



## Cultural Identity

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### What is it?

Cultural identity refers to identification with, or sense of belonging to, a particular group based on various cultural categories, including nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and religion. Cultural identity is constructed and maintained through the process of sharing collective knowledge such as traditions, heritage, language, aesthetics, norms and customs. As individuals typically affiliate with more than one cultural group, cultural identity is complex and multifaceted. While formerly scholars assumed identification with cultural groups to be obvious and stable, today most view it as contextual and dependent upon temporal and spatial changes. In the globalized world with increasing intercultural encounters, cultural identity is constantly enacted, negotiated, maintained, and challenged through communicative practices.

### Who uses the concept?

The concept of cultural identity is used by scholars in a wide range of humanities and social sciences disciplines, including especially communication and cultural studies, but also psychology, history, linguistics, and regional studies, among others. Scholars in communication and cultural studies examine communicative means and practices as both the results and constitutive elements of cultural identity. Outside academia, the concept of cultural identity is most often used by non-governmental organizations in multicultural societies as a way to recognize and celebrate identities of racially and ethnically marginalized groups.

### Fit with intercultural dialogue?

One's cultural identity is created in relation to others within a unique social context. All cultural identities

are defined by recognizing others' presence and cultural practices. Intercultural dialogue is essential to constructing cultural identity as it encourages individuals to see similarities with and differences from others and define who they are. Intercultural dialogue produces a contested space where cultural identity is constantly redefined and negotiated.

### What work remains?

The concept of cultural identity has mainly been studied in multicultural societies and societies with histories of modern Western colonialism. The US and the UK have been at the center of the production of relevant theories and empirical studies, influenced by civil rights movements in the 1960s and identity politics in the 1980s. As a result, existing studies of cultural identity do not reflect the social and cultural contexts in other parts of the world. Asia is one of the regions that has fallen outside the purview because of the relatively homogenous population in many Asian countries. Enhancing and sharing vernacular knowledge rooted in non-Western cultures will lead to further refinement of the concept.

### Resources

- Fong, M., & Chuang, R. (Eds.) (2004). *Communicating ethnic and cultural identity*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2007). Ideology, identity, and intercultural communication: An analysis of differing conceptions of cultural identity. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 36(3), 237-253.
- Miike, Y. (2007). Theorizing culture and communication in the Asian context: An assumptive foundation. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 11(1), 1-21.