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Culture and Interpersonal Communication

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CULTURE AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

William B. Gudykunst
Stella Ting-Toomey
with Elizabeth Chua

Sage Series



Interpersonal Communication 8



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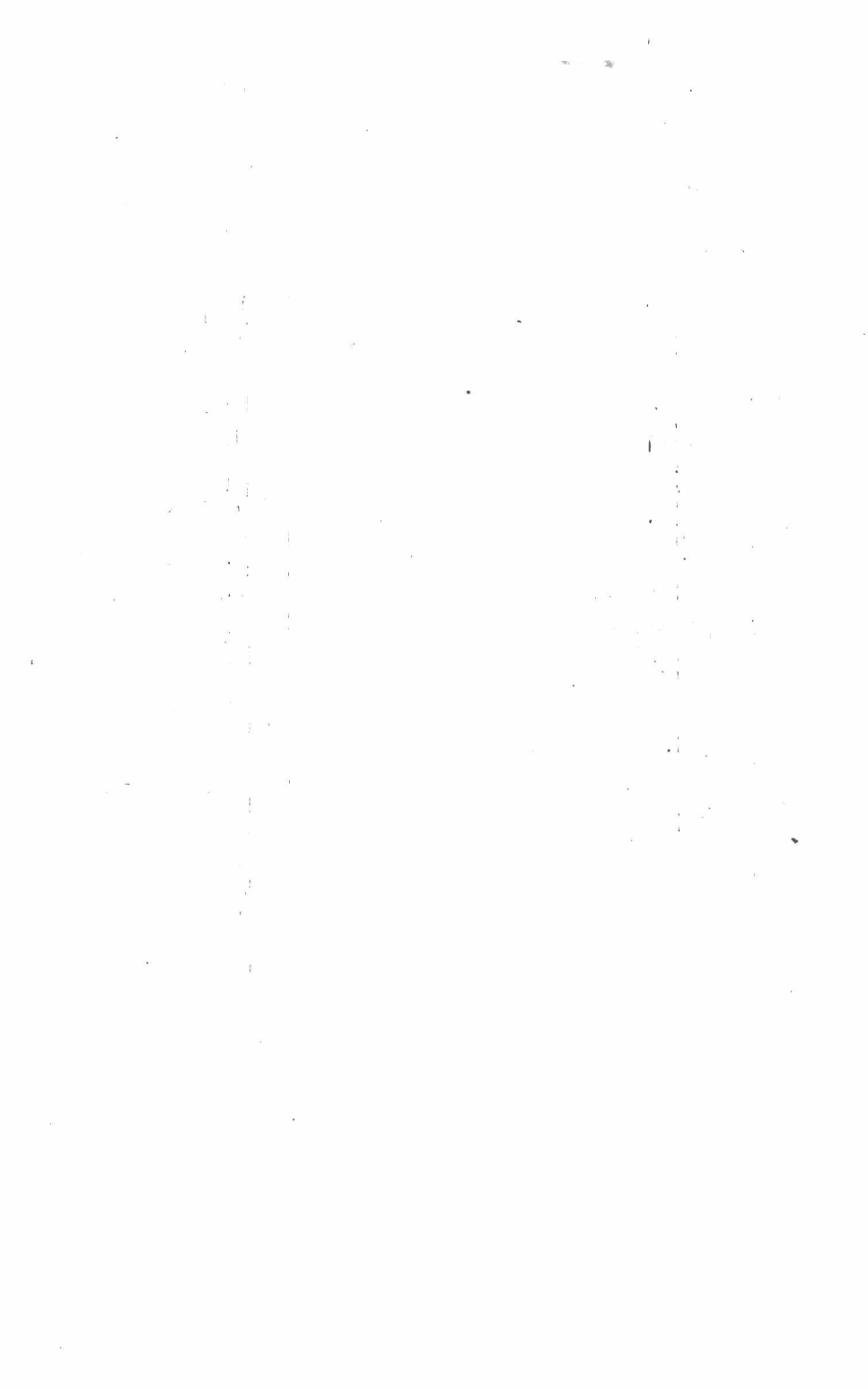
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SERIES EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This book marks a critical point in the maturation of scholarship focusing on the relationship of culture and communication. In the 1960s you could probably count on one hand the number of books in this area. In contrast, the 1970s was an explosion of activity and interest. The concept of the global village had captured the imagination of communication scholars and work began on many fronts. Interest groups and divisions focusing on communication and culture were formed in professional communication associations; textbooks and readers were published; scholarly journals and college courses were established. The study on intercultural communication and cross-cultural communication were characterized by a developing diversity of interests and activities.

But there were few active and ongoing research programs to give the field depth. In addition, the role of communication theory in individual research publications was not always clear. Scholarly respectability, it was argued, was directly related to the future development of theory-driven programs of research. The publication of *Culture and Interpersonal Communication* signals a new phase of scholarly development in this area. It is distinguished by the following features:

First, the clear and driving force throughout this book is the desire to understand and explicate the nature of interpersonal communication as it affects and is affected by culture. Interpersonal communication from this perspective, then, has an element of group identification that manifests itself in the verbal and/or nonverbal messages exchanged. The ability to identify "culture" and/or "group identification" in face-to-face transactions is often elusive, but the authors of this book provide us with useful guidelines for this important undertaking.

Second, this book is distinguished by its ability to synthesize a diverse and complex literature clearly. For example, our ability to understand the influence of culture on communication is dependent on our ability to

understand a myriad of studies that profess to identify basic dimensions along which cultures vary. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey have, gratefully, sifted through the semantic overlap and different methodologies in order to provide us with a manageable list of factors associated with cultural variations in communication. In addition, this volume contains a synthesis of six years of research by the authors themselves—including a number of studies focusing on the role of communication and culture in the development of interpersonal relationships.

Third, this book is theory-driven. It integrates theoretical perspectives from those who study culture and those who study communication. The authors show how an understanding of communication theory is critical for an understanding of the role of culture in human transactions.

Finally, this book sets a scholarly agenda for the study of interpersonal communication and culture. It identifies the major methodological problems and research needs. In my opinion, it is a major sourcebook that should act as a stimulus for improved scholarship in this area and for attracting new scholars.

This is a book that encourages a reader to ask questions; to look for new connections; to open one's mind to alternative perspectives. Most interpersonal communication scholars agree that, in one way or another, culture is an inherent part of all interpersonal transactions. In practice, however, culture and interpersonal communication are often talked about and studied as separate entities. *Culture and Interpersonal Communication* is a valuable exception to this hopefully short-lived and unfortunate trend.

Mark L. Knapp

PREFACE

Most research on interpersonal communication ignores culture. There are, however, at least two reasons theorists and researchers in interpersonal communication should be interested in culture. First, culture is, by definition, a boundary condition for all interpersonal research not conducted cross-culturally (i.e., the conclusions of studies must be limited to the culture—and ethnic group—in which they were conducted) and a scope condition for all theories that do not include culture as one of the concepts in the theory. Research must be conducted and theories must be tested in other cultures in order to establish generalizability. Second, culture is, in and of itself, a powerful and an interesting theoretical variable vis-à-vis interpersonal communication. There is tremendous variability in interpersonal processes across cultures that is not considered when doing research in only one culture. When culture is included in a study or treated as an explanatory variable in a theory, the scope of the study or theory is increased.

Our purpose in writing this book is to examine the theoretical influence of culture on interpersonal communication. The book is an attempt to summarize the work we have conducted on culture and communication over the past six or seven years, as well as to provide a theoretical framework for guiding future research and the interpretation of past research related to interpersonal communication. We contend that cross-cultural comparisons of interpersonal communication must be theoretically based. This implies that culture must be conceptualized in such a way that it can be treated as a variable in research. We present such a conceptualization in the first two chapters and apply it to specific areas of research in the remainder of the book.

There is extensive cross-cultural research on interpersonal processes in the communication, anthropology, and social psychological literature. Most of these studies, however, have not treated culture as a "theoretical" variable. Throughout the book we must, therefore, reinterpret previous research that has revealed cultural differences using the conceptualization of culture (as a theoretical variable) presented in the first two chapters. In so doing, we provide post hoc explanations as

to how culture influences situational factors (Chapter 3), self-conceptions (Chapter 4), verbal communication styles (Chapter 5), non-verbal dimensions (Chapter 6), self-conceptions (Chapter 6), personality (Chapter 7), social cognitive processes (Chapter 8), affective processes (Chapter 9), interpersonal relationships (Chapter 10), and intergroup relationships (Chapter 11).

The chapters are ordered so that explanatory frameworks used in later chapters are presented in earlier chapters. The self-conceptions chapter, for example, comes before the verbal communication styles chapter because the facework theory presented in the self-conceptions chapter is used to explain differences in verbal communication styles. Deciding where to discuss some issues was problematic. To illustrate, conflict styles involve verbal communication, but they also are a function of social cognitive processes and, therefore, could have been examined in either Chapter 5 or Chapter 8. In deciding where to discuss issues like this, we emphasized the topic in the chapter in which the greatest conceptual overlap with other material appeared to exist.

It would be impossible for us to review all cross-cultural research on interpersonal processes. Summarizing the anthropological literature alone would require several books. Further, Harry Triandis and his associates recently completed a review of cross-cultural research in psychology that filled six volumes (*The Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*). Our review of the research, accordingly, is selective.

We have attempted to cite the majority of the communication research of which we are aware (the references include many studies not cited in the text) and selected representative anthropological and social psychological studies to supplement in areas in which little or no communication research has been conducted. In some areas in which no cross-cultural research exists, we present a theoretical/conceptual argument regarding the relationship between cultural variability and the specific process involved. There is no research, for example, on face-negotiation across cultures. We, therefore, present Ting-Toomey's (1988) theory of face-negotiation in Chapter 4. The way we discuss the effect of culture on specific interpersonal communication processes across chapters, accordingly, is a function of previous research, or lack of research, on the topic.

The studies discussed in detail throughout the book are those in which we have confidence that the effects observed are due to culture and not other variables such as age, sex, social class, or rural-urban differences. We have not discussed studies in detail that used international students in the United States as respondents or studies that were not conducted in the respondents' native language. We have, in

other words, tried to focus on those studies that, in our opinion, controlled for other explanatory variables (Note: sample equivalence is discussed in the final chapter). Where other plausible explanations exist, we point them out.

The specific research discussed is important, but it is not the main focus of the book. Rather, as indicated above, the objective of the book is to illustrate how scholars can theoretically explain cultural differences in interpersonal communication that have been observed in the past to proffer hypotheses about cultural variability in future research. The specific studies included, therefore, should be viewed only as exemplars.

Before concluding, we want to express our gratitude to friends and colleagues who contributed their time and expertise in bringing the book to fruition. To begin, we owe an intellectual debt to Harry Triandis. He has influenced our thinking and approach to the study of culture and communication. The model presented in Chapter 1 (and used throughout the book) draws on his work and he graciously provided advice on the development of the model. Michael Bond and Geert Hofstede also have influenced our approach to the study of culture and interpersonal communication. Michael Bond has commented on drafts of several studies included and has provided many of the studies cited in the book. He has been a constant source of support for our work. Geert Hofstede's theory of cultural differentiation provides the basis of much of our work and we emphasize it throughout the book. Without his pioneering work, this book would not have been possible.

Charles Berger, Donald Cushman, David Johnson, Felipe Korzenny, and Tsukasa Nishida also commented on an earlier version of our model of culture and communication (as presented in Gudykunst, 1987a) and made valuable suggestions for improvement. Several colleagues—Young Yun Kim, Sandra Sudweeks, Paula Trubisky, Karen Schmidt, Dean Scheibel, Louise Eckel—and the series editor, Mark Knapp, read a complete draft of the book, commenting on coherency, style, and form. Even though we did not incorporate all of their suggestions, their critiques and suggestions were invaluable. We also want to thank Tsukasa Nishida, Mitchell Hammer, Karen Schmidt, Seung-Mock Yang, Tae-Seop Lim, Young-Chul Yoon, Lori Sodetani, Hiroko Koike, and Nobuo Shiino, coauthors on several of the studies reported herein. The writing of this book would not have been possible without their collaboration over the past several years.

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