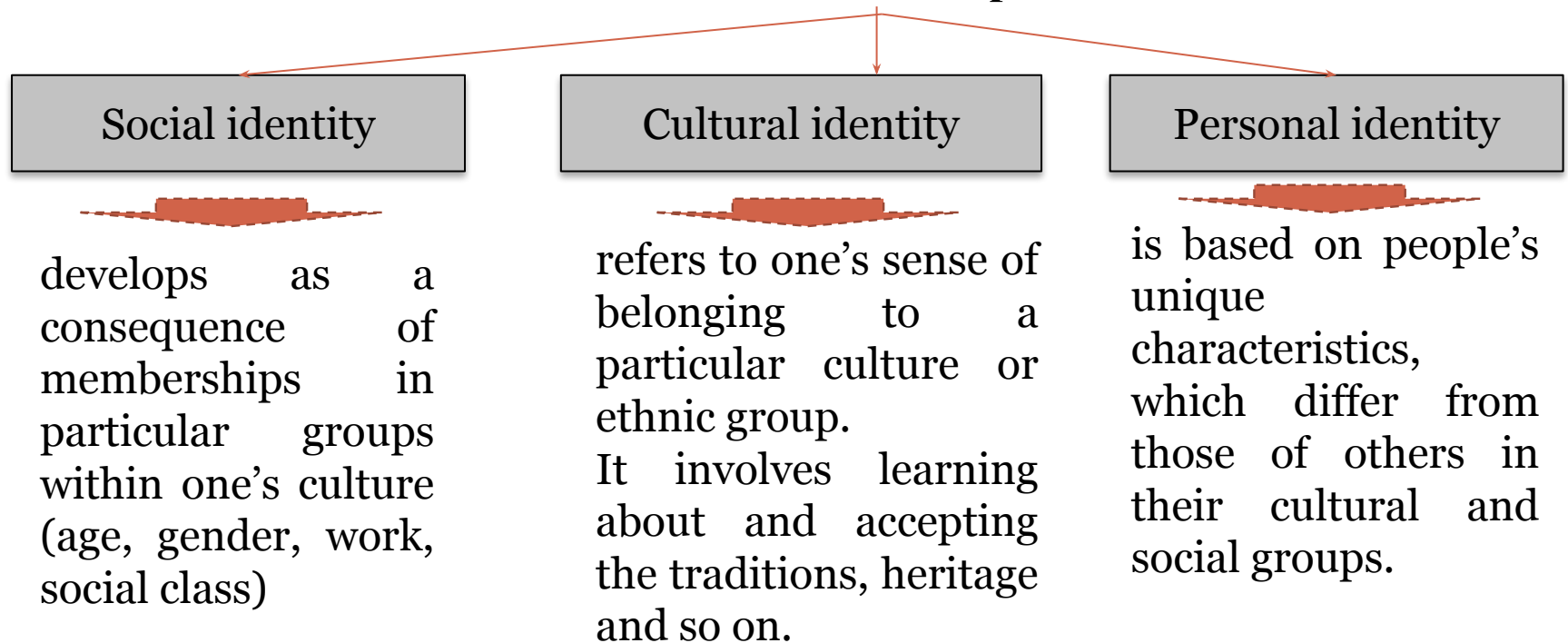# CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CULTURAL BIASES

Related to the distinction between ingroup (tendency to identify as a member of some groups) and outgroup membership is the concept of ***one's identity or self-concept***.

An individual's self-concept is built on

Social identity	Cultural identity	Personal identity
develops as a consequence of memberships in particular groups within one's culture (age, gender, work, social class)	refers to one's sense of belonging to a particular culture or ethnic group. It involves learning about and accepting the traditions, heritage and so on.	is based on people's unique characteristics, which differ from those of others in their cultural and social groups.

(Lustig 130) Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

The formation of cultural identity *(p.133 for example)*

STAGES

| Unexamined cultural identity | one's cultural characteristics are taken for granted, and consequently there is little interest in exploring cultural issues |

| Cultural identity search | involves a process of exploration and questioning about one's culture in order to learn more about it and to understand the implications of membership in that culture |

| Cultural identity | characterized by a clear, confident acceptance of oneself and an internalization of one's cultural identity |

(Lustig 133) Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.

CHARECTERISTICS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Because cultural identities are dynamic, cultural identity (sense of the culture to which a person belongs to) exists within a changing social context.

Consequently, your identity is not static, fixed, and enduring; rather, it is dynamic and changes with your ongoing life experiences.

When a person adapts to various intercultural challenges, your cultural identity may be transformed into one that is substantially different from what it used to be.

(Lustig 134-135) Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

CULTURAL BIASES

• Culture is a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices that affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people.

• Culture exists in people's minds, but that the consequences of culture – the shared interpretations – can be seen in people's communication behaviors.

• Shared interpretations (cultural patterns) provide guidelines about how people should behave, and they indicate what to expect in interactions with others.

• A culture's shared interpretations create predictability and stability in people's lives.

• Cultural similarity allows people to reduce uncertainty and to know what to expect when interacting with others.

Intercultural communication means that people are interacting with at least one culturally different person.

Consequently, the sense of security, comfort, and predictability that characterizes communication with culturally similar people is lost.

The greater the degree of interculturalness, the greater the loss of predictability and certainty.

Assurances about the accuracy of interpretations of verbal and nonverbal messages are lost.

(Lustig 136) Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

Social Categorizing

First, people impose a pattern on their world by organizing the stimuli that bombard their senses into conceptual categories.

Second, most people tend to think that other people perceive, evaluate, and reason about the world in the same way that they do. Humans assume that other people with whom they interact are like themselves.

Ethnocentrism means understanding and evaluating the motivations of others via the personal experiences .

Third, humans simplify the processing and organizing of information from the environment by identifying certain characteristics as belonging to certain categories of persons and events.

Information processing results in a simplification of the world, so that prior experiences are used as the basis for determining both the categories and the attributes of the events is called **stereotyping**

Herodotus described what is now called *ethnocentrism, which is the notion that the beliefs, values, norms, and practices of one's own culture are superior to those of others.*

All cultures teach their members the "preferred" ways to respond to the world, which are often labeled as "natural" or "appropriate." Thus, people generally perceive their own experiences, which are shaped by their own cultural forces, as natural, human, and universal.

Example p137

Ethnocentrism is a learned belief in cultural superiority. Because cultures teach people what the world is "really like" and what is "good," people consequently believe that the values of their culture are natural and correct.

(Lustig 138)

Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.

Journalist Walter Lippmann introduced the term *stereotyping in 1922 to refer to a selection process that is used to organize and simplify perceptions of others*

Stereotypes are a form of generalization about some group of people.

When people stereotype others, they take a category of people and make assertions about the characteristics of all people who belong to that category.

The consequence of stereotyping is that the vast degree of differences that exists among the members of any one group may not be taken into account in the interpretation of messages.

(Lustig 140)

Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

Categories used to form stereotypes about groups

Regions of the world
(Asians, Arabs, Africans)

Countries
(GB, Japan, China)

Regions within countries
(Northern Indians, US Midwesterners)

Cities
(New Yorkers, Parisians)

Race
(African, Caucasian)

Religion
(Muslim, Jewish)

Cultures
(English, Russian, French)

Age (young, adults)

Occupation (teacher, farmer, housekeeper)

Relational role
(mother, friend)

Physical characteristics
(fat, skinny, short)

Social class (wealthy, poor, middle class)

Stereotypes can be inaccurate in three ways:

• First stereotypes often are assumed to apply to all or most of the members of a particular group or category, resulting in a tendency to ignore differences among the individual members of the group.

This type of stereotyping error is called the *outgroup homogeneity effect* and results in a tendency to regard all members of a particular group as much more similar to one another than they actually are.

• A second form of stereotype inaccuracy occurs when the group average, as suggested by the stereotype, is simply wrong or inappropriately exaggerated.

This type of inaccuracy occurs, for instance, when Germans are stereotypically regarded as being very efficient, or perhaps very rigid, when they may actually be less efficient or less rigid than the exaggerated perception of them would warrant.

Stereotypes can be inaccurate in:

•A third form of stereotype inaccuracy occurs when the degree of error and exaggeration differs for positive and negative attributes.

For instance, imagine that you have stereotyped a culture as being very efficient (a positive attribute) but also very rigid and inflexible in its business relationships (a negative attribute). If you tend to overestimate the prevalence and importance of the culture's positive characteristics, such as its degree of efficiency, while simultaneously ignoring or underestimating its rigidity and other negative characteristics, you would have a "positive valence inaccuracy." Conversely, a "negative valence inaccuracy" occurs if you exaggerate the negative attributes while ignoring or devaluing its positive ones. This condition, often called *prejudice.*

Prejudice refers to negative attitudes toward other people that are based on faulty and inflexible stereotypes.

Prejudiced attitudes include *irrational feelings of dislike* and even hatred for certain groups, *biased perceptions and beliefs* about the group members that are not based on direct experiences and firsthand knowledge, and a *readiness to behave in negative* and unjust ways toward members of the group.

(Gordon Allport)

(Lustig 143)

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FUNCTIONS OF PREJUSTICE

a Utilitarian or adjustment

Displaying certain kinds of prejudice means that people receive rewards and avoid punishments. For example, if you express prejudicial statements about certain people, other people may like you more. It is also easier to simply dislike and be prejudiced toward members of other groups because they can then be dismissed without going through the effort necessary to adjust to them.

Ego-defensive

It protects self-esteem. Example, people who are unsuccessful in business may feel threatened by groups whose members are successful. Prejudice may function to protect one's self-image by denigrating or devaluing those who might make us feel less

Knowledge

prejudicial attitudes that people hold because of their need to have the world neatly organized and boxed into categories.

It takes the normal human proclivity to organize the world to an extreme. The rigid application of categories and the prejudicial attitudes assigned to certain behaviors and beliefs provide security and increase predictability.

Value-expressive

If people believe that their group has certain qualities that are unique, valuable, good, or in some way special, their prejudicial attitudes toward others is a way of expressing those values.

Term **discrimination refers to the behavioral manifestations of that prejudice.**

Thus discrimination can be thought of as prejudice "in action."

Discrimination can occur in many forms.

From the extremes of segregation and apartheid to biases in the availability of housing, employment, education, economic resources, personal safety, and legal protections, discrimination represents unequal treatment of certain individuals solely because of their membership in a particular group.

(Lustig 144) Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.

The word **racism** itself can evoke very powerful emotional reactions, especially for those who have felt the oppression and exploitation that stems from racist attitudes and behaviors.

Although *racism is often used synonymously with prejudice and discrimination, the social attributes that distinguish it from these other terms are oppression and power. Oppression refers to "the systematic, institutionalized mistreatment of one group of people by another*

Racism is the tendency by groups in control of institutional and cultural power to use it to keep members of groups who do not have access to the same kinds of power at a disadvantage.

(Lustig 146)

Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

Types of Racism

symbolic	members of a group with political and economic power believe that members of some other group threaten their traditional values, such as individualism and self-reliance
aversive	occurs when individuals do not perceive themselves as prejudiced because they make small concessions to, while holding basically negative attitudes toward, members of the other group.
tokenism	individuals who highly value fairness and equality among all racial and cultural groups nevertheless have negative beliefs and feelings about members of a particular race, often as a result of childhood socialization experiences
Genuine likes and dislikes	prejudicial attitude simply because the group displays behaviors that another group does not like
Degree of unfamiliarity	responding to unfamiliar people may create negative attitudes because of a lack of experience with the characteristics of their group

Cultural biases are based on normal human tendencies to view ourselves as members of a particular group and to view others as not belonging to that group.

Status, power, and economic differences heavily influence all intercultural contacts.

Cultural biases are a reminder that all relationships take place within a political, economic, social, and cultural context.

(Lustig 149) Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

SUMMARY

The biases that impede the development of intercultural competence, such as: Ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and racism

They occur because of the human need to organize and streamline the processing of information.

Cultural biases are based on normal human tendencies to view ourselves as members of a particular group and to view others as not belonging to that group.

Status, power, and economic differences heavily influence all intercultural contacts.

Cultural biases are a reminder that all relationships take place within a political, economic, social, and cultural context.

The intercultural challenge for all of us, as we live in a world where interactions with people from different cultures are common features of daily life, is to be willing to grapple with the consequences of prejudice, discrimination, and racism at the individual, social, and institutional levels.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. If people are born into one culture but raised in another, to which culture(s) do they belong?

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages for U.S. Americans who grow up with multiple cultural heritages?

3. What do people lose, and what do they gain, from having an ethnocentric perspective?

4. Is it possible for European Americans to be the recipients of any form of racism in the United States?

5.   Why might less obvious or less alarming forms of racism be just as dangerous as old-fashioned or symbolic racism?

THANK YOU
FOR
YOUR ATTENTION