Communication Among Cultures   
3/13/17

Culture encompasses almost all aspects of our daily lives, as well as influences how and with whom we communicate. This diversity of race, appearance, customs, beliefs and religious holdings can be found on SUNY New Paltz’s campus. Among these diversities, people enrich the area with their unique culture, physical expression and sexual identities. People in this area are not afraid to express their differences and defy stereotypes. Stereotypes are a generalization that can sometimes be useful, but more often than not, cause problems. While it may be calming to have an idea of other cultures live, it is important to remember that it is biased and not true for everyone. Identity on the other hand is how you choose to be seen, what and who you choose affiliate with. While ones identity may be greatly influenced by their culture, it is by no means a determining factor and can be altered.   
 Stereotypes should be rewritten to portray a more accurate and research-based concept of the culture we perceive. However, they’re biased and this is important to keep in mind as we all use stereotypes, good and bad, to help us navigate our communications. When speaking from individuals of different cultural settings I am more likely to speak similarly to them in the sense of using similar vocabulary, tone and concepts. Another example is when speaking with someone from a different religious background, I am more likely to be quiet and respectful. When you are around like minded people, it is more acceptable to be critical and question these beliefs.   
 It is pertinent to maintain an open-mind and control your emotions when our perceptions do not match the stereotypes. While we should not expect them to, it helps paint a picture of what to expect such as how people in Japan do not make eye contact. This could influence how we act so that we many not offend them. For example, if I am speaking with someone from a location I am not familiar with I am more likely to keep to myself and be conservative. Another example is when I traveled to Thailand. I did some research on their “ways” so that I may be sure to not insult them or have unrealistic expectations. However, I was sure to not apply those expectations when actually being confronted with someone unless they initiated it first. In Thailand, they bowed to say thank you and it was considered rude to not do so. Once someone did it to me and I returned it with positive feedback, I felt more confident in adapting to their culture. While this change of behavior may seem manipulative or unethical, it is called Communication Accommodation Theory in which people focus on the linguistic strategies to either increase or decrease communication. This is similar to intercultural adaption in which people temporarily adapt a culture or aspects of one into their preexisting one.   
 These ways of assimilation and assumption can create barriers in intercultural communication. Another barrier between cultures is demographic issues. Japan’s mountainous land have provided them a haven, safe from foreign influence for many years. This cannot be said for the refugees in the Middle East as of currently. They are seeking shelter and support as they are ripped from their homes and face many obstacles in their immigration. In addition, another problem that stems form that is risk management. Many countries, such as the United States, have difficulty taking in refugees for varying reasons such as economics, political and religious positions. We tend to filter people based on race, religion and other parts of their identity as we try to affiliate with groups ourselves, however in an attempt to understand, we forget that being a part of something is not who you are. I am aware how damaging it can be to each person involved in stereotyping as it sets an unrealistic perception as well as harms the victim’s self-esteem, self-concept and heightens the chances of insulting assumptions of intelligence, rituals and history.   
 Culture highly influences history in the same way history influences culture. Education is an effective solution to these barriers as it can end the cycle and can affect future outcomes considering history repeats. The more you know and understand a culture and their position, you can better attend to it and find peace. While it is important to educate, it is necessary to remember that history can put forth false concepts of individuals being that history is written in the perception of the writer, who more often is the “winner”. We must be careful declaring these memories as fact as this effects people’s cultural identity by increasing nationalism and possibly encouraging war. This can be seen time and time again throughout history.   
 When speaking in terms of war, a government may use a nation’s violent history to justify going to war. For instance, Japan has been motivated by their past inability to resist control by western powers in the mid 1800’s. In response, Japan immediately enacted comprehensive programs to minimize its relations with U.S. and European nations in hopes of national defense. This led to Japans unique and vibrant culture identity we associate it with today. Additionally, Japans inability to protect itself has forced it to reach out for support from its people to create a military that will not only protect its island and people, but also demand respect and a place on the world stage. At the end of World War II, their military efforts have been diminished, however, they have a strong sense of discipline and identity which allowed them to rebuild and create enriching programs by the 1980’s. While Japan is currently reluctant to engage in military action, however they remain an influential nation in world affairs. Knowing their history provides us with a deeper understanding of their people and their personal struggles. Another good example of how history incites war is in China.   
 China, feeling ashamed for being invaded by foreign powers, have led them to feel the need to redeem themselves. They wish to show that they have learned from this and have used their victimization to defend policies, promote nationalism, and are used as displays in multiple museums around China. This can also be seen in The US Early 1800’s. Manifest destiny was used to justify westward expansion in hopes to spread the “benefits” of democracy and freedom to the indigenous peoples inhabiting the region. This took away Native Americans’ freedoms, security and homes. This behavior is not acceptable and must be learned from so that we may not nearly destroy another culture again. The past gives incentive for the future and that is not to say the cycle cannot be broken, but that it must first be acknowledged. However, history influences our cultural identity by showing the path the nation took, who they affiliated with and what they accomplished. This history provides people with an identity that unifies them regardless of their backgrounds and differences.   
 With this in mind, there are core value and beliefs that will not be shaken. While these great nations use their values as foundations, the world as we know it is consistently changing. Nations seem to be maintaining their most valuable components of their culture while adapting to the new world and integrating it into their lives to enrich their current beliefs. In parts of the Middle East, the popular religious views are that of Islam. This has been tied to their cultural identity due to outside perceptions but has become more evident in the media today. Because of their beliefs, woman are not given the same rights or freedoms as men in their culture. In the feminist revolution that is growing across the world, this has often been a topic. However, it is their right to believe, dress and behave how they view is acceptable, despite outside influence. This goes to prove how even with the pressure of outside cultures, they can remain strong and sustain their unique culture. This can also be said for China. Although it has become an industrialized nation with large cities, China still holds tightly to its agricultural roots with their idea of a strict patriarchal family. They strongly believe in collectivism, placing the needs of their society over that of the individual. They also strongly value family and hierarchy. These ideologies aim to maintain a pure Chinese line. Because they prefer men to woman and restrict their amount of children, they have a complication in their population. This forces the Chinese to decide on whether to remain pure until their line runs out, or to procreate with people of diversity. Although it is not ideal, it may be their only option and in that sense, they will have difficulty sustaining their core value of genes. Lastly, Japanese culture has roots in an isolationist view of world involvement and because of this, although their borders are open to travel, they are less likely to be accepting of the integration of outsiders. They have a conformist and highly risk-avoidance culture, therefore change comes gradually. This has been a difficult transition for them as in order to be a respected nation in world trade and power, they had to put aside their isolationist views and be involved in the world market.   
 When a person enters into a conversation with a person from a different culture or background, they must be mindful of the differences between their culture and that of the person they are speaking to. It is in this sense that conversations may become delicate due to the fact that both will have a pre-existing concept of the other persons culture that may not be correct, and in some cases may be offensive. Stereotypes can help people filter out what they believe may not be resourceful for communicating with this person, but can also be stifling. It is important to be open-minded, think before you speak and respect others views.   
 Being consistently assumed to be something can take a toll and effect how you see yourself and influence future choices. Some negative stereotypes are that Native Americans are uncivilized. This comes from their different lifestyle choice as well as connection to the earth as they have been uprooted many times before. Another is that Russians are alcoholics due to the fact that they were in a long period of economic depression and vodka was cheap. People of Asian descent are said to be most intelligent, but this may be because they highly value education and less about their race. Lastly, Americans are said to be swimming in wealth. While some of the richest people in the world live in America, because of our individualistic culture and ways, many live below an average income lifestyle. When speaking with someone from a different culture, you should be mindful of what may offend them as well as be aware of their assumed knowledge of you. We should embrace diversity, use knowledge to encourage new perspectives, open mindedness, and an overall greater understanding of world.