

*THE NOTION OF  
“NATIONAL SOCIOCULTURAL SYSTEMS”  
IN THE WORK OF WILLIAM B. GUDYKUNST:  
A CLARIFICATION AND CRITIQUE\**

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*Abstract.* This paper critically examines the work of William B. Gudykunst to clarify how he constructs an argument for the study of how ‘national sociocultural systems’ impact upon human communication. His argument can be seen as requiring adherence to various assumptions, here termed the cognitive, continuity, boundary, representativeness, and operationalization assumptions. The objectivist approach to the communication and culture connection is found to be wanting in various ways.

**Introduction**

William B. Gudykunst has established himself as the most visible proponent of the objectivist (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1989) study of “the influence of national sociocultural systems on interpersonal communication” (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 30). Over a period of sixteen years he has authored, co-authored or edited over sixty-seven articles, chapters and books related to this topic. (See the list of Gudykunst’s works appended to the references.) But what does Gudykunst mean by ‘national sociocultural systems,’ the central concept of his project? Clearly, whether one finds his work convincing or not will depend on whether or not his arguments on behalf of this core concept invite assent.

This is not the first time the premises of objectivist cross-cultural intercultural communication research have been interrogated. Some

members of the field (Ellingsworth, 1977; Nicassio & Saral, 1978; Saral, 1979; Kim, 1984) have expressed particularly cogent clarifications of the objectivist approach. These voices, however, have typically been ignored or not taken seriously. Clarifying the claims of the objectivist approach — as developed by its principal authority — is thus again necessary.

Through a reading of Gudykunst's papers, articles, and books I present a clarification and critique of the claims he makes for the reasonableness of the concept of 'national sociocultural system.' I will make explicit ideas and connections sometimes only implicit within his discussions. Emphasis will be directed at examining the flow of reasoning and the way he uses various sources to develop and support his arguments. To claim to study the influence that 'national sociocultural systems' have on interpersonal communication requires one to first argue on behalf of the existence of 'national sociocultural systems.' This is no small task. How are such problematic and contested concepts such as nation, society, culture, and system combined? The implications of this study for the future of the cross-cultural communication research will also be discussed.

### **Clarifying Gudykunst's argument**

Most who undertake research in the comparative study of interpersonal communication do not normally feel the need to make clear the presuppositions of their research methodology or technique. Author's of textbooks and review articles, however, do not have this luxury. In at least three places (Appendices A-C) Gudykunst has authored very similar, in many ways identical, presentations concerning how and why the culture concept can be conceptualized and then related to human communication behavior. The texts span a period of

some five to six years. Given that in a footnote in one of his most recent chapters (1993, p. 71) Gudykunst indicates he still concurs with 'the ideas' of Keesing (1974), I believe it is safe to assume that the ideas represented in these three extracts continue to represent Gudykunst's views. The time span also indicates that the ideas represent Gudykunst's mature considerations. I will interpret them in this light. I also believe it is of utmost importance for understanding why Gudykunst comes to the conclusions he does to remember that he is committed to the objectivist-empirical tradition. This philosophical position guides his decision-making; he chooses positions which he feels support this tradition.

As a way of ordering my thoughts, I will begin by stating what I see as the set of conclusions Gudykunst reaches in these texts. I will then go back and clarify the paths he takes to reach these places. It should be kept in mind that Gudykunst does not go into great depth concerning these issues. Almost all of the material is derived from the work of other authors. Very little we find here is original with Gudykunst. The combining of these ideas, however, is very much Gudykunst's work. Often the results of this amalgamating is confusing. In Extract C, for example, readers are expected to combine Keesing's and Peterson's ideas about culture into one definition. Gudykunst and Kim do not help their readers in this regard. In Extract A students are expected to understand why Geertz' metaphor of culture as an octopus "does not define culture sufficiently for us to use the concept to understand our communication with strangers." Still, I believe we can see the general line of Gudykunst's argument. It might be summarized in the following way:

1. Culture is the script, schema or system of knowledge shared by a large group of people.

2. Cultures usually, though not always, coincide with political boundaries. National cultures exist.
3. Though communication influences the shape culture takes, culture influences communication more.
4. We are living in a stable period of history. During such times, it is not unreasonable to see culture as stable and relatively unchanging.
5. The stability of culture allows it to be operationalized and incorporated into objectivist research and theorizing.

The starting point for the argument is, of course, the definition of culture, given most explicitly in Extract A. In all three of the extracts Gudykunst begins his discussion by noting how difficult it has been for scholars to define culture. The lack of consensus among scholars is noted and then a number of rival definitions are introduced. (This is a common approach in intercultural communication studies. Gudykunst's choice of some of the authors introduced also seems to have been influenced by Keesing (1974). The quotation from Schneider in Extract C, for example, is the same as that Keesing uses.)

Gudykunst's definition of culture can be read as containing three assumptions: culture is (1) the system of knowledge (**a cognitive assumption**) (2) shared by (**a continuity assumption**) (3) a large group of people (**a boundary assumption**). The assumptions are interrelated and exist as a unit. They are foundational for Gudykunst.

In defining culture as something in the mind, Gudykunst places himself solidly within the tradition of cognitive anthropology. By his use of Keesing's "long, but not overly technical" definition Gudykunst also leads the reader to believe that defining culture as "the system of knowledge..." is taken under guidance from Keesing and is a justifiable reading of his work. One is asked to trust Keesing's interpretations. But why Keesing? In Gudykunst & Kim (1984a), for example, Keesing

does not appear. In the second edition (1992), however, Keesing's work is introduced. Gudykunst obviously has some standard by which he is able to judge a good definition from a bad one. We are not told what this is.

Given the extent to which Gudykunst relies on Keesing, and to a lesser extent, on Rohner, in framing his arguments about culture, the rhetorical force of his argument rests in no small part upon the reader coming to feel that these authorities can be read as supporting Gudykunst's views. In fact, I do not think this is the case, especially with regard to Keesing. For at least six years, Gudykunst has used the same quote from Keesing's 1974 review of culture concepts. Appendix D is the original text with those parts not used by Gudykunst in bold print.

Gudykunst leads the reader to believe that he is presenting Keesing's conclusions. This is not the case. The section in which the quote by Gudykunst is found begins,

Perhaps the conceptual distinction between 'competence' and 'performance' that linguists are struggling to maintain can provide an avenue of escape from this dilemma [cognitive reductionism or cultural symbols freed from the constraints of mind and brain.]

Keesing is not as sure as Gudykunst leads the reader to believe. Furthermore, Keesing's article goes on for five more pages in which Keesing outlines six reasons why he feels we must "embed an ideational conception of culture in the real social and ecological world, conceive culture as an ideational system within a vastly complex system, biological, social, and symbolic, ground our abstract models in the concrete particularities of human social life" (p. 94). Gudykunst fails to understand that Keesing is arguing against conceiving culture as only ideational; that culture **cannot** be discovered

by asking people what they think. This, however, is the only methodology used by Gudykunst. Keesing (1974) argues,

Moreover, it may be precisely in exploring the phenomenological world of the familiar and immediate, the everyday and mundane, that we stand to gain the most crucial knowledge of how humans perceive, understand, and act (p. 93).

I believe Gudykunst has either completely ignored or failed to understand Keesing's argument. Gudykunst also never indicates he has read Keesing (1987), an article even more critical of the conceptualization of culture we will find Gudykunst promotes.

One finds in Gudykunst the constructing of human agents as 'cultural members.' An accurate reading of Rohner (1984), however, would prohibit such a conceptualization. In his quotation from Rohner it would appear that Gudykunst has omitted an extremely important section. The complete reference is (Rohner, 1984, p. 132):

At this point I should note that an individual is a member of society (*as a population aggregate*), but not of a social system or culture. Individuals participate in social systems (as behavioral systems) and share cultures (as systems of symbolic meanings).

I find it significant that Gudykunst omits Rohner's statement that people should not be conceptualized as members of cultures. Gudykunst uses this section to apparently justify his use of the term sociocultural. Rohner's view would seem to be that such a conceptualization is not warranted, that societal membership, participation in a social system, and the sharing of culture are to be kept distinct. It is interesting that only societal membership is in noun form. The other two are conceived as verbals, as things people do — participate and share. As we will see, Gudykunst, however, sees cultural membership as a normative and ascribed characteristic of human agents.

In claiming that this system of knowledge is also shared, Gudykunst

aligns himself with a “deeply entrenched ...intellectual default position” (Hannerz, 1992, p. 11). Gudykunst writes in (1993),

Because of our socialization into a culture and ethnic group, we share a large portion of our intersubjective realities with other people in our culture or ethnic group. Our shared intersubjective realities are sufficiently stable that we consider the shared portion as an ‘objective’ reality. (p. 35)

and in Gudykunst & Kim (1990),

People raised within the same culture...are likely to share many common denominators that will help them interpret...messages. They may differ or even argue about preferences, but they do understand each other with at least minimum accuracy. Comparatively, individuals from different cultures are faced with a potentially greater problem of understanding each other. (p. 145)

One is to assume the system of knowledge is passed on from one generation to the next in continuous succession. There is continuity. To be ‘born and brought up’ in a particular place on earth is to be born into a context already rich with particular meanings which are then etched, programmed or imprinted into our nervous system. Gudykunst and Kim (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984a) use each of these verbs to describe this process (p. 225). We are given a description of the results of this imprinting.

Our cultural unconscious can be understood only by detailed analysis. We automatically treat what is most characteristically our own as though it were innate. We are programmed to think, feel, and behave as though anyone whose behavior is not predictable or is peculiar in any way is strange, improper, irresponsible, or inferior. (p. 225)

The assumption of cultural sharing is presented here as a given. We are not asked to question whether it may or may not be the case. On what authority, however, do the views of Gudykunst and Kim rest? Is it simply commonsense? The text quoted above is presented in

Gudykunst and Kim (1984a) without any references. It seems, however, to be taken from the following portion of Hall (1976, p. 43).

In fact, according to Powers [Powers, W . T. (1973). Feedback: Beyond behaviorism. *Science*, 179, 351-356.] man's nervous system is structured in such a way that the patterns that govern behavior and perception come into consciousness only when there is a deviation from plan. That is why the most important paradigms or rules governing behavior, the ones that control our lives, function below the level of conscious awareness and are not generally available for analysis. This is an important point, one that is often overlooked or denied. *The cultural unconsciousness*, like Freud's unconscious, not only controls man's actions but *can be understood only by painstaking processes of detailed analysis*. Hence, man *automatically treats what is most characteristically his own* (the culture of his youth) *as though it were innate*. He is forced into the position of *thinking and feeling* that *anyone whose behavior is not predictable or is peculiar in any way is slightly out of his mind, improperly brought up, irresponsible, psychopathic, politically motivated to a point beyond all redemption or just plain inferior*. (The underlined portions are identical to the Gudykunst & Kim quotation.)

My purpose in pointing out Gudykunst and Kim's use of Hall is not so much to focus on their failure to give him credit. Rather, I believe it is important to recognize that since Gudykunst's argument concerning national sociocultural systems requires that the continuity assumption be true, understanding how he has come to accept this assumption is important. It would seem to me that he has relied on Hall rather than done any thinking for himself. Hall is hardly an authority on socialization processes. His use of a short article from a popular magazine to support his views is not convincing. There is much to be debated about with regard to both socialization processes and the cultural sharing it is assumed to cause. This is true with small scale societies. With regard to claims of cultural sharing at the



national level the problem is all the more questionable.

The boundary assumption is the final link in Gudykunst's definition of culture. How large is a 'large group of people?' The ambiguity of the expression is striking even for an introductory textbook. This does not keep Gudykunst from boldly proclaiming, however, that "the 'borders' between cultures usually, but not always, coincide with political boundaries between countries." Note that he presents no justification for this remark. We are expected to find this commonsensical. Though he qualifies his comment with "usually, but not always" we are left in the dark about how this distinction is to be made. Why does Gudykunst make this claim? I think we can find an answer in the last sentence of Extract C:

The argument we make could be extended to 'smaller' groups that share a specific culture (e.g., ethnic groups), but given the conceptualization of cultural variability presented in Chapter 2, we limit our analysis to "national cultures."

The conceptualization of cultural variability is that produced by Hofstede.

We rely most heavily on Hofstede's dimensions of cultural variability because he provides "quantitative" scores for 50 cultures and three regions on each of the dimensions. These scores allow specific explanations and hypotheses to be proffered (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 56).

And the "50 cultures" noted refer to "50 nations." In other words, Hofstede's acceptance of both the cognitive assumption ("cultural is the collective programming of the mind") (see Saeki (1993) for a good discussion of the roots of Hofstede's theorizing) and the continuity assumption it interacts with, lead him to establish his quantitative scores for 50 nations based on questionnaire results distributed to the nationals of these 50 countries. Culture is bounded by national borders.

Gudykunst accepts this position without debate. Furthermore, nationals are considered to be representatives of their nations. We can call this **a representativeness assumption**. Indeed, without this assumption Hofstede's research would have been impossible. The important point to note here, of course, is that this is an assumption. It is an assumption Gudykunst accepts (Gudykunst, Chua, Gray, 1987, p. 462):

While international students may not be typical of the people a person from the United States might meet in their native cultures, they should be representative of the members of their culture who travel to the United States.

Gudykunst Chua, and Gray write that the students "should be representative." One can assume they believe this to be the case because of their acceptance of the other assumptions already described. The students 'should be representative' because their native culture has been imprinted on their minds. Here we see the close connection between the continuity assumption and the representativeness assumption. They require each other. One cannot claim the possibility of representativeness without assuming that through socialization members of nation-states have all been affected similarly by 'culture.'

One final assumption to be described is **an operationalization assumption**. Culture must be operationalized. It goes without saying that this cannot be accomplished unless the cognitive assumption is true. Operationalization is "the process of transforming abstract constructs into a set of concrete indicators that can be observed and measured" (Smith, 1987, p. 39). Gudykunst invariably refers to the work of Foschi & Hales (1979) in framing his reasons for operationalizing culture.

For culture to constitute a theoretical variable, "a **culture X** and a **culture Y** serve to operationally define a characteristic a, which two **cultures** exhibit to different degrees' (Foschi & Hales, 1979, p. 246).

Hofstede's dimensions of culture can, therefore, be used to define operationally the characteristic *a* of interest (for example, individualism-collectivism) in cross-cultural comparisons or studies of intercultural communication; that is, the characteristic *a* should involve some dimension along which cultures vary. Hofstede's theory of cultural differentiation is, at the present time, the only schema of cultural variability that is quantifiable and directly related to communication. (Gudykunst, Chua, & Gray, 1987, p. 467).

It is important to realize that the word 'culture' I have placed in bold print in the preceding text is a code-word for country or nation. Indeed, one finds countless writers and researchers in this field using culture to mean something like a 'system of knowledge' at the beginning of a sentence only to switch to using culture to refer to a nation at the end of the sentence. The implication is that they are interchangeable. The equation seems to be:

- A. Culture equals a system of knowledge shared by a large group of people
- B. Nations are large groups of people
- C. Cultures are nations.

Rohner is perhaps representative when he writes that he has no qualms with the way scholars use the term culture "in a loose, generic sense to refer, in an undifferentiated way, to various sociocultural forms designated...as nation, society, tribe, ethnic group, and the like" (Rohner, 1984, pp. 133-134). In any case, culture is operationalized as equivalent to nation (and so cultural membership is equivalent to possessing nationality). The overwhelming simplicity of this line of reasoning should be obvious. According Krippendorf (1993),

The rather widespread assumption that members of particular cultures or groups think alike, that speakers of a language use the same communication code, and that individual knowledge is shared within a social system serves here as a methodologically convenient ground for

creating the very similarities and differences that objectivistic comparisons require (p 263).

In other words, treating cultural membership as the equivalent of membership in a nation is 'methodologically convenient.' Being unable to make this assumption would bind Gudykunst's hands. The common technique of distributing questionnaires to 100 Japanese in Tokyo and 100 Americans at a midwestern college and then calling this kind of research cross-cultural would be ruled out. Hecht, Sedano, and Ribeav (1993) share similar misgivings when they write,

...we would argue that one of the most pervasive problems within cultural research is the use of group characteristics to classify individuals (normative data) without finding out if the individuals share those qualities. If this were done interpersonally it would be considered stereotyping and the implications are no less damaging in research. Certainly there are elements of community rituals, and traditions that characterize the larger culture. However, we cannot assume that all members of the group are alike in their identity, including its meaning and enactment (p.160).

Is cultural membership normative data? Only if the various assumptions I have noted — the cognitive assumption, the continuity assumption, the boundary assumption, the operationalization assumption, and the representativeness assumption — are accepted. I believe the reading of Gudykunst presented here shows that he indeed adheres to these assumptions and that as long as he accepts the objectivist research paradigm, he indeed must.

A desire to operationalize macro concepts such as culture is part and parcel of the objectivist approach. A related commitment is to the belief that human behavior is organized in law-like relationships of cause and effect. Does Gudykunst believe that culture (however defined) causes behavior in predictable ways? In Extract C he talks

about the 'influence' of culture on communication. In Gudykunst (1993) he writes, ". . . I assume that our communication is influenced by our culture and group memberships, as well as structural, situational, and environmental factors. We nevertheless have the ability to choose how we communicate" (p. 35). This last statement is enigmatic. Is he saying that the influence of culture on our communication is not all-powerful or should the statement be read as only admitting to 'an ability to choose'? But what good would such an ability be if it was never used? Is Gudykunst admitting that human agency can deny culture its consequences? Perhaps. The paper from which the statement is taken, however, leads one to conclude that if he indeed believes this to be the case, he has not allowed this belief to deter him from postulating over forty axioms or "statements that imply direct causal links among variables" (Gudykunst, 1993, p. 35). Axiom number 44 reads, "Members of individualistic cultures emphasize personal identity more than social identity" (p. 67). Given the assumptions Gudykunst works under, I believe this axiom can be read as saying "Being a US national [according to Hofstede the US is an individualistic culture] will cause one [this is what an axiom is meant to indicate] to emphasize personal identity more than social identity." I believe the operationalization assumption requires one to believe that culture has more than just an 'influence' on behavior. Kim (1984) has noted this as well.

Even if the primary purposes of studies are to describe and/or compare different cultures rather than to explain the causes of observed patterns there is an implicit (or sometimes explicit) assumption about the "cause" of such observed communication patterns, that is culture. For example, the observed difference between samples of Italians and Germans is assumed or stated to be due to differences between the respective cultures (p. 24).

Gudykunst's description of the imprinting effect of culture on humans

can easily be read as a version of determinism. Many of his readers probably take him this way. Though Gudykunst may like to see human agents as able to go 'beyond' the confines of cultural membership, if 'the culture of one's youth' is imprinted upon one and programmed into one's nervous system, one wonders if there is any room left for human agency to exert an unpredictable influence.

### **Some conclusions**

This characterization and critique of the work of William B. Gudykunst has served to clarify the assumptions of the objectivist approach to the study of culture and communication. A number of problems with the approach advocated by Gudykunst were detailed. Some of the questions he has failed to answer satisfactorily (if indeed this is possible) are:

(1) How is subjective culture (assuming there is such a thing) connected to sociocultural systems? Jahoda (1980) has noted that Triandis (1980) has failed to clarify this point. Gudykunst's desire to conceptualize culture as a "system of knowledge," however, commits him to taking up this issue of the macro-micro connection,

Resorting to a belief in cultural imprinting to explain this, however, is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it can never be proved. Secondly, it is an assumption which fails to explain the exceptions. Thirdly, it can be used as an excuse for relieving agents of responsibility for their actions (cf. Allport, 1955, p. 100). ("I did that because I'm an American. I did that because I'm black, a woman, a teenager...") Krippendorff (1993) writes,

This practice constructs conceptual hierarchies of constraints whose causality derives solely from the dubious attribution of agency to abstractions. . . . the human communication theories that do emerge

within this conceptual paradigm can hardly be expected to provide a place for individuals taking responsibility for their communication actions (p. 263).

(2)How is any system of knowledge distributed within a given society? Gudykunst leads one to believe that, for the most part, culture is distributed evenly throughout social systems. The politically conservative implications of this conceptualization should not be ignored. As Hannerz (1992) writes,

The major implication of a distributive understanding of culture, of culture as an organization of diversity, is not just the somewhat nit-picking reminder that individuals are not all alike, but that people must deal with other people's meanings; that is, there are meanings, and meaningful forms, on which other individuals, categories, or groups in one's environment somehow have a prior claim, but to which one is somehow yet called to make a response (p. 14).

Related to this is the issue of setting the boundaries of culture. Gergen (1991) and Hannerz (1992) raise this issue. "The autonomy and boundedness of cultures must nowadays be understood as a matter of degree" (Hannerz, 1992, p. 261). The cultural construction of culture must become a focus of research (cf. Bowers & Iwi, 1993).

I hope it is clear that William B. Gudykunst's approach to culture and communication is flawed in various ways. It is my task now to explore answers to the many questions his research has failed to address.

#### **Appendix A: Gudykunst, 1991, pp. 43-45.**

There is no agreement among social scientists on how to define culture. Culture can be seen as including everything that is human made (e.g. Herskovits, 1955) or as a system of shared meanings (e.g.

Geertz, 1973), to name only two possible conceptualizations. Culture also has been equated with communication. Edward T. Hall (1959), for example, believes that “culture is communication and communication is culture” (p. 169).

Clifford Geertz (1966) uses the octopus as a metaphor for culture:

The problem of cultural analysis is as much a matter of determining independencies as interconnections, gulfs as well as bridges. The appropriate image, if one must have images, of cultural organization, is neither the spider web nor the pile of sand. It is rather more the octopus, whose tentacles are in large part separately integrated, neurally quite poorly connected with one another and with what in the octopus passes for a brain and yet who nonetheless manages to get around and to preserve himself [herself], for a while anyway, as a viable, if somewhat ungainly entity. (pp. 66-67)

The octopus is an interesting metaphor for culture, but it does not define it sufficiently for us to use the concept to understand our communication with strangers. While there are many definitions of culture, it is necessary to select one to guide our analysis. I use Roger Keesing's (1974) definition. His definition is long, but not overly technical:

Culture, conceived as a system of competence shared in its broad design and deeper principles, and varying between individuals in its specificities, is then not all of what an individual knows and thinks and feels about his [or her] world. It is his [or her] theory of what his [or her] fellows know, believe, and mean, his [or her] theory of the code being followed, the game being played, in the society into which he [or she] was born....It is this theory to which a native actor refers in interpreting the unfamiliar or the ambiguous, in interacting with strangers (or supernaturals), and in other settings peripheral to the familiarity of mundane everyday life space; and with which he [or she] creates the stage on which the games of life are played....But note that the actors “theory” of



his [or her] culture, like his [or her] theory of his [or her] language may be in large measure unconscious. Actors follow rules of which they are not consciously aware, and assume a world to be "out there" that they have in fact created with culturally shaped and shaded patterns of mind. We can recognize that not every individual shares precisely the same theory of the cultural code, that not every individual knows all the sectors of the culture...even though no one native actor knows all the culture, and each has a variant version of the code. Culture in this view is ordered not simply as a collection of symbols fitted together by the analyst but as a system of knowledge, shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires, organizes, and processes information and creates "internal modes of reality." (p. 89)

I use the term culture to refer to the "system of knowledge" that is shared by a large group of people. The "borders" between cultures usually, but not always, coincide with political boundaries between countries. To illustrate, we can speak of the culture of the United States, the Japanese culture, and the Mexican culture. In some countries, however, there is more than one culture.

Throughout the remainder of the book, I will discuss how culture influences the way we communicate. While I focus on the influence of culture on our communication, I do not mean to imply that this is a one-way process. Our communication with other members of our culture can and does influence the form our culture takes. Cultural change, however, takes place over long periods of time. At any given point in time, our communication is influenced more by our culture than we are influencing our culture by our communication.

When I refer to subdivisions of a "national" culture, I use the term subculture. Subculture implies that the group shares some of the larger national culture, but has some values or customs that differ from the larger culture. We can speak of ethnic subcultures (ethnicity is

discussed later in this chapter), or an “artistic” subculture, to name only two possibilities. While the focus of this book is on communicating with people from different national cultures and ethnic subcultures, everything said applies to other subcultures as well.

In order to understand similarities and differences in communication across cultures, it is necessary to have a way of talking about how cultures differ. It does not make sense to say that “Jiro communicates indirectly because he is a Japanese” or that “Adrian communicates directly because he is from the United States. This does not tell us why there are differences between the way people communicate in the United States and Japan. There has to be some aspect of the cultures in Japan and the United States that are different and this difference, in turn, explains why Japanese communicate indirectly and people from the United States communicate directly. In other words, there are variables on which cultures can be different or similar that can be used to explain communication across cultures. I will refer to these variables as “dimensions of cultural variability.”

There are several different conceptualizations of how cultures differ. It is impossible to discuss them all in a short book like this. I, therefore, focus on the two that I have found most useful in understanding similarities and differences in communication across cultures: individualism-collectivism and low and high context communication.

#### **Appendix B: Gudykunst, 1987, pp. 847-848.**

Numerous definitions of culture exist (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Schweder & Levine, 1984), but no consensus definition has emerged within or across disciplines. Culture, for example, can be conceived as everything that is human made (Herskovitts, 1955) or as involving

shared meanings (Geertz, 1973). Hall (1959) equates it with communication. Birdwhistell (1970) suggests that "culture and communication are terms which represent two different viewpoints or methods of representation of patterned and structured interconnectedness. As 'culture' the focus is on structure; as 'communication' it is on process" (p. 318).

Keesing's (1974) review of cultural theories concluded that two themes predominate: Culture is an adaptive system, and culture is an ideational system. To overcome dilemmas in both definitions (cognitive reductionism and a vision of the world of cultural symbols as spuriously uniform, respectively), Keesing (1974) borrowed the distinction between "competence" and "performance" from linguistics to explain culture:

It is his [or her] theory of what his [or her] fellows know, believe, and mean, his [or her] theory of the code being followed, the game being played, in the society into which he [or she] was born. . . . It is this theory to which a native actor refers in interpreting the unfamiliar or the ambiguous, in interacting with strangers. . . . But note that the actors "theory". . . may be in large measure unconscious. Actors follow rules of which they are not consciously aware, and assume a world to be "out there" that they have in fact created with culturally shaped and shaded patterns of mind. . . . Even though no one native actor knows all the culture, and each has a variant version of the code, culture in this view is ordered not simply as a collection of symbols fitted together by the analyst but as a system of knowledge, shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires, organizes, and processes information and creates "internal modes of reality." (p. 89)

Culture focuses on "competence," but sociocultural "performance" also must be studied, according to Keesing. Culture must, therefore, be distinguished from the social system (the behavior of people who share a common culture, including networks of social relations and patterns

of social interaction; Geertz, 1973; Parsons, 1951) and society (the population of humans who share a common culture and social system; Parsons, 1951). Rohner (1984) argues that “an individual is a member of a society. . . individuals participate in social systems. . . and share cultures” (p. 132). Given that society, social system, and culture are all interrelated and have an impact upon communication, the focus of this chapter is on the sociocultural system, which is conceived as including all three.

### **Appendix C: Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, pp. 27-30.**

The conceptualization of culture has concerned social scientists for decades (e.g., Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; see Schweder & Levine, 1984, for recent conceptualizations). Numerous definitions exist, but to date no consensus has emerged within or across disciplines. Culture can be seen as consisting of everything that is human made (e.g., Herskovits, 1955), or as involving shared meanings (e.g., Geertz, 1973), to name only two possible conceptualizations. It is also equated with communication. Hall (1959), for example, believes that “culture is communication and communication is culture” (p. 169). Birdwhistell (1970) takes a slightly different position, suggesting that “culture and communication are terms which represent two different viewpoints or methods of representation of patterned and structured interconnectedness. As ‘culture’ the focus is on structure; as ‘communication’ it is on process” (p. 318).

Keesing (1974) reviewed theories of culture, concluding that the focus in anthropology is on two themes: culture as an adaptive system and culture an ideational system. Those who see culture as an adaptive system tend to agree on several assumptions (Keesing, 1974). Theorists tend to assume that cultures link individuals to the ecological setting

in which they live. Harris (1968), for example, contends that culture “comes down to behavior patterns associated with particular groups of people, that is, to ‘customs’ or to a people’s ‘way of life’” (p. 16). There also appears to be agreement that the adaptation process is similar to natural selection. Cultures tend to evolve toward equilibrium. Further, those aspects of the culture linked to production are viewed as the most central and adaptive part of cultural systems, but ideational components also have adaptive consequences.

Ideational theories of culture tend to view culture as a cognitive system, a structural system, or a symbolic system. Goodenough (1961) is one of the major proponents of culture as a cognitive system. He argues that culture “consists of standards for deciding what is. . . for deciding what to do about it, and. . . for deciding how to go about doing it” (p. 522). Such a view makes culture unobservable and very similar to the cognitive systems of language. Levi-Strauss (1971) suggests that cultures are “shared symbolic systems” that are “creations of the mind.” He argues that the structuring of components of culture (e.g. myths) should be the focus of analysis. Geertz (1966, 1973) is the major advocate of the culture-as-symbolic-system school of thought. He uses the octopus as a metaphor for culture:

The problem of cultural analysis is as much a matter of determining independencies as interconnection, gulfs as well as bridges. The appropriate image, if one must have images, of cultural organization, is neither the spider web nor the pile of sand. It is rather more the octopus, whose tentacles are in large part separately integrated, neurally quite poorly connected with one another and with what in the octopus passes for a brain, and yet who nonetheless manages to get around and to preserve himself [herself], for a while anyway, as a viable, if somewhat ungainly entity. (1966, pp. 66-67)

Schneider (1972) takes a slightly different position differentiating

cultural and normative systems:

Where the normative system. . . is Ego centered and particularly appropriate to decision-making or interaction models of analysis, culture is system-centered. . . . Culture takes a man's [or woman's] position vis-a-vis the world rather than a man's [or woman's] position on how to get along in this world as it is given. . . . Culture concerns the stage, the stage setting, and the cast of characters; the normative system consists of the stage directions for the actors and how the actors should play their parts on the stage that is so set. (p. 38)

Taken individually, there are problems with each approach. Keesing (1974) argues, for example, that viewing culture as an adaptive system can lead to cognitive reductionism, while the view of culture as a symbolic system can lead to seeing the world of cultural symbols as spuriously uniform. To overcome the dilemmas in both definitions, he borrows the distinction between "competence" and "performance" from linguistics to explain culture:

Culture, conceived as a system of competence shared in its broad design and deeper principles, and varying between individuals in its specificities, is then not all of what an individual knows and thinks and feels about his [or her] world. It is his [or her] theory of what his [or her] fellows know, believe, and mean, his [or her] theory of the code being followed, the game being played, in the society into which he [or her] was born. . . . It is this theory to which a native actor refers in interpreting the unfamiliar or the ambiguous, in interacting with strangers (or supernaturals), and in other settings peripheral to the familiarity of mundane everyday life space; and with which he [or her] creates the stage on which the games of life are played. . . . But note that the actors "theory" of his [or her] culture, like his [or her] theory of his [or her] language may be in large measure unconscious. Actors follow rules of which they are not consciously aware, and assume a world to be "out there" that they have in fact created with culturally shaped and shaded patterns of mind. We can recognize that not every individual shares precisely the

same theory of the cultural code, that not every individual knows all the sectors of the culture. . . even though no one native actor knows all the culture, and each has a variant version of the code. Culture in this view is ordered not simply as a collection of symbols fitted together by the analyst but as a system of knowledge, shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires, organizes, and processes information and creates "internal modes of reality." (p. 89)

According to Keesing, culture must be studied within the social and ecological setting in which humans communicate, that is, sociocultural "performance" also must be studied.

Peterson (1979) reviewed the use of the concept "culture" in the sociological literature, concluding that the diverse conceptualizations share several elements:

The focus on drama, myth, code, and people's plans indicates a shift in the image of culture. While it was once seen as a map of behavior, it is now increasingly seen as a map for behavior. In this view, people use culture the way scientists use paradigms. . . to organize and normalize activity. Like scientific paradigms, elements of culture are used, modified, or discarded depending on their usefulness in organizing reality. (p. 159)

Given the similarity of the conclusions, Keesing's and Peterson's explanations will be accepted as the working definition of culture.

Following Swidler (1986), we contend that culture independently influences behavior in "settled" cultural periods. In "unsettled" cultural periods, when a culture is undergoing massive change, actions are guided by explicit ideologies. Since we focus on "settled" periods here, this distinction is not critical for our analysis. For those interested in the influence of culture in periods in which a culture is "unsettled" (e.g., national development), the distinction is critical (see Swidler, 1986, for specifics of this argument).

Since culture cannot be studied in isolation from its social and ecological environment, it must be distinguished from the social system (the behavior of people who share a common culture, including networks of social relations and patterns of social interaction; Geertz, 1973; Parsons, 1951) and society (the population of humans who share a common culture and social system; Parsons, 1951). Rohner (1984) argues that “an individual is a member of a society. . . individuals participate in social systems. . . and share cultures” (p. 132). Since society, social system, and culture are all interrelated and have an impact upon communication, the focus of the book is on the sociocultural system, which is conceived as including all three.

Given the conceptualization presented, culture is a script or a schema shared by a large group of people. The “group” on which we focus throughout the book is the nation or society. More specifically, we technically are examining the influence of national sociocultural systems on interpersonal communication. We will, however, use the term “culture” because it is the shared culture that influences interpersonal communication, not membership in a society. The argument we make could be extended to “smaller” groups that share a specific culture (e.g. ethnic groups), but given the conceptualization of cultural variability presented in Chapter 2, we limit our analysis to “national cultures.”

#### **Appendix D: Keesing, 1974, p. 89.**

Culture, conceived as a system of competence shared in its broad design and deeper principles, and varying between individuals in its specificities, is then not all of what an individual knows and thinks and feels about his world. It is his theory of what his fellows know, believe, and mean, his theory of the code being followed, the game



being played, in the society into which he was born (see also 37). It is this theory to which a native actor refers in interpreting the unfamiliar or the ambiguous, in interacting with strangers (or supernaturals), and in other settings peripheral to the familiarity of mundane everyday life space; and with which he creates the stage on which the games of life are played. **We can account for the individual actor's perception of his culture as external (and as potentially constraining and frustrating); and we can account for the way individuals then can consciously use, manipulate, violate, and try to change what they conceive to be the rules of the game.** But note that the actors "theory" of his culture, like his theory of his language may be in large measure unconscious. Actors follow rules of which they are not consciously aware, and assume a world to be "out there" that they have in fact created with culturally shaped and shaded patterns of mind.

We can recognize that not every individual shares precisely the same theory of the cultural code, that not every individual knows all the sectors of the culture. **Thus a cultural description is always an abstracted composite. Depending on the heuristic purposes at hand, we, like the linguists, can plot the distribution of variant versions of competence among subgroups, roles, and individuals. And, like the linguists, we can study the processes of change in conceptual codes as well as in patterns of social behavior (37).**

**Such a conception of culture as an idealized body of competence differentially distributed in a population, yet partially realized in the minds of individuals, allows us to bring to bear a growing body of knowledge about the structure of mind and brain and the formal organizations of intelligence. Even though no one native actor knows all the culture, and each has a variant version of the code. Culture in**

this view is ordered not simply as a collection of symbols fitted together by the analyst but as a system of knowledge, shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires, organizes, and processes information and creates "internal modes of reality." (16, 38, 39). **Such a conception of culture frees us potentially from the dangers of both cognitive reductionism and ethereal idealism.**

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