



Cosmopolitanism

Miriam Sobre-Denton

Assistant Professor, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, IL, USA

What is it?

Cosmopolitanism refers to the idea of intercultural world citizenship at global and local levels. Cosmopolitanism is generally understood as distinct from—but within the context of—globalization. This theory addresses how individual people negotiate their personal circumstances in relation to the influence of global forces. It includes consideration of the ethical and moral imperatives people have to their local communities as well as to the larger world beyond their localities. It involves social life and communication across borders; thus it is a social phenomenon.

Who uses the concept?

Cosmopolitanism originated with the Ancient Greek Stoics and then Enlightenment scholars, with roots in the concepts of intellectualism and rationalism, combined with notions of citizenship and ethical obligations to others. Today, due largely to globalization, the concept is experiencing a resurgence. Political theorists, sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and most recently communication theorists, have migrated towards cosmopolitanism, particularly its critical and vernacular versions. Today theorists often approach cosmopolitanism from bottom-up, transnational and trans-local levels, present on the peripheries as well as the centers of the globalized world.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Cosmopolitanism requires intercultural dialogue: people engage the world through dialogue with one another locally and globally. The communicative aspect of cosmopolitanism involves active

participation in social life with culturally different Others, to develop relational and contextual empathy. In particular, the notion that all human beings value, even though what they value changes from person to person and culture to culture, and the understanding that those values are held equally dear, requires dialogue as a means of understanding and negotiating spaces of difference.

What work remains?

Cosmopolitanism has been widely examined by academics across social science and humanities disciplines, although communication scholars only recently have demonstrated interest. Work to bring cosmopolitanism into the world of practitioners, in terms of education, diplomacy, training, and human rights advocacy, is greatly needed. Translating cosmopolitanism's notions of world citizenship and ethical obligations to others in terms of teaching intercultural competency and global-local ties is imperative. More effort examining cosmopolitanism in everyday life and applying its tenets to today's globalized world would be highly valuable.

Resources

- Appiah, K. A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers*. London: Penguin.
- Delanty, G. (Ed.). (2012). *Routledge handbook of cosmopolitanism studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Hansen, D. T. (2011). *The teacher and the world: A study of cosmopolitanism as education*. New York: Routledge.
- Sobre-Denton, M. S. & Bardhan, N. (2013). *Cultivating cosmopolitanism for intercultural communication: Communicating as a global citizen*. New York: Routledge.