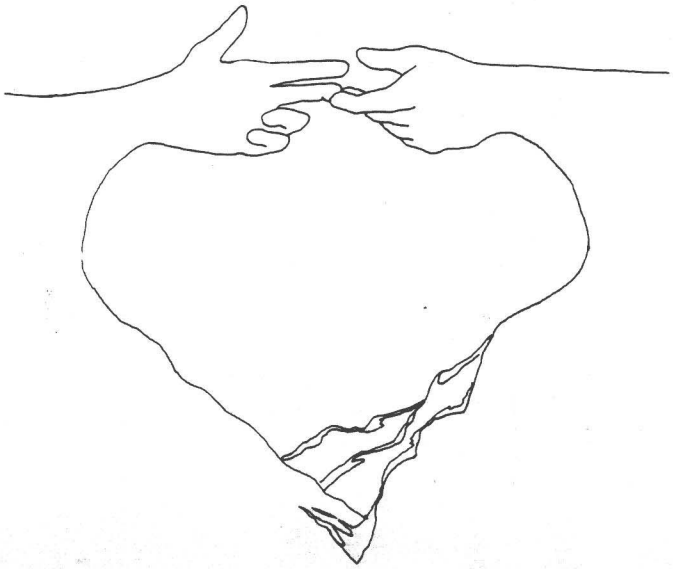
Bridging Differences

Effective Intergroup Communication

Second Edition



William B. Gudykunst

INTERPERSONAL COMMTEXTS 3

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Preface

I originally became involved in studying intercultural communication in the United States Navy when I served as an Intercultural Relations Specialist in Japan. We designed and conducted training to help naval personnel and their families adjust to living in Japan. While conducting intercultural training in Japan, I thought intercultural communication (i.e., communication between people from different cultures) was different from intracultural communication (i.e., communication with members of our own culture).

After getting out of the Navy, I went to Minnesota to work on my Ph.D. with Bill Howell. While completing my Ph.D., I continued to see intercultural communication as different from intracultural communication and retained my interest in training and applications. After accepting a position as an assistant professor, however, I focused on conducting research and developing theory. In

trying to develop a way to explain communication between people from different cultures, I came to the conclusion that the processes operating when we communicate interculturally are the same as when we communicate intraculturally. To illustrate, our stereotypes always affect our communication. Stereotypes, however, lead to ineffective communication more frequently when the person with whom we are communicating comes from another culture than when the person comes from our own culture. One reason for this is that our stereotypes of our culture tend to be more accurate and favorable than our stereotypes of other cultures. Inaccurate and unfavorable stereotypes of other cultures and ethnic groups cause us to misinterpret messages we receive from members of those cultures and ethnic groups.

Given that the underlying process of communication is the same in intercultural and intracultural encounters, we need a way to refer to this common underlying process. Young Yun Kim and I used "communicating with strangers" to refer to this common process in our intercultural communication text, *Communicating With Strangers* (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, 1992). I have drawn on that framework and the work of Harry Triandis, Henri Tajfel, Howie Giles, Chuck Berger, Ellen Langer, Walter Stephan, and Cookie Stephan, among others, to develop anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory (Gudykunst, 1988, 1993) to explain interpersonal and intergroup communication (intercultural communication is a type of intergroup communication). I apply this theory to improving communication effectiveness in this book. My emphasis is on improving communication effectiveness between people from groups that differ in, for example, culture, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, or social class. The ideas presented, however, can be applied to communication with people within groups as well.

There are numerous people who have contributed, either directly or indirectly, to my thinking about communication and to this book. Exposure to Kurt Lewin's writing early in my graduate career convinced me that theories must have practical application. Bill Howell and George Shapiro reinforced this notion at Minnesota. Tsukasa Nishida, Gao Ge, Mitch Hammer, and Karen Schmidt have worked with me on many of the studies on which

the theory is based, and Mitch co-authored the special version of the theory applied to intercultural adaptation (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988a). Sandy Sudweeks, Paula Trubisky, Joyce Baker, David Doyle, Mark Cole, and I initially applied the theory to designing an intercultural training program. Participants in the Applications of Intercultural Communication course I taught at California State University, Fullerton, tested many of the ideas presented in intergroup training programs they designed and implemented.

Stella Ting-Toomey served as a sounding board for the theory and its application; she read a complete draft of the first edition and suggested the title. Stella also read a complete draft of the second edition while she was trying to complete her own intercultural book. Harry Triandis, Rich Wiseman, Jon Bruschke, and the Series Co-Editors, Mark Knapp and John Daly, also provided valuable feedback on a draft of the first edition of the book. Michael Bond has provided valuable feedback on my work over the years that I have incorporated in this book. The book would not have been written without the gentle prodding and support of Ann West, my editor at Sage for the first edition. Sophy Craze facilitated the production of the second edition at Sage. The time to write the first edition of the book was made possible by a Senior Faculty Research Grant from California State University, Fullerton.

William B. Gudykunst
Laguna Beach, CA

Greetings! I am pleased
to see that we are different.
May we together become greater
than the sum of both of us.

Vulcan Greeting
(*Star Trek*)

See at a distance an undesirable person;
See close at hand a desirable person;
Come closer to the undesirable person;
Move away from the desirable person.
Coming close and moving apart,
how interesting life is!

Gensho Ogura

Praise for the First Edition....

"This is an insightful volume and can be a useful resource for teachers as well as anyone working within a multicultural environment. It provides a framework for understanding, but goes beyond this by helping the reader assess his or her own communication style and offering guidelines and approaches for more effective communication."

—Et cetera

"The book is particularly well suited to undergraduate classes, because it includes many different scales that can be used in class exercises to help students appreciate the complexities of concepts such as ethnic identity, ethnocentrism, prejudice, approach-avoidance, uncertainty orientation, tolerance for ambiguity, empathy, and communication satisfaction."

—Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology

With an increasing emphasis on such issues as culture and ethnicity, attitudes and stereotyping, and community building, **Bridging Differences, Second Edition** is more topical than ever. New to this second edition is a chapter on exchanging messages with other groups; material that looks at differences between age, social class, and physical ability; discussion of ethical issues and perceptions; and, suggestions for improving the accuracy of intergroup attributions. In addition, the expanded material includes culture and ethnicity; intergroup attitudes and stereotyping; managing intergroup attitudes; community building; and the knowledge, motivation, and skills necessary for intergroup communication.

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1

Communicating With Strangers

Elie Wiesel, a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, believes that hate directed toward members of different cultural and racial groups, as well as toward members of different political and ideological groups, is the major source of problems between people in the twentieth century.[1] Hate is being expressed toward, and conflict is occurring between, people of different groups everywhere we look. To illustrate, nationality conflicts are taking place in the former Soviet Union (e.g., between the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians); ethnic conflict is occurring among the Serbians, Croatians, and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia; conflict between neo-Nazis and immigrants in Germany is leading to violence; conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland is still taking place; and conflict between Arabs and Jews in Israel has not stopped, to name only a few of the intergroup conflicts occurring

in the world today.[2] There also is racial harassment on university campuses in the United States; hate crimes are being committed against members of various groups (e.g., members of different ethnic groups, homosexuals) at an increasing rate in cities throughout the United States; and there is conflict between pro-choice and right-to-life groups at abortion clinics in the United States. The animosity among the various groups is aggravated by the hate programs appearing on public access cable television in the United States (e.g., "Race and Reason"; see Zoglin, 1993).

Although the specific causes of the conflicts occurring throughout the world differ depending upon the situation, all incidents share one thing in common, polarized communication. *Polarized communication* occurs when the communicators have "the inability to believe or seriously consider one's view as wrong and the other's opinion as truth. Communication within human community becomes typified by the rhetoric of 'we' are right and 'they' are misguided or wrong" (Arnett, 1986, pp. 15-16). Polarized communication exists when groups or individuals look out for their own interests and have little or no concern for others' interests. Deborah Tannen (1993) believes that

> the devastating group hatreds that result in so much suffering in our own country and around the world are related in origin to the small intolerances in our everyday conversations—our readiness to attribute good intentions to ourselves and bad intentions to others; to believe there is one right way and ours is it; and to extrapolate from frustration with an individual in order to generalize to a group. (p. B5)

We express these small intolerances in our everyday conversations largely without being aware of doing so.

When we are not concerned for others' interests we are *morally exclusive.* "Moral exclusion occurs when individuals or groups are perceived as *outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply.* Those who are morally excluded are perceived as nonentities, expendable, or undeserving; consequently, harming them appears acceptable, appropriate or just" (Optow, 1990, p. 1). Lack of concern for others and moral exclusion are a function, at least in part, of the spiritual deprivation (i.e.,

the feeling of emptiness associated with separation from our fellow humans) that Mother Teresa sees as the major problem facing the world today (Jampolsky, 1989). Tannen (1993) points out that our "inability to feel committed to others we see like us is matched by an equally strong tendency to diminish the humanity of those we see as different" (p. B5).

One reason for our spiritual deprivation is the difficulties with which we must cope in our life. As Scott Peck (1978) says, "life is difficult" (p. 15). Most of us expect our life to be easy, but it is not. The difficult conditions in our life threaten our self-concepts (i.e., our views of ourselves; Staub, 1989). Also, whenever we perceive threats to achieving our goals, we perceive our self-concepts to be threatened (Lazarus, 1991). When our self-concepts are threatened, we try to improve the way we see ourselves. One way we accomplish this is by positively comparing ourselves to others or putting others down (Tajfel, 1978). When we feel superior to others or see others as inferior to us, we feel good about ourselves. Another way we deal with threats to our self-concepts is by becoming hostile or aggressive toward others, particularly those who are different from us in important ways (e.g., members of different cultures or ethnic groups, people with different gender orientations).

We also feel spiritual deprivation and unconnected when we do not know how to communicate with others. This is especially true for interactions between members of other cultures or ethnic groups in the United States, but it also is true for interactions between people with disabilities and people without disabilities, interaction between younger and older people, and interaction between members of different social classes. Because we have little contact with members of other groups (T. Rose, 1981), we do not have much practice in communicating with them. Many of us believe that our inability to communicate with members of other groups is due to one person not being competent in the other's language or dialect. Linguistic knowledge alone, however, is not enough to ensure that our communication with people from other groups will progress smoothly or be effective. Confucius said that "human beings are drawn close to one another by their common nature, but habits and customs keep them apart." Misunderstandings in intergroup encounters often stem from not

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