a general, the content message is verbal and the relational message is nonverbal. (Cooper and authors 2007, 6)

Communication is also complex. Its complexity is obvious even more when cultural dimensions are included. Albeit all cultures use symbols to share their realities, the specific realities and the symbols employed are often quite different. In one culture, you smile in casual manner as a form of greeting, whereas in another you bow formally in silence while in another you acknowledge your friend with a full embrace and yet in another with a handshake and two or three consecutive kisses on both cheeks.

As indicated earlier, to say that we have communicated does not imply an outcome. Although, communication is a process involving the exchange of messages and the creation of meaning, no two people ever attach the same meaning to a message. Whether or not a specific instance of communication is effective or not depends on the degree to which the participants attach similar meanings to the messages exchanged. Stated differently, communication is effective to the extent that we are able to minimize misunderstandings. (Gudykunst 2005, 26)

Nevertheless, when we communicate, we construct messages, which we transmit to strangers and interpret messages we receive from strangers. Albeit we are not always aware of this process, we do it anyway. To say that two people communicated effectively requires that the two attach relatively similar meanings to the messages sent and received. Accordingly, communication is effective to the extent that the person interpreting the message attaches a meaning to the message similar to the one originally intended by the person transmitting it. This, however, is not what happens most of the time. Most of the time we interpret strangers' messages using our own frame of reference and our own internal perspective. This is the point where problems emerge because we always assume the possibility of direct transfer of meaning. However, although there are universals of behavior, this often proves to be a dangerous assumption. In other words, when we communicate with strangers/foreigners and base our interpretations on our symbolic systems, ineffective communication often occurs. (Gudykunst 2005, Samovar and authors 2007, Cooper and authors 2007)

As indicated by Gudykunst (2005, 27-28), misunderstandings can occur when we communicate with strangers. These may include, but are not limited to the following: (1) the messages may be transmitted in a way that they cannot be understood by others (e.g. pronunciation or accents may cause misunderstanding), (2) the communication rules of the cultures from which the interlocutors come from may differ and influence how messages are interpreted (direct and indirect rules of communication), (3) one of the interlocutors may not be able to speak the other's language adequately (fluency), (4) one person may not understand how to accomplish a certain task or interpret a specific utterance within a social context (a person who does not speak English well tries to complain but apologizes instead), (5) one person may make errors in attributions because of his/her group identity and/or expectations (Japanese and American direct vs. indirect answers to questions), and (6) the interlocutors may not be familiar with the topic being discussed. On the other hand, when misunderstandings are recognized within a conversation, communicators have three options: (1) to stop the thread of conversation taking place by shifting topics, (2) to negotiate the misunderstanding, and (3) to ignore the misunderstanding and continue conversation.

The unique aspects of our symbolic systems can also be problematic when we communicate with people we know reasonably well. In fact, it appears that we have many misunderstandings with people we know well as with strangers or foreigners. One reason for this is that we assume that people we know well have preferences that are similar to ours. Since the topics of conversations we hold with people we know (friends, family co-workers) are often more important than those we hold with strangers/foreigners, small differences in meanings attached to messages may lead to misunderstandings. It is also important to recognize that the misunderstandings we have while conversing with strangers and/or foreigners are the result of our interpretations of their behaviors, not their behavior *per se*. Therefore, to decrease the chance of misinterpretations of strangers/foreigners' messages based on our unconscious interpretations, we must be aware of our tendencies. There are five useful principles (Gudykunst 2005, 31) in understanding how misinterpretations occur:

1. We can never know the state of mind – the attitudes, thoughts and feelings of other people.
2. We depend largely on signals, which are frequently ambiguous, to inform us about the attitudes and wishes of other people.
3. We use our own coding system, which may be defective, to decipher these signals.

4. Depending on our own state of mind at a particular time, we can interpret other people's behavior with bias and decode it falsely (see page 9 for communication model).
5. The degree, to which we believe that we are correct in interpreting other person's motives and attitudes, is not in relation to actual accuracy of our belief.

Broadly speaking, understanding these principles and above all clarity can help us improve the quality of communication with strangers/foreigners. Nonetheless, using the aforementioned principles requires wisdom, openness to new information, awareness of more than one perspective when taking part in communication and being mindful in behavior. As a final point of note, communication is all about focusing on the process and interpretation of the messages that lead to accuracy of predictions and explanations of participants' behavior, which inevitably increases the effectiveness of communication with strangers/foreigners.

## **What is Culture**

Moving from communication to culture is rather an orderly transition because as Hall indicates, culture is communication and communication is culture (1990, 10). After all, the relationship between communication and culture is reciprocal, complex and interrelated. This means that culture affects, and is affected by communication. Communication is the carrier of culture and influences the structure of culture. In turn, culture manifests itself in communication because it tells people how they should appropriately behave. Put into slightly different words, when looking at communication and culture, it is hard to decide which is the voice and which is the echo. (Samovar and authors 2007, 22) The reason for this duality is that you "learn" your culture via communication, while at the same time communication is a reflection of your culture. The following few questions, show the powerful link between communication and culture:

- People in many parts of the world try to eradicate rats from their homes, but people in some parts of India live and eat with them. Why?
- Some people speak Swahili and some speak English. Why?
- Some people shake their hands when introduced to a stranger, but other people join their hands with palms together, and bow down in front of the other person. Why?



The universal answer to all of these questions is the same: culture because there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. (Hall 1990, Samovar and authors 2007, Cooper and authors 2007)

Briefly, anthropologists define culture in a way that explains learned behavior. They interpret it as a realm that is comprised of traditional ideas, related values and demonstrated behavior. Culture is that complex whole which includes language, knowledge, belief, arts, clothes, food, dance, music, sports, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society. Culture is something shared and transmitted from one generation to the next, it is something that organizes life and helps interpret existence. Simply put, culture is a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms and social practices, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people. (Lustig and Koester 1999, Samovar and authors 2007, Cooper and authors 2007, Ting-Toomey and Chung 2005)

Other characteristics of culture are invisible such as concept of time, religion, political ideology, friendship, beauty, sin and education to name but a few. In either way, if you understand these concepts of culture you have the opportunity to elevate your awareness of your own culture as well as the culture of other people because every person's culture includes his/her own social heritage that tells them which behaviors are appropriate and which are not. (Cooper and authors 2007, 45)

## Elements of Culture

As we have seen earlier, culture is composed of a countless number of elements (food, shelter, work, defense, social control, psychological security, social harmony, purpose of life, etc.). As Samovar and authors (2007, 25-26) and Lustig and Koester (1999, 37) indicate, there are five elements that will enable you to appreciate the notion that all cultures share a common set of components, and acting out of these issues often distinguishes one culture from another. These elements are: (1) history, (2) religion, (3) values, (4) social organizations, and (5) language.

**History** Over two thousand years ago, the Roman orator Cicero postulated that history provides guidance in daily life. He was right, because all cultures believe in the idea that history is a diagram that offers direction about how to live in the present. Passed from generation to generation, history helps perpetuate a culture's worldview. The stories of the past offer members of a culture a part of their identity, values, rules of behavior and the like. History highlights a culture's origins, "tells" its members what is important and identifies the accomplishments of the

culture of which they can be proud. While all cultures pass on a history that help shape their members, each history is unique to a particular culture and carries specific cultural messages. The “lessons” of the Holocaust, the American Revolution, Civil War in former Yugoslavia and the motivation behind the building of the Great Wall of China, the Egyptian Pyramids and the Acropolis, are stories that are emotional and touchy to respective cultures and help explain contemporary perceptions held by their members.

**Religion** Another distinctive element of all cultures is religion. The influence of religion is very important. It represents the entire fabric of a culture because it serves so many basic functions such as social control, conflict resolution, and reinforcement of group solidarity, explanations of the unexplainable and emotional support. These functions consciously and unconsciously influence everything from business practices to politics, and individual behavior.

**Values** Another peculiarity of all cultures is values. The key word in any discussion of cultural values is “guidelines”. In other words, values determine how people ought to behave. To the extent that cultural values differ, you can expect that participants in intercultural communication will tend to exhibit and to anticipate different behaviors under similar circumstances. In Asian and American Indian cultures, the elderly are highly respected and revered while in the United States, the emphasis is on youth.

**Social organizations** Another trait found in all cultures is so-called “social organizations”. These organizations (referred to at times as social systems or social structures) represent the various social units contained within the culture. Such institutions – including the family, government, schools and tribes – help the members of the culture organize their lives. These social systems establish communication networks and regulate norms of personal, familial and social conduct. How these organizations function and the norms they advance are unique to each culture.

**Language** It is another feature that is common to all cultures. Not only does language allow the members of a culture to share ideas, feelings and information, but it is also one of the chief methods for the transmission of culture. Whether they are English, Greek, Swahili, Chinese or French most words, meanings, grammar, syntax, bear the identification marks of a specific culture.

## **Cultural Diversity and Cultural Identity**

Diversity can be defined as the condition of having or being composed of differing elements, and, especially, the inclusion of different types of people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization.

Thus, diversity is when all people from all walks of life with differences and similarities, with diverse cultures and traditions wishfully work together in order to have common ground free from conflict (Parvis 2007, 15). The system of nature is a good example of diversity because it is composed of a variety and uniformity of living organisms. Humans, members of this ecosystem present a community comprised of so many different cultures, backgrounds, ideas and ways of life. The types of diversity are numerous: diversity in styles, economic status, political ideas, sexual orientation, geographic locations and social norms generate challenges that need accentuation in numerous multicultural environments.

People should not be waiting for diversity to happen, because they will be involved in it in one way or the other. Instead, they need to embrace diversity with all its challenges and benefits at home, school and work. They need to increase their level of awareness by acknowledging diversity, and by admitting that they live in a society that embraces people from all parts of the world regardless of the color of their skin, race, religion, language, national origin, gender, size, disability, sexual orientation and ideology.

### **Different Types of Diversity**

There are many types of diversity around the globe. In the western world, especially in North America and Australia, there are more types of diversity compared to other parts of the world. People are different in one way or the other. Understandably, diversity includes many different attributes including culture, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, age, ability, language, weight, style, idea, income, orientation, geographic location and many more aspects that make people unique. The first thing to do is to accept diversity and seek ways that make people more comfortable with one another. Therefore, according to Parvis (2007, 17-21) the main types of diversity that identify people and their associations are race, ethnicity, sex, gender, and geographic diversity.

**Race** Color of the skin is the main indicator of people coming from different geographic regions of the world. Generally, race signifies certain common and distinguishing physical characteristics comprising a comprehensive class that appears to derive from a distinct historic source.

**Ethnicity** It denotes a classification or affiliation with a group of people having common customs, characteristics, language etc. One good example of an ethnic group are the Aborigines in Australia, Maori in New Zealand and the Amish in the United States, who have maintained their way of life for centuries to date regardless of high tech modernization not far away from their ambient.

**Sex** It is a biological characteristic not a social construction. Issues about sex (including sexism and chauvinism) are a worldwide concern that varies from place to place. In addition, women and minorities have been discriminated in their work places for promotions and salary raise. Such barriers such as glass ceiling (representing an invisible but real barrier through which the next stage or level of advancement can be seen, but cannot be reached by a section of qualified and deserving employees) exist due to implicit prejudice on the basis of age, ethnicity, political or religious affiliation, and/or sex. Although generally illegal, such practices prevail in many countries.

**Gender** In recent years, the word gender has become well established, and prevailing (as in the politics of gender). Many anthropologists have supported this usage, and they prefer to use sex for reference to biological categories, and gender to refer to social or cultural categories. Another term that is still controversial in the society is sexual orientation that includes LGBT population. Coming out has been, in some cases, very difficult for some individuals, primarily because of fear and anxiety of not being accepted within family, relatives and their circle of friends. Sexual orientation has been the subject of cutting-edge debate not only in the United States but in Europe as well.

**Geographic diversity** The world is full of diversity indeed. When one travels, he/she notices the differences quite easily such as landscapes, climate, flora and fauna, landmarks, monuments, building structures, locations to name a few. Geographic diversity phenomenon has sometimes created perceptions mixed with stereotypes. Geographic diversity often refers to a generalization based on class, status, race diversity or other differences that exist among people. Particularly strong ties between status and neighborhood make geographic diversity known to people who identify places using stereotypes. For instance New York City vs. New Jersey is one of the American stereotypes as well as the difference between the North and the South, or countries members of the European Union vs. Balkan countries.

The key principals emphasized by many experts in the field of diversity are awareness and understanding. These two primary requirements in any multicultural setting provide individuals with the necessary look at our diverse world with acceptance and respect. Thus, awareness is a sense of gathering information about someone or something. This means that one needs to have a good self-awareness, and understanding of other people's ideas, beliefs, traditions and sensitivities. Understanding here means that each individual should be aware that differences exist among people. This is a challenge for most people who have never been around people different from themselves.

Nevertheless, understanding diversity is not an easy task because everyone needs to be prepared to face the bigger world and have the big picture. This means increasing the level of acceptance and admitting that we are living in a world that should connect through culture and celebrate diversity because the future of our world is all about diversity.

## Cultural Diversity

The long sought Golden Fleece of modern times – cultural diversity or multiculturalism is the variety of human societies or cultures in a specific region, or in the world as a whole. Under the multicultural paradigm, all cultures have an equal chance to be studied by everyone, and have an equal standing.

As the term “multiculturalism” implies, a variety of cultures learn to co-exist from the *sine qua non* of what it means to exist as a human being. As such, cultural diversity waives the flag of intercultural exchange and understanding. Once acknowledged as a movement in its own right, multiculturalism offers a parallel bridge for diverse groups of people to live under one roof in the democratic regime without falling in the cataclysmic abyss of discrimination and exclusion.

As is the case with almost all social paradigms, at least ever since Plato wrote “The Republic”, where he asserted the multiculturalist vision of a new inclusiveness of world community and culture, multiculturalism is not without certain problems. For example, one of the components cultures may refuse to conform to, is a common set of rules for peaceful coexistence. An example of such “culture” may be the political subculture of the Nazis, or similar racial supremacists as the KKK (also known as The Klan) in Texas. In these cases, one group may advocate its own supremacy over others without their consent, and, therefore, may feel compelled to rule over them, and in extreme cases even attempt to destroy them. Albeit one group may advocate its own supremacy over others, to survive in the context of a legally sanctioned multicultural society it may have to abide by laws that require it to respect the rights of other groups. At the same time, such group might also be allowed to express publicly its anti-multicultural ideology. (Parvis 2007, 45)

The following four recommendations in designing a multicultural identity should be noted (Parvis 2007, Cooper and authors 2005, Lustig and Koester 1999):

1. Multiculturalism should not be limited to strictly human perspectives, but include the lessons one may learn from imagining the “perspectives” of all the possible non-human “others”.

2. Avoid consciously or subconsciously working within assumptions that are ethnocentric even if camouflaged as “multicultural”.
3. Recognize the ability of human beings to learn about, join, or even convert to other cultures, all of which are not only allowed in a multicultural society, but should be legally protected.
4. When discussing culture, allow the chips of evidence to fall where they may under conditions of careful empirical research even if the results may shatter a popular or well-liked belief.

In closing, you should always bear in mind that if Plato could deal with multiculturalism thousands of years ago, so can people today.

## **Cultural Identity**

As early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the ancient Greeks identified what they shared in common and what distinguished them from the Persians and other non-Greeks: blood, language, religion and way of life. This list has not changed much up to now.

Since then, identity was a topic of interest in the fields of psychology and sociology and only later became a subject of investigation for intercultural communication scholars, who began to examine the cultural components of identity. Cultural identity has been concerned with characteristics that distinguish ways of thinking and behaving among people. Cultural identities continuously evolve and change, creating new associations and models of identification. As a result, some definitions addressed “identity” and others spoke of “cultural identity” because culture influences every facet of all our identities. While some scholars treat identity in its broadest sense, some communication scholars address cultural identity more specifically.

Largely, identity is highly abstract, complex and dynamic concept that defines who a person is. It is notoriously difficult to define, and this means there is not only one definition that would suffice. Therefore, and for the purpose of this book, it would be appropriate to look at some theories about cultural identity only to demonstrate the abstractness of identity and cultural identity.

Gardiner and Kosmitzki, (2002, 74) for example, see identity as a person’s self-definition as a separate and distinct individual, including behaviors, beliefs and attitudes. Ting-Toomey (2005, 212) considers identity to be the reflective self-conception or self-image that we derive from our family, gender, cultural, ethnic and individual socialization process. Identity, basically, refers to our reflective views of our selves, and other perceptions of our self-images. For Mathews (2000, 17) identity is how the self conceives of itself and labels itself. In a more concise