

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

RAISING THE LEVEL OF AWARENESS: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE CULTURE
PLAYS IN EVANGELISM

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ABSTRACT

Evangelism efforts in twenty-first century North America and cross-cultural communication are joined together. As Christians reach out with God's Word into their community, they find people who are unlike themselves. While they share the good news of a Savior for all, cultural differences can easily be ignored. Cultural ignorance negatively affects evangelism efforts. It prevents witnesses from effective gospel communication because it creates psychological barriers that stop effective communication. Cultural awareness enhances evangelism efforts. It breaks barriers down. This thesis seeks to raise the level of awareness of the role culture plays in evangelism efforts. The thesis begins by looking at biblical principles of evangelism and the role human communication plays. Then it creates a basis of understanding about culture and intercultural communication. Lastly it looks at two ways for growing in cultural intelligence and how that knowledge might be applied.

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INTRODUCTION

The pastor stands in front of a house only a mile away from church. When the door opens, he introduces himself. He explains that he is from the church down the road and that he wants to share what his church is about. As he looks around during the conversation, he notices that the house is not decorated like his own. He can smell dinner cooking but he has no idea what it is. He sees how different this family's life is from his own. But after refocusing in on the conversation, he senses an opportunity and launches into his law/gospel presentation. He lays out the main points of Christianity as he has so many times before. After minutes of listening, the prospect responds with a polite thank you for the visit and accepts the church flyer. The pastor sees that his words didn't connect with him but still invites him to come to worship and Bible study. On the way back to the car he knows the visit didn't go well and wonders what went wrong.

Many pastors, seminarians, and lay evangelists have found themselves in similar situations. Standing in front of people who are not like themselves and trying to communicate God's unimaginable truths is an unnerving task. But by expressing the truths of God's Word so clearly and succinctly, one might assume their words were impossible to misunderstand, that those words would resonate with any heart. They used passages that had clarified so much for themselves. They could speak from the heart because what they were saying had touched their

own heart. The work was well-intentioned but the conversation was lacking something: cultural awareness.

Whether one recognizes it or not, culture plays a huge role in communication. Whatever culture people grow up in shapes them in a significant way. That's why communication within a native culture feels natural. It comes easily. Cross-cultural communication is not easy. It can feel like putting a square peg into a round hole. In our multicultural society, culture can seem like an impenetrable wall for Christian evangelism efforts.

This thesis aims to empower and equip the reader to carry out the calling to share the good news with all cultures by raising the level of cultural awareness. "Awareness is stepping back from what we're doing and reflecting on it. It's disciplining ourselves to see what we otherwise miss."¹ This thesis will train the reader to see what can easily be missed, to be intentional about cultural awareness. An increased level of awareness about God's call, culture, and cross-cultural communication will serve evangelists well in their work. Cultural awareness will help break down barriers and will lead to effective cross-cultural evangelism.

BE AWARE OF WHAT GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO

The events of the last few weeks caused the disciples' level of awareness to rise quickly. They were no longer ignorant about what had happened. They were witnesses of his suffering and death. His resurrection taught them that their forgiveness was certain. Jesus made them aware about all that had been written when he "opened their minds so they could understand the

¹ Livermore, David A. *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 148.

Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Everything that was written in the past centered on what Jesus had just done.

Jesus also made them aware of what their future was going to be. Some of his last words to the disciples clarified their mission on earth: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV).

The Great Commission meant big changes for the disciples. It was a cross-cultural imperative. The good news was for all nations. Jesus told the disciples to go out. His command was clear; they were not supposed to stay in one place. They would have to interact with people who were not like themselves as they traveled throughout the world. Jesus had demonstrated how to act in cross-cultural situations and now the disciples would do the same. Going out from Israel guaranteed cross-cultural communication. This was a new level of awareness about what it meant to be fishers of men.

The goal of their communication was to make disciples. Jesus specified how they were supposed to do this: through baptism and through teaching. Communication was necessary as they taught people about the Scriptures, about the long-promised Messiah who came and won forgiveness for them. Explanation of the blessings of baptism had to be clear so that people wouldn't think baptism was something they did to gain favor with God. Making disciples of all nations demanded cross-cultural communication.

This task of worldwide, cross-cultural discipling of a Gentile, unbelieving world was more than any of the disciples could bear on their own. Jesus's lifelong promise to be with them

in all their efforts would comfort them and remind them that they were not alone in the difficult task. The one who commissioned them to go out would be with them as they went.

Jesus continues to be with his disciples who carry out the Great Commission today. The work did not end after those disciples died. Jesus promised to be with those who carry out this commission to the “end of the age.” It was not just the marching orders for those few disciples. He laid out the mission of the Church until his second coming. He commanded his Church to go, baptize, teach, make disciples of all nations. This is what God has called all Christians to do as part of his Church.

This calling gives clarity and purpose in Christian lives. They are to share the good news with everyone. All nations includes people who are ethnically dissimilar to them, people whose way of life is not their own, people whose values are far from those of a Christian. Jesus commands that evangelism efforts go beyond cultural boundaries.

Whenever a Christian carries out the Great Commission, he is living a sanctified life in accordance with what God wants. Be aware of what Christians are doing when they go, baptize, and teach. Spreading the good news beyond boundaries is an act of love. Jesus summarized the entire life of a Christian with one word: love. When he was asked, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39). Love sums up all the other commandments. Love is to be at the center of everything a believer does.

Cross-cultural evangelism is following God’s command to love. Whenever a Christian shares the good news, they are showing love for God. Obedience to God’s command to make disciples of all nations is an act of love for God. Sharing God’s Word clearly and biblically is

loving God by praising him in proclamation. Christians are called to love God by sharing his Word.

Evangelism is showing love for other people by giving them what they need most. The people in the world who live apart from Christ are without the one thing needful. Physical needs are important, and Christians obey God's command to love by caring for them. The spiritual state of an unbeliever is more important. Without faith in Jesus, they are on the path to Hell. They are stuck trying to earn favor from God with imperfect actions. By nature they can't come up with any other solution. Sharing the good news gives people real hope in this life. Freedom from the demands of the law and the *opinio legis* removes the impossible load that unbelievers carry. Evangelism efforts lead people to heaven through belief in what Christ has done. Preaching the good news is love for earthly well-being and in the life to come. Christians who carry out the great commission are loving others by declaring the good news of Christ.

Love is not only the "what" of cross-cultural evangelism, it's also the "why." Christians love God and others because they have a reason to love. The driving force behind Christian love is Christ's love. "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Paul describes the "restless love of Christ."² Christ continually loved people by living an obedient life to the Law. Every moment of his life was an intentional act of love for others. He died an innocent death because he loved those who were not innocent. The extent of his love was not determined by the degree of people's sinfulness. It was not bound by people meeting his standard of perfect

² Paul Wendland, "Cross Cultural Ministry - Don't Lose the Message" (paper presented for the Nebraska District Convention in Waco, Nebraska, June 14-16, 2010), 2.

love. It did not have limits. His love broke through all the normal boundaries to love. Christ simply loved all.

Christ's incarnation helps us understand the depth of his cross-cultural love. Paul encouraged the Philippians to be like Christ, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped; but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8 NIV84)! The second person of the Trinity decided to enter into a foreign world that had been corrupted by sin. The King of kings lowered himself and made himself a servant. The only perfect and innocent one ever to live died a criminal's death. Christ's life is one of love for people who were not like himself.

Christian love is the natural response to Christ's boundless love. His love takes away guilt and the burden of earning salvation. His love comforts and assures people of forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation. The love of Christ compels people to live lives of love for God and for others. It moves people to live lives of service, putting others in front of themselves. Living for Christ means constantly looking for opportunities to love God and to love others. Christ's love motivates Christians to work to break down their own boundaries so that they can love as he did.

God has commissioned Christians to carry out cross-cultural evangelism. Christians are obedient to God's command to love when we do this. Jesus has given believers the clearest example of what cross-cultural love looks like. His love for all people brings forgiveness and enables Christians to love others. He invites Christians to join in this amazing work. His boundless love moves Christians to love others beyond the boundaries of culture. Awareness

about what God has called one to do and about the reason why will lead one to search out opportunities for sharing the Gospel with all nations.

BE AWARE OF YOUR PART IN EVANGELISM

The goal of sharing the good news with all people is that they might believe and be saved. This is God's goal. He is after the eternal salvation of souls. While the almighty God could have done this in many different ways, he has chosen to work through specific means to accomplish a person's salvation. Evangelism efforts have a role to play in God's mission. Awareness about one's role in evangelism is vital. Ignorance in this area will lead to frustration, burn-out, or worship of self. Awareness will take away an impossible burden and allow for a proper measure of faithfulness.

The Causes of Salvation

Dogmaticians have written about four different causes of salvation.³ Each cause properly answers the question, "Why are you saved?" Each of these causes deals with evangelism efforts (at least in part) but an in-depth look at the instrumental cause and the ministerial cause will be beneficial for becoming more aware of a Christian's role in evangelism. In order to understand the role culture plays in evangelism, one needs to understand how these two causes work together and how they are distinct.

³ For a clear description of all four causes, read Jon Hein's essay Treasures in Jars of Clay.

The Instrumental Cause of Salvation

Christians cherish and gather around the instrumental cause of salvation. “The *instrumental cause* of salvation is the Word and Sacrament. These are the tools by which God creates faith and gathers the Church.”⁴ Where the means of grace are, there the Church will be. Christians treasure these tools because they give forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation. They comfort hearts worn down by sin and guilt. They give certain hope. In this world, one cannot value God’s instrumental cause of salvation too highly.

God’s instrumental cause, the Word, is described as power. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (Romans 1:16 NIV). “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18 NIV). The gospel in Word and Sacrament carries a power that humans do not have in themselves. God gives these means their power. What God declares through these powerful means is certain and sure.

A clarification of what the gospel is powerful to do is worthwhile. God specified that the gospel in Word and Sacrament is powerful for its designated purpose. Using the Word for other purposes can be practicing superstition. Expecting physical contact with a Bible to bring physical healing is not the purpose God designated. One cannot carry a Bible and expect protection against demonic attacks. Putting the Words of Scripture in a prominent place in one’s house does not cause household blessings.⁵ The gospel is not powerful apart from its God-given purpose.

⁴ Jonathan Hein, “Treasures in Jars of Clay: The Synergy Between the Instrumental and Ministerial Causes in God’s Plan of Salvation” (essay presented to the Institute of Worship and Outreach, 2011), 3.

⁵ Hein, 4-5.

The gospel is powerful to do what God desires and designates.⁶ One designated purpose of the Word is to call people to salvation. “Through his Holy Word, when men hear it preached or read it, and the holy Sacraments when they are used according to his Word, God desires to call men to eternal salvation.”⁷

God’s other purpose of the gospel comes when people reject it.

The Word then hardens the heart, confirming the presence of the sinful nature and spiritual death. This is to God’s glory as well. While the testimony of the natural world and the unbeliever’s conscience will leave him ‘without excuse on Judgment Day,’ the rejection of the clear promise of the Word will provide further evidence that the unbeliever’s eternal condemnation is just and right.⁸

The gospel is powerful to save and to harden.

God carries out his purposes through his powerful Word, which he describes as truth. “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Jesus also declares this in his high priestly prayer for believers, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). The Word is objective truth, for all people.

As truth, the Word appeals to the psychological nature of human beings. One can say that the Word is a series of facts⁹ that are perceived by human senses. This truth appeals to human intellect, emotion, and will. People can understand the facts that God’s Word presents. God’s

⁶ Isaiah 55:10,11.

⁷ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration Article II. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 553.

⁸ Hein, 5-6.

⁹ Hein, 6.

truth reaches humans in their hearts. It moves people to live and to act in a certain way. God designed his Word to appeal to his creation. It works psychologically.

However, understanding the gospel does not absolutely mean that people have faith in those facts. People can know what it says and reject it or ignore it. Corrupted human reason is offended by what the Word teaches. The Bible contains doctrines that fallen human reason cannot fully comprehend: the Trinity, the incarnation, the resurrection of the dead, the Last Day, etc. When human reason is faced with such teachings, on its own, it will always reject them. Human reason and the facts are not enough to bring about one's faith and one's salvation.

The gospel works salvation psychologically but also supernaturally. The Holy Spirit accompanies the Word and works belief in seemingly unreasonable facts. Without the Spirit, even though the gospel is powerful, it is pure foolishness.¹⁰ The Spirit must work to allow understanding and acceptance of biblical truths. Yet this happens in a psychological way. Intellect, emotion, and will are touched when the Spirit works faith and salvation. Paul tells us what this was like for the Thessalonians: "Our gospel came to you not simply with wisdom but also with power, with the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:5). The powerful, factual gospel and the Spirit are God's design for the instrumental cause of salvation.

Since the mission of the Church is to declare the good news for the salvation of those who believe, the gospel is essential in carrying that out. For evangelism, there is no other instrument than what God has given us in the means of grace. The Holy Spirit is at work with these means. Christians can be confident they have the perfect tools for the job and that they don't need to add anything to make them effective. Evangelism efforts must center around God's powerful means of grace. God has chosen to work through them and the Spirit does work

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:14.

through them. Therefore, “we can rightly say that the means that our God provides in his Word and sacraments are the *sine qua non* of true evangelism.”¹¹

The Ministerial Cause of Salvation

From a human perspective, it’s obvious that valuable things should be kept in solid, secure places. People trust bank vaults, personal safes, and places that have armed guards to ensure that things are kept safe. God chooses a different vessel for his treasure, the gospel. He stores it in jars of clay—people.¹² In this way, people play a part in God’s mission. “The *ministerial cause* of salvation is the ministers¹³ God calls. They become God’s agents, playing a vital role in his saving work, by utilizing the Word, i.e. the instrumental cause.”¹⁴ Without the powerful instrumental cause of salvation, the ministerial cause would just be empty jars. But God determined that people, even though they are not the strongest, would have a role in calling others to salvation.

Paul explained this role well in Romans 10:14-15: “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”” Without the ministerial cause of salvation, the instrumental cause would not be heard. Someone needs to share the good news. God determined that people would be his heralds, his messengers.

11 Charles Westra, “God’s Mission: The Means and the Methods” (paper presented for the Nebraska District Convention in Waco, Nebraska, June 14-16, 2010), 8.

¹² Hein, 1.

¹³ Not just public ministers, but all Christians are part of the ministerial cause of salvation.

¹⁴ Hein, 3.

They would proclaim the powerful and absolute truths of God's Word so that the Holy Spirit could work with the instrumental means and create saving faith. The role Christians have in evangelism is beautiful.

This role can be misunderstood. On one side, an improper view of the ministerial cause of salvation can lead to a worship of self. The Old Adam inside every Christian loves to take credit for God's work. It naturally wants to elevate itself above God. A temptation to elevate one's work above God's comes with outward success. If that focus remains for evangelism, it will not take long before that becomes the source of salvation for the evangelist.

An overdependence on the ministerial cause can also lead to frustration and burn-out. The ministerial cause on its own will never bring someone to faith. On its own, even the best, well-thought-out argument can do nothing to save someone. The Spirit has to work with the gospel to create saving faith. Depending on oneself to do the Spirit's work without God's chosen means will end in disaster. The witness will no longer point to God's objective truths but to an imperfect jar of clay that will break sooner or later. Christians do well to watch out for this in their evangelism efforts.

Understanding that Christians are jars of clay both comforts them and empowers them in their role. It gives proper perspective for people and it shows that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.¹⁵ Weak vessels have to find strength and certainty outside of themselves. Something weak can try to show itself as strong, but when tested, it will show itself to be weak. Christians are wise to recognize their weaknesses and to look outside of themselves for power and certainty. Knowing that God chose people to be his vessels in which he keeps his instrumental, powerful cause of salvation enables Christians to carry out Christ's mission with

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:7.

confidence. Knowing that God has given the right means to call people to faith moves Christians to use those means. God has given Christians the ministerial role in evangelism to keep their focus off of themselves and on the powerful and effective means of the gospel.

These two causes of salvation work together for the salvation of believers. Separation of these two causes reveals ignorance about God's way of saving someone. Christians who want to carry out Christ's Great Commission must know the synergy between the two causes and must strive to be faithful with them.

Faithfulness as the ministerial cause of salvation means faithfulness with the instrumental cause. Using the truism "the Word works" to excuse poor communication is being unfaithful to God's calling. Hiding behind the hidden will of God instead of striving for effective communication is failing to carry out the role God has given evangelists. Evangelists will work hard to communicate the beauty of the instrumental cause clearly. The role Christians play in God's mission of salvation is this: to share the good news with people in an effective way but to depend on God's Word and the Spirit to produce results.

Communication

Human communication plays a role in both the instrumental and ministerial causes of salvation. God chose to communicate his gospel to humans through facts and truths that appeal to people psychologically. God chose people to share those facts and truths through what they say and do. He called them to be faithful stewards of his treasure. He could use other means to call people to salvation, but he doesn't. The synergy between the two causes detailed above means that evangelists will work for effective human communication while confessing that the results

depend on God's power and the work of the Holy Spirit. An increased level of understanding about what effective communication looks like will clarify one's part in evangelism.

People communicate. From the time of birth, all the way until death, communication is happening in the lives of humans. God created people to be social beings, not to isolate themselves, but to come together as friends, family, societies, and churches. God created people to communicate with one another. Communication is a constant in life on earth.

The concept of communication is simple. "Human communication is the process through which individuals—in relationships, groups, organizations, and societies—respond to and create messages to adapt to the environment and one another."¹⁶ Communication happens when messages are received and people give significance to them.¹⁷ People communicate when they put forward symbols meant for others to receive.

Knowing the principles of communication helps people raise their awareness about the complexities beyond the simple concept. Moreau, Campbell, and Greener's list of principles identify some of the principles of communication. Communication is a dynamic process and not a fixed thing. People are not able to reverse what they have communicated. People have an active role in sending and receiving symbols. Communication is both interpersonal and intrapersonal. Human communication always happens in a larger context.¹⁸ When people communicate there is a lot going on.

¹⁶ Larry A. Samovar, and Richard E. Porter, *Communication between Cultures* (Sydney: Wadsworth, 2001), 22.

¹⁷ A. Scott Moreau, *Effective Intercultural Communication: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2014), 11.

¹⁸ Moreau, 12.

Awareness of these principles enhances human communication. Because communication is a dynamic process, one will not view their own communication as static. One must be aware of various changes that occur each time they communicate. The irreversible aspect of communication means that it is impossible to go back and start over again as if no interaction had happened. Communicating in this way shows ignorance. People who receive communication are actively involved. Awareness of the proactivity of communication means one must work to find out if the process has been misunderstood. Communication is interactive and both inter- and intra-perspectives need consideration. What happens in communication does not happen in a vacuum.¹⁹ It happens in a specific place and time. People can change their communication to fit the proper context. Effective communication comes from more than just an understanding of the simple definition. A raised level of awareness is necessary for understanding how to communicate effectively.

While effective communication appeals to the intellect, emotion, and will of human beings, poor communication puts up barriers between the message and the recipient. People are not able to make the instrumental cause of salvation less effective or less powerful, but they do have a direct impact on the ministerial cause of salvation. Ignorance about communication can prevent the Word from being received.²⁰ God does not promise that the gospel will overcome poor communication. Evangelists will work hard to avoid poor communication and strive for effective communication.

Holding oneself accountable in communication is beneficial for evangelism efforts. Taking a step back and looking at whether or not barriers are being raised is important. When

¹⁹ Samovar and Porter, 25.

²⁰ Hein, 15.

one finds barriers, working to remove them is possible. Ignorance of ineffective communication will benefit no one. Christians will strive for faithfulness in their calling to share the good news with all nations.

Jesus commissioned believers to share the good news with all nations. God revealed that people play a role in the salvation of others. God has given believers the treasure of the powerful gospel for them to share. Evangelists communicate God's powerful truths with people who need them. They strive to avoid barriers to effective human communication. Christians carry out the Great Commission with the awareness that their human communication does play a role in evangelism.

BE AWARE OF CULTURE

“Go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:19). Jesus's Great Commission called the disciples to start doing something strange, for them at least. Preaching the good news of the fulfillment of God's promises to his chosen nation made sense. Israel had a direct connection to those promises, an understanding of God's plan of salvation. Focusing on sharing the gospel with their own people was logical. But Jesus called them to go out and preach to all people, including those who were not like them. Some of those people probably had no understanding of God's promises. Many would have had a religion of their own already. The opportunities for evangelism were endless but the challenges to effective communication might have seemed endless too. God has called all Christians to this challenging task.

As Christians strive to communicate the gospel effectively, they work to break down barriers that prevent effective communication. Cultural barriers go along with cross-cultural evangelism. “The diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and assumptions resident in

communicators due to their culture has the potential to make communication very difficult.”²¹ Cultural barriers to effective communication of the gospel are not only difficult to overcome; they can be easily missed. Sometimes Christians put up these barriers without even knowing it. Ignorance of the role culture plays in communication will prevent evangelists from seeing and breaking down barriers to effective cross-cultural communication.

Cultural awareness is necessary for identifying these barriers and finding ways to break them down. Christians will be blessed by a study of culture. “The social sciences, which make observations about people and societies in God’s creation, may assist Christians in carrying out Christ’s commission, especially by alerting them to possible external barriers which may keep people from being willing to listen to a Christian’s testimony and by apprising them of possible points of contact with the unchurched.”²² Raising the level of awareness about culture will enable evangelists to proclaim the good news to all nations more effectively.

Cultural Intelligence

Social scientists came up with a scale for measuring cultural awareness and intelligence. “CQ²³ is the ability to engage in a set of behaviors that uses skills and qualities that are tuned appropriately to the culture-based values and attitudes for the people with whom one interacts.”²⁴ Unlike IQ, which does not change much throughout one’s life, CQ can change dramatically. Someone can go from little to no cultural intelligence to someone who functions well across

²¹ Samovar and Porter, 3.

²² Westra, 17.

²³ CQ = Cultural intelligence.

²⁴ Brooks Peterson, *Cultural Intelligence* (New York: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2004), 89.

many different cultures. Christians will strive to raise their CQ as a means to more effective cross-cultural communication.

What is Culture?

Raising one's CQ begins with a solid understanding about what culture is. This is a difficult task. One of the pioneers of the study of cross-cultural communication, E.T. Hall, helps people understand why: "Much of culture operates outside our awareness."²⁵ Cultural ignorance is easy. It's the default. Deliberate study of culture is necessary.

The foundation of understanding culture is a definition of culture. Many social scientists have worked to come up with a definition. A list of definitions can be found in Appendix A. While these definitions are in-depth and contain valuable insights, they are also quite complex and can be confusing. Professor Allen Sorum uses a concise definition: "the norm which is the foundation for expectation within society."²⁶ Culture helps people develop proper expectations. Culture helps to create a level of understanding by giving a norm. This concentrated definition serves well as a base to build from.

An analogy about culture can help create a deepened level of understanding. Culture is like an iceberg. Icebergs have different layers. About a third of an iceberg is visible above the water while the other two thirds are hidden beneath. People can see one part of culture fairly

²⁵ Gary R. Weaver, *Culture, Communication and Conflict: Readings in Intercultural Relations* (Boston: Pearson, 2000), 10.

²⁶ E. Allen Sorum, *Change: Mission & Ministry Across Cultures* (Milwaukee, WI: WELS Outreach Resources, 1999), 75.

easily, yet there is much below the surface that needs to be discovered if one wants to become more aware of what culture actually is.

Culture, like an iceberg, has a layer that sticks out and is plain to see. For some people, those who have a low CQ, this is their concept of what culture is. This layer of culture consists of cultural artifacts like the language spoken, art, clothing, food, money, trends, music, etc. Seeing the things that make up this top layer requires little effort because they are open and obvious. David Livermore asked many short-term missionaries who had returned home, “What did you notice about the culture where you visited?” and many people made comments like these: “I remember them driving on the wrong side of the road, speaking a different language, and using strange-looking money.” “Everything was different. The buildings were different. Their cars were different.”²⁷ These are examples of top-level awareness of culture. Awareness on this level does not mean one has a high CQ.

The intermediate level of culture consists of symbols, meanings, and norms. These are below the surface but can be discovered through some effort. Noticing that people use their hands to tell you how much you owe instead of saying it out loud, understanding why people ask you if you had eaten yet that day because it is a usual greeting, turning around to look at something while standing in line at the grocery store and then finding out that someone has stepped in front of you because you left too much space are examples of the intermediate layer. Getting to know a culture on the intermediate level happens through intentional awareness that focuses on finding symbols, meanings, and norms.

The third and lowest level of culture is vital for raising CQ. At the bottom of the iceberg are the traditions, beliefs, and values. If someone wants to have high CQ, they have to strive to

²⁷ Livermore, 82.

get down to this level of culture. People have to go well below the surface to find the bottom of an iceberg. This level is also most difficult to realize. Striving for understanding at this level is asking the question “why?” “It is these beliefs and values that drive people’s thinking, experiencing, reacting, and behaving.”²⁸ Knowing that a child is obligated to stay close to an elderly parent to take care of them or understanding that your host will keep filling your plate if you empty it because they believe a host must feed their guests until they are full are examples of being aware at the lowest level of the iceberg.

A three-part description of culture expands understanding and awareness of what culture is. Culture is deeply rooted, all encompassing, and carefully transmitted.²⁹

Culture is deeply rooted in people. One cannot separate a person from culture. The real basis behind culture comes from universal human needs. Toomey lists some of these base-level needs: safety, freedom, security, inclusion, dignity/respect, control, connection, meaning, creativity and play, spiritual striving, peace, and a sense of well-being.³⁰ Different cultures work for these needs in different ways but the need for them drives culture. An increased level of awareness about the deep roots of culture helps people understand that culture deserves much consideration.

Culture is all-encompassing. It is a holistic system that can be broken down into different sub-systems. All of these are interconnected and work together. Changes in one sub-system of

²⁸ Stella Ting-Toomey and Tenzin Dorjee, *Communicating Across Cultures Second Edition* (Guilford Publications, 2018), 14.

²⁹ Sorum, 75.

³⁰ Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, 14.

culture will have an effect on all other systems. The different systems and sub-systems make up the whole of culture.

Culture's holistic character means that it is pervasive. It penetrates into every aspect of our life and influences the way people think, talk and behave.³¹ It functions to provide anchoring points through which we attribute meanings and significance to our identities. It explains why cultural members do the things they do in a given culture. It shapes ingroup and outgroup attitudes in dealing with people who are culturally dissimilar. It facilitates the adaptation processes among the self, the cultural community, and the larger environment. It affects communication and communication affects culture.³²

An example of the pervasive characteristic of culture is to see how culture shapes values. Social scientists have determined different value orientation models that make this clear. One can observe a group of people and find out where their values fall on a spectrum. Each group has a place on the spectrum but few of them are at the exact same place. These value orientation models help one to see how the bottom level of culture affects people.

Ting-Toomey's value dimensions are helpful in seeing how these cultural gauges work. The Individualism-Collectivism value spectrum is a gauge that shows whether a culture stresses individual or group identity, rights, and needs.³³ The Power Distance value dimension measures whether people are content with an unequal distribution of power or whether power is spread out more evenly in the culture.³⁴ The Uncertainty Avoidance value dimension shows how much the

³¹ Guo-Ming Chen and William J. Starosta, *Foundations of Intercultural Communication* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 27.

³² Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, 17-19.

³³ Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, 170.

³⁴ Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, 173.

members of a culture feel threatened by uncertainty and work to avoid it.³⁵ The Short-Term versus Long-Term value dimension reveals if a culture more values short term or long term issues.³⁶ The pervasiveness of culture can be seen through scales like these. The number of spectrums that can be used is as large as the number of values, qualities, and behaviors in culture.

Culture is carefully transmitted. Scholars agree that culture is learned. “Because culture is a shared symbolic system within a relatively large group of people, the only way for group members to integrate into, reinforce, and co-create this shared symbolic system is through a learning process.”³⁷ Culture is taught and shared. This education may occur deliberately but can also happen by being in a specific cultural environment. Culture has to be shared through people. Without people teaching and learning, culture does not exist.

Reflecting on the concept of culture is extremely important for raising one’s CQ. Ignorance of the basics makes raising one’s CQ impossible. People need an objective view that steps back to look at culture to raise their level of awareness of what it is and how it functions. The basic understanding of culture shows the beginnings of the relationship between culture and communication. Someone who understands the characteristics and the functions of culture is on their way to higher CQ and more effective cross-cultural communication.

Intercultural Communication

Awareness of intercultural communication is the next step in raising one’s CQ. Trying to communicate interculturally without knowing the basics of the discipline of intercultural

³⁵ Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, 175.

³⁶ Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, 178-179.

³⁷ Chen and Sarosta, 27.

communication causes ineffective communication. Ignorance about the basics will prevent one from seeing the barriers that should be obvious. People will also miss the obvious solutions that can break those barriers down. A study of the basics of intercultural communication will raise one's CQ and lead to more effective intercultural communication.

The secular world has found the discipline of intercultural communication to be of increasing importance. Intercultural communication took place long before people made it into an academic study. Perceived needs led to a scholastic look at it. The discipline of intercultural communication came from the need for better diplomatic and business training for people working outside of the United States in the 1950's. While intercultural communication and intercultural communication training had been taking place, it was not what people wanted. Previous training focused on theory and generalized ideas. Rather than focusing on the entire culture, the trainees wanted specifics for real intercultural communication situations they would face.³⁸ Their desire resulted in a new anthropological discipline: intercultural communication.

The study of intercultural communication has developed since its beginnings. Rather than focusing on only studying individual cultures, the interaction between cultures became the focus for the discipline of intercultural communication. Cultural value orientations (like the ones listed above as value dimensions) provided conceptual contributions to the field.³⁹ People started to come up with intercultural theories, write books on the discipline, and even create journals dedicated to the field of intercultural communication. Colleges created intercultural communication degrees. The field of intercultural studies grew to become a large influence on communication today.

³⁸ Moreau, 28.

³⁹ Chen and Sarosta, 9.

The definition of intercultural communication brought clarity to the purpose of the discipline. “Intercultural communication is communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event.”⁴⁰

Intercultural communication focuses on overcoming these barriers. To be an effective intercultural communicator, one must be aware of the things that can alter communication and work to manage them.

In the study of intercultural communication, three major paradigms shape how one works to grow in awareness and understanding about intercultural communication. Each paradigm is based on multiple theories of intercultural communication. Each paradigm differs in definitions of culture, identity, conflict communication, and conflict competence. Each paradigm has different goals and methods. A brief look at the three paradigms will give a framework for study of intercultural communication.

The Functional/Social Scientific Paradigm was the predominant approach to the study of intercultural communication in the 1980’s. Today it remains one of the three major approaches.⁴¹ The Functional Paradigm works to observe the objective reality of culture through different cultural lenses. The comparison between the two cultures allows for discovery of how cultures communicate. People gather information by observing from the outside of a culture. The findings are able to be studied, explained, and measured. In this paradigm people seek patterns and regularities through controlled experiments. This paradigm views culture as a priori and static. The Functional Paradigm gives quantifiable results. One could describe this paradigm as an outsider’s objective view of things.

⁴⁰ Samovar and Porter, 46.

⁴¹ Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, 37.

The Interpretive Paradigm looks for shared meaning within a culture. This theory proposes that a cultural insider is necessary for understanding. The cultural insider is questioned and interviewed so that those who are researching the culture have a real understanding of what that culture is all about. This paradigm focuses on lived experiences and determinations of meaning. One can see changes in culture with this paradigm. Gaining the trust of a cultural insider for the purpose of understanding a culture better is difficult though. One could describe this paradigm as an insider's view of things.

The Critical Studies Paradigm views culture through the lens of either a dominant culture or a minority culture. It proposes that in cultural systems, people can pass over minority voices. The goal of this paradigm is to bring awareness to the easily-missed oppressive structures that exist in a hierarchical society.⁴² This paradigm calls for a level playing field between cultures but it continually uses a power/privilege lens to find abuses in culture.

All three paradigms have advantages and disadvantages. Many intercultural communication scholars focus their efforts on one specific paradigm; but people can benefit from using all three. One can look for objective and subjective aspects of cultural communication. Discovering abuses of power in a culture can open up opportunities for healing. None of these paradigms is perfect, but a combination of all of them will bring benefits for anyone studying intercultural communication.

Intercultural communication has become increasingly important today because of the diverse interactions that are taking place. Companies bring in and send out workers across national boundaries. The United States, along with many other nations, has become a nation with multicultural complexities and nuances because of demographic changes. Digital media allows

⁴² Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, 46.

for instant intercultural communication. The different cultures of the world have contact with each other often.

Awareness of when intercultural communication takes place is important. People can communicate interculturally while being ignorant of what is happening. Some social scientists think that “no communication can be understood outside of its cultural milieu.”⁴³ Working in the discipline of intercultural communication will raise one’s CQ.

Jesus’s Great Commission is an invitation to become more aware of culture. Christians will strive for understanding and competence in intercultural communication through many available means. A raised level of awareness about CQ, culture, and the discipline of intercultural communication will have a positive effect on evangelism efforts.

BE AWARE OF AREAS FOR GROWTH

Working to overcome cultural ignorance is a process. Reaching the goal of having a high CQ takes hard work and concentrated effort. Through the discipline of intercultural communication, it became clear that specific intercultural training can help produce consistent results for raising CQ.

Social scientists have come up with different models of intercultural training with the goal of more effective intercultural communication. The classroom model may be the most popular approach. This model works to increase cognitive understanding of features and functions of a specific culture so one does not experience discomfort when confronted with

⁴³ Timothy Lenchak, "The Bible and Intercultural Communication," *Missiology: An International Review* 22, no. 4 (October 1994): 457-67. doi:10.1177/009182969402200403, 459.

cultural differences. The simulation model was a response to the classroom model. Social scientists tried to create a situation in which one would experience living in a foreign culture. The self-awareness model focused on teaching individuals how psychological forces operate in groups and how their own behavior influences others. The behavioral model taught specific behaviors of a certain culture. And the interaction model required people to interact with members of a target culture.⁴⁴ All intercultural training models have useful insights for growing in CQ.

The cultural awareness training model is possibly the most useful for Christians who simply want to share the good news with people of all cultures. It is easily understood, able to be put into practice immediately, and its use is beneficial no matter the level of CQ one has. The principles behind this model state that one is able to grow in CQ by working to understand one's own culture, other cultures, and then contrasting them. Following the cultural awareness model means working to raise the level of awareness of one's own culture and of other cultures.

Awareness of Who We Are

The first step in the cultural awareness model is to see the importance of one's own culture. This means taking a step back and perceiving things objectively. Objectivity about oneself and one's own culture is not easy. Taking culture for granted is easy. But an effort to understand the perceptions, values, and functions of one's own culture will prove beneficial.

At the most basic level people need to be aware that everyone has a culture, including themselves. "Our cultural identities can be so ingrained that unless we encounter major cultural

⁴⁴ Chen and Sarosta, 265-267.

differences, we may not even notice the importance of our cultural membership badges.”⁴⁵ Yet no human being is born outside of culture. No one grows up in a non-cultural context. Every human perceives things through a cultural lens. One can see their own culture by thinking through the different layers of culture and listing things that would fit in each layer. Awareness of the existence of one’s own culture is essential.

If someone were to do an objective evaluation of the culture of the WELS, it is possible to say that there would be an observable ethnocentric attitude.⁴⁶ The WELS is not immune to the self-centered issue that is ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is the assumption that one’s ways are better and correct, that one’s own comfort is what matters most, that one’s own “rights” are most significant.⁴⁷ Ethnocentrism is not only elevating one’s own culture, it is devaluing other cultures. It leaves room for great growth in CQ.

When evaluating one’s own culture, looking for key features of ethnocentrism is helpful. Searching for cultural stereotyping and prejudices will help one see ethnocentric attitudes and practices.

Stereotyping reveals ethnocentrism in a culture. It is a complex form of categorization that mentally organizes experiences and guides behavior toward a particular group of people.⁴⁸ It happens because human beings like to categorize and classify. Classification is not bad in itself but assuming all culture-specific information applies to all individuals is choosing to be ignorant

⁴⁵ Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, 59.

⁴⁶ Wendland, 10.

⁴⁷ Wendland, 9.

⁴⁸ Samovar and Porter, 268.

of other cultures. Ethnocentrism leads to stereotyping as people don't want to put in effort to understanding others clearly.

Prejudice shows ethnocentrism openly. It amounts to a rigid and irrational generalization about a category of people.⁴⁹ In intercultural settings, it often includes various levels of hostility.⁵⁰ Making conclusions and showing hostility without any cultural understanding of another culture is foolish ethnocentrism.

Discovering ethnocentric attitudes in any culture is not surprising. People are inclined to be ignorant about others. Since all people are born with a sinful nature, the desire to raise self above others is natural.⁵¹ Fundamentally, it is a sinful lack of love.⁵² Love for God and love for others leads people to look outside of themselves. A lack of love ignores others and elevates self. Ethnocentrism and Christian culture do not mix. Thankfully Christ's intercultural intervention for sinners brings forgiveness for these sins and empowers Christians to work to avoid it.

God speaks clearly about the need for intentional awareness and adaptation. God gave us biblical examples in order to understand that Christians should work to avoid ethnocentrism. Paul described Christian love: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:10). Peter tells believers to have a humble attitude toward others: "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another" (1 Peter 5:5). Putting others before oneself is part of sanctified Christian living.

⁴⁹ Samovar and Porter, 269.

⁵⁰ Samovar and Porter, 269.

⁵¹ Michael Jindra, "Multiculturalism and the WELS" (paper presented to the WELS Faculty Conference at Northwestern College June 7, 1990).

⁵² Wendland, 9.

A positive aspect of WELS which would be discovered through an objective evaluation is a love for the truths of God's Word. Much of the culture of the WELS comes from and is centered around what God reveals in the Bible. The treasure of the full and free forgiveness in Christ influences many aspects of the cultural attitudes and actions of Christians. Yet even with these treasures, Christians need to watch out for ethnocentrism. Christian culture is not the norm. Wanting to preserve these truths can lead a person into devaluing other cultures.

Working to know one's own culture, at the family, congregation, synod, or community level, is attempting to accomplish the first half of the awareness model. A raised level of awareness about one's own culture enables one to evaluate shortcomings and work toward culturally aware witnessing.

Awareness of Other Cultures

The second part of the cultural awareness training model is focusing on other cultures. An objective self-evaluation of the level of awareness of other cultures in WELS could reveal a degree of aloofness.⁵³ Looking at the people in a congregation and then comparing that to the people who live in the community that church is located in can reveal an ethnocentric tendency.

Paul Wendland describes this:

How does this aloofness demonstrate itself? We're comfortable in our congregations the way things are. We tend to avoid getting ourselves into the difficulties involved in new and unfamiliar situations, the whole messiness of love. We steer clear of conversations with strangers where there might be a real exchange of views, and where we can't control the outcome. If we do find ourselves talking with a non-WELSian, we want to make sure they know who we are first, and so we'll try to tell them as much as we can about our doctrine and history. Instead of

⁵³ The WELS Seeking Our Neighbor Committee observed: "Many of us are uncomfortable in speaking with people of racial or ethnic backgrounds different from our own. There is not always an awareness that what we say and do can cause needless offense to people of other races and cultures."

listening and learning about them, we're more concerned with them knowing about us.⁵⁴

Digging into other cultures can be messy. An uncontrolled outcome is intimidating. But the desire to share the good news with people of all cultures motivates Christians to stretch past the boundaries of comfort.

God has given multiple biblical examples of culturally-aware evangelism for people to follow. Because WELS holds God's Word dear, it has motivation for working toward raised CQ and models for growth of CQ. Through the work of the apostles, God helps people see that the Great Commission did lead to culturally-aware witness. Jesus's love shown in his evangelism efforts demonstrates cultural awareness in action.

Paul worked at becoming more aware of the culture in Athens. While waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him, and before he started preaching, "he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols" (Acts 17:16). He had been walking around the city and observing. Learning about the culture of the people to whom he would preach was important to him.

He wanted to share the good news in places that were appropriate for those specific people. He started out in synagogues but also in the marketplaces, where it was normal to share opinions. When the philosophers became interested in what he was saying, Paul went with them to the Areopagus, their center of learning, and discussed "the latest ideas." He understood the importance of learning in that place for those people.

The content of Paul's message was specific to their culture. "For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). He later quoted their poets. He went on to share the good news that the true God

⁵⁴ Wendland, 10.

doesn't need emergency altars to unknown gods, but that He was seeking them. The people of Athens responded to his culturally aware message, "We want to hear you again on this subject."

Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well shows how culturally-aware evangelism draws people in. His communication was specific to her. She couldn't help wanting to hear more. Jesus' words had touched her intellect, emotion, and will.

The differences in culture between Jesus and the woman are clear. Jesus broke his own cultural rules when he asked her for a drink of water. When the woman appealed to Jacob as her ancestor, Jesus told her that he was better than any water Jacob provided. The place of worship for the woman was on Mount Gerizim but Jesus told her about what worship truly is. The cultural gap between the two of them was obvious.

Jesus's culturally-aware witness bridged the gap. He intentionally asked her for water so that she would question him. He didn't discount the well that Jacob had dug but told her of a better water. Samaritans and Jews worshipped on different specific mountains so Jesus revealed that true worship of God can take place anywhere. He built off of her belief that there would be a messiah by explaining that he was the Messiah she had been waiting for. Jesus explained things in a way that she understood and connected with.

Paul condenses culturally-aware witness down to one simple sentence, "I have become all things to all men so that by all means possible I might save some." (1 Corinthians 9:22) God's goal in evangelism is the salvation of souls. This is the goal of increasing understanding of other cultures.

Intentional awareness of other cultures involves looking at all of the layers of the iceberg of other cultures. One cannot be content with just the surface. The unseen layers give insight into

cultural identity, values, perceptions, and beliefs. Working to understand a different culture at the deepest levels will give a much better understanding.

Growing in awareness of other cultures only happens when someone puts themselves in positions where raised awareness is possible. There have to be points of contact for growth to happen. Avoiding contact with other cultures will never lead to a growth in awareness and understanding. Working to grow in awareness of other cultures is only effective if people are willing to step outside of their cultures and cross over.

The cultural awareness training model is about growing in awareness and understanding. It takes a willingness to observe one's own culture carefully when that is not the norm. Humility is necessary so that devaluing others doesn't occur. Motivated by Christ's boundless love and a desire for effective communication, Christians can find many benefits by putting cultural awareness training principles into practice.

PRACTICAL CQ SUGGESTIONS FOR EVANGELISM

Immersion in a culture that is not your own will naturally raise your level of awareness. Immersion gives time in which it will be easy to see different layers of the cultural iceberg. Differences from your own culture will stand out. When your own cultural expectations are not being met, you naturally ask why. Prolonged immersion in a foreign culture will also lead to a more objective view of your own culture. Thinking about how your own culture functions will come more easily. Cultural immersion is a guaranteed way of forcing growth in cultural awareness. WELS Mission Journeys offers a concrete way for a congregation and pastor to put this into practice immediately.

Another practical way to grow awareness is to ask cultural questions of people who are culturally different from oneself. Ask them what they see on each level of the cultural iceberg. It is easier for someone to describe the hidden things of their own culture than it is for you to try to find them out on your own. Asking what others think about your own cultural norms, perceptions, and values gives insight into both your own and their culture. Make culture a regular topic in conversations with other people. People who are culturally different from you will be glad you are interested in them!

A practical application of applying cultural awareness to evangelism is to create a test of cultural awareness that one can put any evangelism materials through. It could be a list of questions that one must ask before actually putting materials into use. It could be a group of people from diverse cultures that can look things over and tell you what they think. Maybe it is a list of things to avoid because you know they only apply to your own culture. Having a test for cultural awareness in materials is practical and intentional.

God has given Christians the best resource for applying cultural awareness to evangelism: his Word. God uses many different ways of communicating with people in his Word. One is naturally drawn to the examples that communicate effectively with themselves, so work to see the examples that you have missed. A courtroom scene is not the only way to explain the concept of justification. The power that God has over evil is seen throughout his Word and connects excellently with many cultures. Some people understand things in an honor-shame context.⁵⁵ God designed his Word to be for nations and has given us ways to effectively communicate it. One can dig into the different ways God talks about justification. Psalms or Proverbs contain illustrations that can connect with different cultures. The culturally-aware evangelist will study

⁵⁵ Consider the book *The 3-D Gospel* by Jayson Georges.

the Bible from the perspective of one who wants to see how God talks to different cultures and communicates to all people.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to cross-cultural evangelism, ignorance is not bliss. It may be easier but it also prevents effective communication from taking place. When Christians have opportunities to witness to different cultures around them, “they cannot afford any longer the luxury of ignorance.”⁵⁶ Effective intercultural communication is blocked by cultural barriers that must be dealt with.

Raising the level of one’s CQ will enable one to work hard at getting rid of cultural barriers. Awareness of one’s own culture and awareness of other cultures gives the possibility of effective communication.

Effective communication is what Christians strive for in evangelism. As part of God’s design for the salvation of people, evangelists have roles to play. They carry the treasures of the means of grace which God uses to bring others to faith. God has given a high responsibility to those who share the good news of Christ. God enables Christians to reflect Christ’s love and break down cultural barriers with love that transcends culture and time. They work for raised CQ because “intercultural intelligence is the bridge that helps us more effectively express and embody Christ’s unconditional love across the chasm of cultural difference.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Sorum, 164.

⁵⁷ Livermore, 19.

APPENDIX A

Definitions of CultureCultural Intelligence: A Model for Cross Cultural Problem Solving p. 545

a learned and shared, integrated system of values, beliefs, and assumptions for understanding, coping with, and relating to the world which results in behavior that is characteristic of a group of people.

Chen and Sarosta p. 25-26

A set of fundamental ideas, practices, and experiences of a group of people that are symbolically transmitted generation to generation through a learning process.

Sorum p. 78

“the foundation for expectation within society” quoting Mayers.

Samovar/Porter p. 33

“shared learned behavior which is transmitted from one generation to another for purposes of promoting individual and social survival, adaptation, and growth and development” quoting Marsella.

Toomey and Dorjee p. 14

“Complex frame of reference that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meanings that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of an identity community.”

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