

PREJUDICE

Whereas ethnocentrism is thinking your culture is better than others and stereotyping is acting as if all members of a group were alike, **prejudice** is a negative attitude toward a group of people just because they are who they are. Often the groups on the receiving end of prejudice are marginalized groups—people in poverty, people of color, and people who speak a language other than English. People who are accustomed to being on the receiving end of prejudice can become highly aware of that prejudice. One study compared Black Americans to white Americans in how accurately they could identify nonverbal signals of prejudice during 20-second video clips.³¹ The Black participants were more accurate in identifying nonverbal signals of prejudice than were white participants.

Sometimes the group experiencing the prejudice is actually larger than the group exhibiting prejudicial behaviors. For example, many countries, including the United States, show prejudice against women (as evidenced by the wage gap and the glass ceiling that limits career advancement) even though they are a numerical majority. Women experience sexist incidents—demeaning and degrading comments and sexual objectification—much more than men do, and they experience depression, anger, and lower self-esteem because of such incidents.³² In many other countries, people who are a numerical minority control the fates of and show prejudice toward a group that is larger but has less power.

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engaging diversity

Meeting, Greeting, and Eating

As you consider the ideas of cultural relativism, look at this list of nonverbal behaviors from around the world. Each of these behaviors needs to be judged not in comparison with what people do in the United States but in terms of its meaningfulness in another culture.

- U.S. citizens and Europeans shake hands in greeting, whereas an even larger number of Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese people bow when meeting.
- In China and other Pacific Rim countries, hosts and guests exchange small, nicely wrapped presents, especially in formal visits.
- Men and women in Russia, Italy, and France give each other a cheek-to-cheek hug and even a kiss on the cheek when greeting.
- Citizens of Pacific Rim countries exchange business cards on meeting by using both hands as if handing off a delicate gift. They look at and even comment on the card.
- Chinese people and other Asians eat with chopsticks, whereas people in many countries influenced by the British customarily eat with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right hand. North Americans tend to hold the fork in the right hand.

- Muslim men in Malaysia and in some other countries touch their heart after shaking hands as if to say their greeting is “from the heart.”
- Many Jews eat kosher food that has been blessed by a rabbi; many Muslims eat halal foods prepared by custom by a butcher who faces east and says the name of Allah while draining the animal’s blood. Traditionally, neither Jews nor Muslims eat pork.
- Whereas North Americans are famous for their “fast foods,” much of the rest of the world takes time to eat, to savor the food, and to enjoy conversations with others.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Unconscious bias describes the ways our unconscious cognitions engage stereotypes and biases that unknowingly impact our behaviors. Unconscious biases arise from several factors.

Confirmation bias is a form of cognitive bias that addresses the tendency to pay attention to behaviors and ideas that reinforce our existing belief structures. For instance, your friend Pam hasn’t texted you back for a week, so you believe she is avoiding you. You hear from your mutual friend that Pam regularly texts back within a few minutes, so you use this as evidence to confirm your belief that Pam is avoiding you, which might not be the case. **Attribution bias** occurs when we positively evaluate behaviors and situations from people in our in-group and judge those in the out-group more harshly, even when they engage in the same behavior as the ingroup. A classic example of this is if you are in a rush for class and cut someone off on the highway, you will likely rationalize that you are a good person running late; however, if someone does this to you, you will likely think they are an impatient and reckless driver. Finally, **affinity bias** is the tendency to build relationships with people who share your interests and background.³³ For example, when students are asked to work in groups of their choice, affinity bias might lead students to work with people with the same major rather than others with different majors.

communicating with agility

Steps for Managing Unconscious Bias

Identifying unconscious bias in ourselves typically requires a shift in how we normally think about our behaviors and how we talk with others. The following are four ways you can begin to manage unconscious bias in your own life:

1. **Personal awareness.** Conduct a self-examination to identify your beliefs and values that can lead to unconscious bias.
2. **Acknowledgment.** Recognize the ways in which you could have or have engaged in unconscious bias in the past.

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2. **Acknowledgment.** Recognize the ways in which you could have or have engaged in unconscious bias in the past.
3. **Empathy.** Actively listen to people who are different from yourself and seek to understand their views and experiences.
4. **Education.** Increase your knowledge about how unconscious bias impacts your communication. Ask others to challenge you when they notice you are engaging in unconscious biases.

Source: Adapted from Bucknor-Ferron, P., & Zagaja, L. (2016). Five strategies to combat unconscious bias. *Nursing*, 46(11), 61–62.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

In recent years, the general public has become increasingly aware of **microaggressions**, or everyday verbal or nonverbal communication that can insult or devalue people in marginalized communities.³⁴ Kevin Nadal, a professor of psychology, noted in an episode of Life Kit on National Public Radio that microaggressions are common occurrences and that people may not be aware they are experiencing them or engaging in them.³⁵ While overtly racist comments are easy to identify, microaggressions are often subtle and nuanced and can be intentional or unintentional. In general, microaggressions can be focused on stereotypes of many aspects of identity such as of age, race, and gender.

Professor Nadal suggests addressing microaggressions with the following three steps:

1. *Educate yourself.* Watch documentaries and read personal essays, blogs, and research articles to understand the experiences of people in marginalized groups so you can understand how their experiences differ from your own. This ensures that you come to the conversation with information, rather than expecting the people from the marginalized group to be your main source of information.
2. *Set realistic conversation expectations.* As you prepare for the conversation, consider if the discussion will actually help and acknowledge that one conversation typically won't change a person's worldview. If motivation and interest are present, additional conversations could take place.
3. *Be aware of your mental health.* Conversations about microaggressions require emotional labor, especially on the part of those in the marginalized group. Therefore, it is important to balance productive arguments and conversations with time for rest.

Strategies for Improving Inclusive Communication

Effective communication often takes considerable time, energy, and commitment. The strategies presented here will provide you with some ways to improve inclusive communication and avoid additional challenges. Having some strategies in advance will prepare you for new situations with people with diverse identities and will increase your confidence in your ability to communicate effectively with a variety of people.

1. *Conduct a personal self-assessment.* How do your own attitudes toward other identities influence your communication with people from those groups? One of the first steps toward improving your inclusive communication skills is an honest assessment of your own communication style, beliefs, and prejudices.
2. *Practice supportive communication behaviors.* Supportive behaviors, such as empathy, encourage success in intercultural exchanges. Defensive behaviors tend to hamper effectiveness.
3. *Develop sensitivity toward diversity.* One healthy communication perspective holds that you can learn something from all people. Diverse populations provide ample opportunity for learning. Take the time to learn about other cultures before a communication situation, but don't forget that you will also learn about others simply by taking a risk and talking to someone who is different from you. Challenge yourself. You may be surprised by what you learn.
4. *Avoid stereotypes.* Generalizations go only so far; avoid making assumptions about another's social group identity, and get to know individuals for who they are.
5. *Avoid ethnocentrism.* You may know your own culture the best, but that familiarity does not make your culture superior to all others. You will learn more about the strengths and weaknesses of your own culture by learning more about other cultures.
6. *Develop code sensitivity.* **Code sensitivity** refers to the ability to use the verbal and nonverbal language appropriate to the cultural norms of the individual with whom you are communicating. The more you know about another's culture, the better you will be at adapting your communication.
7. *Use and encourage descriptive feedback.* Effective feedback encourages adaptation and is crucial in inclusive communication. Both participants should be willing to accept feedback and exhibit supportive behaviors. Feedback should be immediate, honest, specific, and clear.
8. *Manage conflicting beliefs and practices.* You have your own beliefs that are, in part, manifested from your own culture. There may be moments when your cultural beliefs and values are in conflict with those of another culture. If you develop acquaintances who practice those cultural beliefs, how will you respond? For instance, how will you respond if your roommate practices religious beliefs other than your own? If you decide to take a job in a country that limits the rights of free speech, how will you choose to behave? Thinking about how you will reconcile your own beliefs against the values of another social identity

group helps you better plan to avoid or at least manage tensions that could develop.

Of course, the most effective strategy for improving your inclusive communication competence is practice. Fortunately, the increasing diversity of our own culture means that inclusive communication practice can take place with the people at the corner market, at your place of employment, or even with the student sitting next to you in class. To learn from these many instances, you must learn to be reflexive. **Reflexivity** means being self-aware and learning from interactions with the intent of improving future interactions. That is, you are able to assess the interaction, identify what went well in the conversation and what could have been done better, and then learn from those observations. Through reflexivity you will not only improve your intercultural communication skills but also become a more effective communicator in nearly every situation.



- Freedom of expression and a diversity of perspectives are fundamental to a civil society.

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be ready... for what's next

Getting Involved with Other Social Identities

Did you know that spending time with people who are from different social identity groups has a positive effect on your attitudes during your college years? For example, researchers have shown that when college students have a large percentage of friends from different ethnic groups, especially during sophomore and junior years of college, they tend to be less biased in favor of their own ethnic group. Additionally, by the end of their senior year, students tend to feel less anxious when interacting with members of different ethnic groups.³⁶

In an effort to develop new friendships with people from different social identity groups, make it a point to ask questions and attend events at your school or in your community. The following is a list of questions to help get the conversation started.

1. What makes people feel like they are part of this group?

Chapter Review & Study Guide

Summary

In this chapter you learned the following:

1. The study of inclusive communication is important because we are increasingly interacting with people with different identities.
2. Inclusive communication seeks to reduce communication barriers and subsequent prejudice.
3. Diversity and equity help build relationships among a variety of different people in fair and just ways.
4. A culture is a unique combination of rituals, ways of thinking, and ways of behaving.
 - Dominant identities includes those who have power and can influence traditional social structures such as politics, religion, schools, and businesses.
 - Nondominant identities exist within the broader culture and differ from the dominant culture in one or more significant characteristics.
5. Social identity theory, communication accommodation theory, and contact theory explain and describe challenges and opportunities toward inclusive communication.
6. Ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, unconscious bias, and microaggressions present challenges to inclusive communication.
7. You can strive to improve your own communication competence by
 - conducting a personal self-assessment
 - practicing supportive communication behaviors
 - developing sensitivity toward diversity
 - avoiding stereotypes
 - avoiding ethnocentrism
 - developing code sensitivity
 - using descriptive feedback
 - managing conflicting beliefs and practices
 - practicing reflexivity

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Key Terms

Affinity bias

Attribution bias
