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3 Theoretical perspectives on communication and cultures

Abstract: This chapter provides an overview of contemporary theoretical perspectives in culture and communication scholarship, based on a review of articles published 2010–2014 in 5 well-known culture and communication journals. The analysis identified four characteristics of each article/abstract: meta/theoretical perspective (critical, interpretive, social science), research context (face to face, mediated etc), focus (intracultural, cross cultural, intercultural), and target cultural group (e.g., African-Americans, Asians, etc); as well as primary topic/s addressed. The review revealed a broad range of topics, foci and contexts. In addition, while the tripartite framework appears useful in understanding the range of current meta/theoretical perspectives, there is a lack of interrogation of these Western approaches, as well as a lack of attention to economically, politically and geo-strategically less-powerful countries, resulting in “silent zones” in our theorizing. The chapter then calls for scholarship that really matter to contemporary humans as as nearly half of humans live on less than $2.50/day, there are more displaced people in the world than at any other time in human history, and ethnic and religious conflicts threaten the stability of vast world regions. Finally, specific research strategies are identified that may enhance our knowledge and more effectively apply this knowledge to critically important global communication challenges.

Keywords: culture, communication, intercultural, theory, paradigm

1 Introduction

This undertaking – providing an overview of contemporary culture and communication theoretical perspectives – is daunting, to say the least! The contemporary scholarship includes a range of metatheoretical perspectives, varying in research goals, metatheoretical assumptions regarding epistemology, ontology, axiology and preferred research methods and investigates a broad range of intercultural communication topics and contexts. In addition, communication scholars from all areas of the world contribute to extant knowledge, although they have noted the need for more research about Africans and communication, and studies by African-affiliated scholars (Miller et al. 2010; Miller et al. 2013) as well as studies focused on the Middle East (Heisey 2011).
2 A review of research published in five primary culture and communication journals

In order to gain a better understanding of current theoretical perspectives, we systematically reviewed the contents of articles published during the past five years (2010–2014) in five well-known culture and communication journals: *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication (JIIC)*, *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research (JIICR)*, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations (IJIR)*, *Language and Intercultural Communication (LAIC)* and *Intercultural Communication Studies (ICS)*. The total number of articles/abstracts reviewed was 750. Our content analysis/rewiew was two pronged and included: 1. a close reading of approximately 25% of the abstracts/articles to identify four characteristics of each article/abstract: meta/theoretical perspective, context of research, focus of research, and target cultural group, e.g., African-Americans, Asians, etc; and 2. identification of primary topics in each of the 760 abstracts/articles using qualitative content analysis software. The specific methods of these two analyses are described below.

2.1 The big picture: Paradigms, focus, context, and cultural groups

Approximately 25% of the 700 abstracts (n = 200) were randomly selected for close reading and each of the abstracts was categorized by the second author for four characteristics: 1. metatheoretical perspective using the well-known tripartite framework (social science, interpretive, critical) (Martin & Nakayama 1999), concentrating primarily on the research goal, 2. research context (face to face, old/traditional media, new media), 3. research focus (intercultural, cross-cultural or intracultural), and 4. target cultural group(s), e.g., African-Americans, Asians, etc. In addition, a note was made of any specific theories or theoretical notions mentioned. In instances where there was not enough information in the abstract to make a judgment about a particular characteristic we consulted the published article; we also noted instances where it was not possible to categorize one or more characteristics (e.g. theoretical articles which did not mention a cultural group or a context).

2.1.1 Paradigms

The results of this analysis revealed that, first, the tripartite framework continues to be useful in understanding the range of meta-theoretical and theoretical perspectives in culture and communication scholarship. Specifically, approximately 45% (n = 89) of the articles seem to reflect the social science, functionalist paradigm (explicit or implicit goal of predicting human behavior and assuming causality); 40% (n = 80) reflected interpretive assumptions (goal of understanding and
describing) and 12% (n = 25) reflected the critical paradigm (research goal of identifying unequal power relations and ultimately eliminating oppression). That said, it should be noted that many articles reflect a blending of paradigmatic assumptions or lack of explicit assumptions, e.g., descriptive studies that did not explicitly state predictions but seemed to assume a predictive model, e.g., interpretive essays that incorporated critical sensibilities, that is, acknowledging the influence of macro contexts on analyses of intercultural communication phenomena (e.g. historical, political, socio-economic) as well as the importance of social justice issues (Halualani, Mendoza & Drzewiecka 2009). There were 6 articles where it was not possible to identify a clear paradigmatic stance (3%).

It is instructive to note that if we eliminate the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* abstracts (the most interdisciplinary of these journals), then the three paradigmatic perspectives are almost equally represented. Each of the five journals seemed to favor particular paradigmatic perspectives and their goal statement and topics of interest reflect these preferences. For example, the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* expressly denotes topics of interest in the stated publication goals: “immigrant acculturation and integration, intergroup relations and intercultural communication” (https://www.elsevier.com/journals/international-journal-of-intercultural-relations/0147-1767/guide-for-authors) – topics that have historically been investigated from a social science perspective. The *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* articles reflected the broadest metatheoretical range – research from all three paradigmatic perspectives and explicitly state the goal: to publish “diverse perspectives and methods, including qualitative, quantitative, critical and textual approaches in these contexts (democracy, the environment, gender and sexuality, globalization, health, identify, media, organization, postcolonialism, technology, transnationalism, among others)” (http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=rjii20). *Intercultural Communication Studies* and *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* articles seemed to reflect primarily social science and interpretive paradigmatic assumptions; *Intercultural Communication Studies* stating the general goal of publishing research “that brings something new and pertinent to the field of intercultural communication” (http://web.uri.edu/iaics/iaics-journal/) and the *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*’s to publish “qualitative and quantitative research that focuses on interrelationships between culture and communication” ... in non-mediated contexts”. The paradigmatic preferences for *Language and Intercultural Communication* are stated more explicitly – “to promote an interdisciplinary understanding interplay between language and intercultural communication, ... to resist reductive and hegemonic interpretations ... stimulated by contemporary critical perspectives” (http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=rmli20).

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to identify all the theoretical perspectives in extant literature, we hope to describe some of the dominant topics, theories and approaches, note recent trends and also identify future theoretical
and metatheoretical directions. Continuing with the big picture, we describe the primary contexts, foci, and cultural groups that emerged from our analysis of research published in the journals identified above.

2.1.2 Contexts

Our analysis of the 200 abstracts/articles reveals that most research therein (55%, n = 111) focuses on face to face contexts (note: this doesn’t mean researchers study actual face to face encounters but the focus is on face to face communication in various interpersonal, organization, and public settings.) Only 15% of the articles (n = 29) focused on “old” mediated contexts (film, newspapers, television) and only 7% (n = 15) examined intercultural encounters in new media contexts (blogs, SNS, email etc) and 8% (n = 17) focused on written texts (poetry, novels). In 28 articles (14%) it was not possible to identify a context (e.g. the article was theoretical or author did not specify a context). It seemed surprising that there were so few studies conducted on new media, given the proliferation of mediated communication today and it is also worth noting that although the new media studies represented all three paradigmatic perspectives, many of the studies seemed descriptive and atheoretical, suggesting a need for more examinations and theorizing about this fast moving communication phenomenon (see Shuter 2011).

2.1.3 Focus

The content analysis also revealed the primary foci of current intercultural communication research (e.g. intercultural, cross cultural or intra/cultural). Not surprisingly, the majority of the 200 abstracts/articles seemed to focus on intercultural communication encounters (61%, n = 122), the remainder of the research focused almost equally on cross cultural studies (15%, n = 30) and cultural (17%, n = 34). It seems that there are fewer cross cultural studies and more focus on intercultural interaction than in previous eras. Note: Again while the focus is on intercultural interaction, much of the research does not investigate actual interaction, but on interaction in the abstract (e.g. acculturation of immigrants which assumes intercultural contact between immigrants and members of host culture without actually observing or describing the encounters).

2.1.4 Cultural groups

Our analysis revealed a rather bleak picture, exposing vast “silent zones” in extant culture and communication research – described in more detail later in the chapter. Specifically, the 200 abstracts/articles under review revealed a focus on ap-
approximately 236 different cultures/regions of the world\(^1\). Given that we reviewed articles in U.S. American and European journals, it is not surprising that the largest majority of the articles focused on cultural groups within North America and Europe (17\% and 27\% respectively, a total of 44\%). However, Asian countries (including the South Asian country of India) represented 27\% (n = 65), with China representing 13\% (n = 30) of all cultures mentioned! (compared to Japan with 6\%, n = 14).

As scholars have noted, research foci follow the money – seen so clearly in the emphasis on Japanese cultural phenomena during the Japanese economic heydays of the 1980–2000, and now the strong emphasis on China, the more recent economic powerhouse. There are three vast geographical areas that are completely neglected in the scholarship reviewed here. Of the 236 specific cultural groups mentioned, only four countries within the entire African continent were mentioned and there were two other general mentions of “Africa,” a shameful absence noted by Miller et al. 2013. Similarly, Central and South America cultures/countries are also absent: Mexico was mentioned twice; Costa Rico and Chile once, representing 2\% of all cultural groups mentioned. Middle Eastern countries/cultures (including Turkey) fared slightly better – representing 13\% (n = 30) of cultural groups mentioned; but given the current world and regional conflicts, it seems imperative that culture and communication scholars focus more on this important geographical region. It should be noted that a number of articles focused on encounters/relations between Jews and Muslims within Israeli contexts.

2.2 Overview of topics and theoretical perspectives

In order to better understand the topics represented in current culture and communication scholarship, for our second content analysis, all the articles and their abstracts published in the aforementioned journals in last five years (2010–2014) were downloaded in a single file. Then a qualitative data analysis software tabulated frequencies for all the words appearing in those journal abstracts; articles and prepositions (the, a, and, etc.) were then deleted, in order to focus more on the keywords related to culture and communication. The top ten words, appearing an average of 500 times each, are: intercultural, research, study, cultural, communication, social, students, language, identity, and Chinese.

For the next step, we considered only those words which appeared at least 50 times in the abstracts, yielding a total of 184 words. These words were arranged

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\(^1\) In instances of cross cultural or intercultural studies, all cultures were noted, e.g., an article focusing on “Moroccan immigrants in France” was tallied as focusing on both Morocco and France. Also, some groups were referenced rather vaguely, e.g., “international students”, or “immigrants in Australia” (n = 13).
alphabetically to identify similar keywords (e.g. cultural, culture and culturally; or language and languages) and these words were grouped under single keywords (e.g. culture and language respectively). Then these keywords were grouped (by the first author) based on their meanings and interconnectedness; for example, words such as pedagogy, teaching, student and teachers were grouped together. In cases of doubt, close reading of the words in actual contexts was done, in consultation with the second author, in order to gain a better understanding of the meanings and implications of the keywords. Finally, the following eight topic domains in culture and communication research emerged and are described in the next section, along with specific theories identified in the earlier analysis (close reading of 25% of the articles/abstracts). These topic categories are not mutually exclusive by any means; many of the articles could be considered for multiple categories. Topics are presented in alphabetical order as follows.

2.2.1 Academic interactions and intercultural communication

Academic training, orientation and pedagogical, aspects are integral processes of various intercultural communication praxis. Journal articles in this category are both descriptive and prescriptive. Some describe behaviors, beliefs and practices, primarily from a social science paradigmatic stance, e.g. measuring teacher characteristics and their impact on student learning in various cultures (Goldman, Bolkan & Goodboy 2014) or investigating the relationship between intercultural competence and motivations of the learners (Mirzaei & Forouzandeh 2013). Scholars described cases from conventional classroom situations (Keshishian 2013) as well as online settings and in study abroad contexts (Sandel 2014).

The more prescriptive articles described strategies for strengthening intercultural competencies of both teachers, e.g. internationalization of education through network-based international collaborations (Dooly 2011) and face to face training in interculturality (Garduño, Puga, Manzano & Taipa 2012) and students, e.g., applying newer pedagogical tools in intercultural training such as usage of audiovisuals/films and social media (Truong & Tran 2014).

There are also a few critical studies of intercultural communication in academic contexts, e.g., using a post-colonial, post-structural lens to question the effectiveness of interreligious dialogues for accomplishing and promoting intercultural pedagogy (Riitaoja & Dervin 2014), using cosmopolitan pedagogical framework to examine global competencies of students in Chicago’s underserved communities (Sobré-Denton, Carlsen & Gruel 2014).

2.2.2 Acculturation, competence and intercultural negotiations

Contemporary scholars continue paying attention to topics of acculturation, competence and face negotiation, and much of the primary theorizing in intercultural
The theoretical perspectives on communication and cultures communication scholarship still focuses on acculturation. The review revealed that the social science theories employed in investigations of these topics are many of those identified and described in Gudykunst’s 2005 edited volume, *Theorizing Intercultural Communication*, most notably those covering acculturation (e.g. Communication scholar Kim’s Integrative theory, Gudykunst’s Anxiety/Uncertainty Management theory (AUM) theory) (see Yuan 2011; Zhang & Goodson 2011), effective intercultural interaction (e.g. Oetzel’s Effective Intercultural Work Group Communication Theory), and adaptation in intercultural interaction (e.g. Giles and colleagues’s Communication Accommodation theory, Burgoon’s Expectancy Violations theory).

In addition to communication theories identified above, current scholarship also builds on social psychology theories, including Berry’s four strategies of acculturation (see Jibeen 2011), Ward and Searle’s model of psycho cultural and sociocultural dimensions of adaptation, and Black’s theory of transition (Lin, Chen & Song 2012). Our review reveals that the social science scholarship (especially in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*) is replete with explorations of variables connected to acculturation, including social capital, emotional displays, leadership, happiness, satisfaction and well being, stress, language learning, extended kin, cultural intelligence, emotional intelligence, food consumption, and stereotyping. In recent years, various papers have been written on the roles of media exposure, social support, and individual coping in the context of acculturation (Hanasono, Chen & Wilson 2014). Aspects such as cultural fusion and cultural adaptation are also addressed by various authors (Sandel & Liang 2010). It should be noted that, whereas previous research focused on business expats and student sojourners, current research is extended to immigrant groups’ transitions and adaptation – described later in this chapter.

Narratives on face and discussion on face-negotiation theory emerged from scholarship of several researchers, much of it based on Ting-Toomey’s well-known work in face negotiation (see Gudykunst 2005), for example, face-ideology in the context of cross-cultural business communication (Shi 2011).

Our review also revealed a great deal of social science research that extends interpersonal communication scholarship/theorizing (usually based on psychology research) to intercultural contexts, e.g., relational schemas, social penetration, elaboration likelihood model of persuasion, nonverbal expectancy theory, willingness to communicate, and similarity-attraction paradigm, too numerous to cite all specific examples here. Two examples address intercultural relationship aspects – one examines cultural variations in self-disclosure and emotional closeness (Maier, Zhang & Clark 2013) and another examines conflict styles of interracial couples (Lawton, Foeman & Braz 2013).

Related research on intercultural competence is another important area of theorizing. Building on previous research, scholars examined the relevance and impacts of communicative aspects on intercultural competence such as cultural sensi-
activity on ethnocentrism (Chen 2010), dialogic/questioning behaviors and diffused resistive enactments (Araújo e Sá, Carlo & Melo-Pfeifer 2010) and sensation seeking (Arasaratnam & Banerjee 2011).

2.2.3 Conflict, peace-building and intercultural communication

Intercultural communication studies have recently considered peace building and conflict resolution as one of the central foci of the discipline, both on the individual and societal level. On the individual (interpersonal) level, the domain of conflict is studied from various perspectives by contemporary scholars, including the impact of individualistic and collectivistic culture on conflict, role of trust/distrust in resolving conflict, and racial attitude and intergroup communication in constituting/resolving conflict (Allison & Emmers-Sommer 2011). Scholars also use theories from organizational communication – e.g., Rahim’s conflict strategies (Cheng 2010).

In the peace building context, various frameworks that embrace community engagement, reflexive dialogue and solidarity building were described and discussed as well as interest in discovering how best to encourage intercultural dialogue and peacebuilding, especially in the complex arena of intractable conflicts (Broome & Collier 2012). Another more recent area of theorizing investigates the potentials of intercultural dialogue and its transformative possibilities [see special issue of Journal of International and Intercultural Communication (Vol. 4, issue 2) in face to face as well as online interaction (Carbaugh et al. 2011; Witteborn 2011)].

2.2.4 Diversity, underrepresented populations and intercultural communication

Building on Co-cultural theory (Orbe & Spellers in Gudykunst 2005), recent research questions the dominant discourses and foregrounds co-cultural agencies and identities. To explain co-cultural communication theory, Camara and Orbe (2011) noted that it is grounded in muted group and standpoint theories as well as phenomenology, and is founded on the experiences of a wide range of co-cultural groups, including members of racial and ethnic groups, women, persons with disabilities, gays, lesbians and bisexuals, and those with a lower socioeconomic status.

Issues of hegemonic structural violence, imposition of dominant ideologies, and maintenance of privileges are discussed in several papers (Milazzo 2015). In response to discrimination and violence, scholars explore the relevance and necessity of co-cultural agentic engagements such as intercultural dialogue, civic engagements, and empowerment of co-cultural groups (Camara & Orbe 2011; MacLennan 2011). The issue of multiculturalism in many contexts is also explored (see Arasaratnam 2013).
To understand the processes and impacts of discriminations and prejudices, research also focuses on several intercultural aspects such as construction of cultural “other”, effectiveness of face-to-face and mediated prejudice reduction, co-cultural responses and discrimination negotiation strategies (Jun 2012; Shulman, Collins & Clément 2011), as well as a focus on white privilege (Lacy 2010).

Research also addressed the issues of minority identities (e.g., racial, ethnic, caste-based minorities) and identity struggles using postcolonial approaches, critical race theory and various foci on race and white privilege [See Journal of International and Intercultural Communication 2015 special issues (Vol 8, issues 1 and 2) on “Race(ing) Intercultural Communication”). A most recent focus is on a cultural group that has been undertheorized in intercultural communication – the LGBTQ community [see 2013 Journal of International and Intercultural Communication special issue (Vol 6, Issue 2) (Chavez 2013)]. For example, LGBTQ issues such as body images and homonormativity are discussed (Aiello et al. 2013). Issues of other underrepresented groups such as foreign domestic helpers (Ladegaard 2013) and HIV/AIDS victims are also addressed in contemporary intercultural journal articles (D’Silva, Leichty & Agarwal 2011).

2.2.5 Globalization, west-centric imperialism and intercultural communication

The processes of globalization and its manifestation are also studied by intercultural communication scholars; global diversity, global citizenship and global communication are some of the aspects discussed; see for example, Witteborn’s (2010) examination of the role of transnational NGOs in promoting global citizenship and globalizing communication practices. Contemporary intercultural articles also examined the roles of traditional and new media in globalization, extending Everett Roger’s theory of diffusion of innovation, as well as other theories including cultivation theories, dependency theories, uses and gratifications theories. See for example, the study of Bedouin and Tel-Aviv teens and their use of mobile phones (Samuel-Azran 2012).

In understanding Eurocentric and west-centric imperialism, scholars examined several cultural aspects such as markers of desire, white supremacy, and white privilege (Lacy 2010). Roles of cultural diplomacy, discursive initiatives and local/regional media are studied in the context of building national images and legitimizing transnational issues (See Da 2013; Su 2012).

2.2.6 Identity, resistance and intercultural communication

Our analysis reveals a continuing focus on identity, using many of the theories included in Gudykunst’s (2005) Theorizing ... noted earlier: Collier’s theory of iden-
tity, Hecht’s Communication theory of Identity, Ting-Toomey’s Identity negotiation theory as well as her Facework theory.

Critical conceptions of identity include the notions of hybridity where identity is articulated and expressed in complex and often dialectical competing tensions (Bardhan 2011) and the importance of physical space and place in understanding identity for various cultural beings (Sekimoto 2012); others incorporate work of European critical theorists (e.g. Foucault, Bakhtin etc). Many scholars, particularly those who use a critical lens, study global capitalism and structural inequity to understand poverty, voicelessness and marginalization in the underserved spaces (Murphy 2013). Scholars paid attention to how construction of minority and hegemonic discriminatory policies reify power imbalances and resource disparities (see Martínez-Guillem’s 2011 discussion of European attitudes toward the Roma). Cases of resistive co-cultural enactments and communicative activism were presented in several articles (Antony 2010); these papers are primarily guided by the theoretical perspectives of feminism and co-cultural discursivity and seek to create avenues for social change (Miles 2010). Some of the relevant aspects emerged from the discussion of contemporary scholars are interplay between global/universal and local/non-western realities/experiences and identities (e.g. how intercultural dialogues and creativity used to study the global-local interplay (Uddin & Hill 2010), and dehistoricized cultural othering of the underserved (Weiguo 2013)).

2.2.7 Language and intercultural communication

Linguistic aspects remain one of the primary areas of investigation in intercultural communication research and theory; particularly among European language scholars who conduct studies using discourse analysis, Speech Act theory, politeness, conversational strategies, and cultural scripts, in various contexts. A primary context is second language learning. For example, some research discusses intercultural willingness to communicate (Mertins & Baus 2010) and others the emotional aspects in the context of second-language learning (see Horan 2013). Scholars also argued in favor of linguistic pluralism and legitimizing underrepresented voices; in doing so, they criticized and questioned linguistic hegemony, American modernism and global capitalist competitions (Lee, Han & McKerrow 2010).

In addition, the issues related to translation also got substantial attention from the contemporary intercultural scholars. Several aspects of translation such as audiovisual translations, ideological aspects, culture specific vocabularies, manipulation of narratives, disappointing translations, global processes and portrayal of local languages in translation processes are discussed (see Heller 2011; Li 2012). Other language orientated theories include rhetorical analysis, as well as the role of language in identity negotiation and expression (see Fay & Davchevea 2014; Spencer 2011).
2.2.8 Migration, diaspora and intercultural communication

Research investigating migration and diasporas might be seen as an extension of the longstanding social science investigations of acculturation and adaptation and often include recent critical approaches, espousing a more nuanced and complex view of these topics, incorporating power relations and more fluid conceptualizations of culture and identity. For example, Kinefuchi (2010) describes a diasporic view of acculturation that also involves spatial negotiations. Issues of language and migration also receive attention [See Language and Intercultural Communication 2014 special issue (Vol 14, issue 3) on “Migrating Languages: Multidisciplinary perspectives on Refugees, Asylum, Migration and Language”].

Issues of migration are studied from macro as well as from micro perspectives. Immigration policies of nation-state, resettlement policies are important foci (e.g., Cheah et al. 2011). Individual and micro-level negotiations of migration issues are addressed; for example, transnational marriages and inequalities caused by migration processes (Drzewiecka & Steyn 2012). Researchers also studied different cultural perspectives from host and migrant standpoints, and processes of negotiating and constructing social cultural values to foreground immigrant and diasporic narrativization (Hua 2010). In such contexts, nonverbal communication, social political diversities, and the impacts of globalization and transnationalization were examined (Flynn & Kosmarskaya 2014).

3 Current trends and future directions

This review of contemporary theorizing in intercultural communication reveals several trends. First, research now seems to include works with less emphasis on cultural values frameworks (e.g. Hofstede’s cultures values framework) that were so dominant in the 1980’s and 90’s and have been critiqued for promoting a static, essentialist conceptualization of culture (Fougère & Moulettes 2007). Research using these frameworks is still being published (see Merkin, Taras & Steel 2014 for a review of research findings connecting cultural values and cultural variations in communication patterns), but viewing all cultural variations through the lens of value frameworks is less common. Recent scholarship has pointed out existing gaps in intercultural communication theorizing promotes more nuanced views on popular topics like acculturation, identity, competence and reveals some initial forays into new and social media. For instance, Lim, Kim and Kim (2011) discuss Holism, a concept or a missing link in individualism collectivism research, which shed new light in understanding individualistic-collectivistic imperative.

This trend likely reflects the recent impact of critical studies on current intercultural communication research (Inuzuku 2013). There are still many descriptive studies but scholars are calling for more discussions of power relations, especially
in language and communication studies (Horan 2013; Lee, Han & Mckerrow 2010; Miles 2010). Critical theorizing addresses some of the same topics as social science and interpretive researchers, e.g. acculturation, and identity. However, while critical sensibilities are gaining in influence, an important challenge is how to understand and deconstruct power in intercultural encounters and not succumb to nihilism or abstract intellectual arguments that don’t reach beyond our academic journals or our conversations. As Jing Yin in Alexander et al. (2014a: 43) notes so aptly, “struggle over power and meaning should not end in the act of deconstructing the narratives that normalize the relations and rationalities that work against the interests of the marginalized ... [but] should be seen as a possibility for reconstructing alternative narratives, imaginaries, cultural spaces and identities”.

Second, our review also revealed a lack of interrogation of Western paradigmatic approaches to theorizing. While there are examples of scholarship that critique approaches to particular topics in current research, e.g., approaches to competence (Dasli 2012), the “culture of war research” (Kim 2012), and the 2014 Journal of International and Intercultural Communication issue that described issues and challenges in current intercultural communication scholarship (Alexander et al. 2014b), the critique of naive dialecticalism (Spencer-Rodgers, Williams & Peng 2012), a postcolonial critique of cultural intelligence and globalization (Dutta & Dutta 2013), there were few metatheoretical explorations; that is, there were few essays that questioned or critiqued the underlying assumptions of the current traditional (western) approaches and few that proposed alternative epistemologies. We strongly suggest that it is time to move beyond the Western tripartite paradigmatic frameworks, and the Western/nonwestern dichotomy to a more inclusive metatheoretical umbrella and to more exploration of alternative perspectives, e.g., to incorporate or highlight centric metatheoretical perspectives, and to apply more varied and diverse concepts to examine common communication issues in innovative ways of theorizing (Miike 2007).

Miike and Asante are two scholars who have proposed alternative paradigmatic perspectives – the Afrocentric and Asiacentric approaches (Asante & Miike 2013). For example, Miike (2017) comprehensively and persuasively argued that the praxis of centering paradigmatically legitimizes local histories, philosophies, religions, aesthetics and languages in representing local culture and phenomena in a non-ethnocentric and non-essentialist manner. Grounded in the principles of self-realization and self-determination, centering seeks to ethically contribute to cultural reaffirmation, renewal, reconstruction and re-humanization. In the recent past, several alternate philosophies and epistemologies emerge in the domain of culture and communication (Brummans & Hwang 2010), e.g., the “sarvodaya” (progress

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2 We should note that this chapter would cover more critical theories had we included in this review the culture and communication journals that focus exclusively on critical research e.g. Communication and Critical Cultural Studies.
for all) approach based on Gandhian philosophy, as well as alternate development approaches based on Buddhist philosophy, the African emancipatory philosophy of “ubuntu”, and the “maat” philosophy of Egypt for harmony, balance, order, justice, truth, righteousness, and reciprocity.

Dialogues and engaged interactions between West centric approaches and non-Western centric approaches might yield possibilities for bringing about social justice and equity. For instance, Rao (2010) suggests that we should reject the false dialectical opposition of the global-local, center-periphery, universality-particularism models as inadequate and rather proposes the notion of glocalization, citing Robertson (1995: 29) that “captures the dynamics of the local in the global and the global in the local”. The theory of glocalization sees global and local not as opposites, but rather as “mutually formative, complementary competitors, feeding off each other as they struggle for influence” (Kraidy 2003: 38). Rather than pitching global against the local, glocalization breaks down the “ontologically secure homes” of each and presents them as interconnected forces (Rao 2010: 5). Thus scholars are proposing a more inclusive and dialogic-dialectic approach of theorizing culture and communication matters.

Third, scholars further emphasize that intercultural communication research should examine topics that really matter to contemporary humans as the majority of people in this world live on less than $2.50/day, there are more displaced people in the world than at any other time in human history, and ethnic and religious conflicts threaten the stability of vast world regions. While some scholars address the issues of the underserved and emphasize theorizing communication matters emerging from and situated in marginalized spaces, e.g., M. J. Dutta’s (2008) culture-centered approach, and Orbe’s co-cultural communication theory described earlier, our analysis revealed that vast geographical regions of the globe remained understudied by intercultural communication scholars. More specifically, more than 60% of the global population lives in African, Latin American and Asian (except for East Asia) countries, and yet less than 10% of the articles we reviewed focused on those countries and populations. This can hardly be explained by the publication language and researcher affiliation alone (also see below). This lack of scholarly attention to studying economically, politically and geo-strategically less-powerful countries creates a knowledge gap or “silent zones” in intercultural communication research and calls us, as intercultural communication scholars, to study these regions and populations in order to enhance our knowledge and more effectively apply this knowledge to critically important global challenges. For example, U. Dutta’s recent research to studying underdevelopment and social disparity in South Asia region sought to foreground voices and issues of the underserved (Dutta 2015).

The larger question is, what should we as culture and communication scholars focus on in our research? A group of eminent (and diverse) scholars recently responded to this question in a multivocal conversation, suggesting the following:
giving voice to the marginalized, questioning the hegemony of English, the need for rethinking the concept of similarities/difference and redefining racial and ethnic identities (Alexander et al. 2014b). Other issues that are woefully unaddressed are socio-economic class and intercultural communication, preservation of co-cultural artifacts (especially those are on the brink of extinction) and endangered languages, religious and ethnic conflicts happening in various areas of the globe, and a lack of focus on inter religious interactions and challenges. Some scholars have accepted the challenge (see Broome 2013; Cheong & Poon 2009; Dutta & Dutta 2013).

Fourth, in recent years, scholars have suggested several innovative methodologies for advancing the discipline of critical intercultural research. Some of the prominent theoretical leads in this direction are critical race theories and decolonizing theories linked to indigenous methodologies, activism based methodologies, and performative methodologies (Willink et al. 2014). Learning about alternative epistemologies situated in local spaces such as local/indigenous wisdom, knowledge, and communication praxis are crucial in creating newer communication research-dialogues and knowledge production avenues.

Emergent global dynamics and advancement of communication technology lead contemporary scholars to conduct research to make the world a better place and communication for social change and information technology aided culture and communication research (see Dutta & Das 2015). Exploration of transdisciplinary avenues and dialogue with scholars and practitioners from other disciplines are crucial for enhancing the culture and communication scholarship. Explorations and collaborative researchers working in the domains of information sciences, communication technology, communication design, human dimensions of engineering and management could potentially yield new knowledge production avenues.

Critical communication scholars consistently question and challenge hegemony praxis, which creates disenfranchisement, displacement, as well as conditions of poverty, hunger and marginalization (Antony 2010), while constructing group boundaries. In order to create a better world, scholars emphasize meaningful communication praxis for creating avenues of social transformation; some of them are building community dialogue, creating avenues for foregrounding issues of the underserved in their own voice and propose horizontal methodology of authorship (Aldaya 2012; Daniel 2012). Empathetic knowledge production emphasizing projective empathy (imagining future communications), communicative ecology (based on equity, freedom, capabilities, sustainability), sharing (knowledge, space, wealth, power, responsibility), and localocentric innovation and creativity are instrumental in bringing about social change in the era of globalization.

For bringing about social justice, scholars argued in favor of a more engaged and reflexive research approach. Many critical scholars called for activism-oriented research, which emphasizes solidarity, reflection and commitment for creating openings for social change and addressing critical issues including environmental
inequity, climate change, global health disparity, and global sustainability – issues underlying some ostensibly intercultural issues. Such research essentially calls for searching alternate avenues and meanings of health, development, empowerment and social justice. Similarly, addressing the peace imperatives, scholars have noted that while conflict is inevitable, ethically engaging and harmony-yielding communicative praxis are instrumental in bringing about peace; they emphasized humaneness principles, rootedness and indebtedness, respect and care for promoting dialogue, peace and human rights and dignity, and preservation of cultural heritages, worldviews, home and communities (Miike 2017).

In search of newer theoretical and methodological approaches, we have seen many scholarly works that embraced autoethnography (Root et al. 2013) and creative non-fictions in the recent years. Increasing emphasis on visual and sensory methodologies (Pink 2009) aided intercultural communication scholars in discovering new grounds/avenues of engaged communication research. For instance, contemporary scholars are now proposing auto-videography (Chan & Ng 2013) for advancement of culture and communication research.

Finally, proliferation of new media and information technology (at large) prompts culture and communication scholars to examine phenomena in the emerging field of intercultural new media studies (INMS). One of the leading scholars in this field, Shuter (2012: 219) noted, “INMS investigates new digital theories of intercultural contact as well as refines and expands twentieth-century intercultural communication theories, examining their salience in a digital world”. INMS also opened up avenues for incorporation of multiple media and multimodal communicative possibilities (Pfister & Soliz 2011) including virtual and artificial intelligence enabled interactions. Scholars argued that such interactions and emergence of newer communicative accesses would bring about greater digital democracy/equity and thereby ensure more democratic participation and representations in new media spaces (Johnson & Callahan 2013).

Advancement of information and communication technology and increasing emphasis on participatory/community-centered research enabled culture and communication scholars to explore transdisciplinary research avenues such as mixed media and online/digital-based research. For instance, real-time creation and sharing of audio-visual information in online platforms by community members would be instrumental in foregrounding underserved voices in discursive spaces of decision making. Moreover, usage of newer techniques for pedagogical and communicative purposes also yielded new possibilities; utilization of video-games for teaching languages, and avatar mediated communication for virtual proxemics can be considered as some examples.
4 Conclusion

While intercultural communication scholarship has contributed a great deal in understanding and facilitating encounters between people from different cultures, current global conditions compel us to explore more inclusive, equitable, and creative theorizing to meet the technological, immigration, peace, and demographic challenges facing humanity today, of which culture is but one element, yet it remains a consequential consideration to many.

5 References


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