inter-cultural communication
an Advanced Resource Book

Adrian Holliday, Martin Hyde and John Kullman

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Routledge Applied Linguistics is a series of comprehensive resource books, providing students and researchers with the support they need for advanced study in the core areas of English language and Applied Linguistics.

Each book in the series guides readers through three main sections, enabling them to explore and develop major themes within the discipline:

- Section A, Introduction, establishes the key terms and concepts, and extends readers' techniques of analysis through practical application.
- Section B, Extension, brings together influential articles, sets them in context, and discusses their contribution to the field.
- Section C, Exploration, builds on knowledge gained in the first two sections, setting thoughtful tasks around further illustrative material. This enables readers to engage more actively with the subject matter and encourages them to develop their own research responses.

Throughout the book, topics are revisited, extended, interwoven and deconstructed, with the reader's understanding strengthened by tasks and follow-up questions.
Intercultural Communication:

- introduces the key theories of intercultural communication
- explores ways in which people communicate within and across social groups
- is built around three themes – identity, otherization and representation – which are followed and developed over the book's three sections
- gathers together influential readings from key names in the discipline, including: James Paul Gee, James P. Lantolf, Les Black, Richard Dyer, Jacques Derrida and Alastair Pennycook.

Written by experienced teachers and researchers in the field, *Intercultural Communication* is an essential resource for students and researchers of English language and Applied Linguistics.

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Intercultural Communication

An Advanced Resource Book

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and John Kullman

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Series Editors' Preface

The Routledge Applied Linguistics Series provides a comprehensive guide to the key areas in the field of applied linguistics. Applied Linguistics is a rich, vibrant, diverse and essentially interdisciplinary field. It is now more important than ever that books in the field provide up-to-date maps of what is an ever-changing territory.

The books in this series are designed to give key insights into core areas of Applied Linguistics. The design of the books ensures, through key readings, that the history and development of a subject is recognized while, through key questions and tasks, integrating understandings of the topics, concepts and practices that make up its essentially interdisciplinary fabric. The pedagogic structure of each book ensures that readers are given opportunities to think, discuss, engage in tasks, draw on their own experience, reflect, research and to read and critically re-read key documents.

Each book has three main sections, each made up of approximately ten units.

A: An **Introduction** section, in which the key terms and concepts that map the field of the subject are introduced, including introductory activities and reflective tasks designed to establish key understandings, terminology, techniques of analysis and the skills appropriate to the theme and the discipline.

B: An **Extension** section, in which selected core readings are introduced (usually edited from the original) from key books and articles, together with annotations and commentary where appropriate. Each reading is introduced, annotated and commented on in the context of the whole book, and research/follow-up questions and tasks are added to enable fuller understanding of both theory and practice. In some cases, readings are short and synoptic and incorporated within a more general exposition.

C: An **Exploration** section, in which further samples and illustrative materials are provided with an emphasis, where appropriate, on more open-ended, student-centred activities and tasks designed to support readers and users in undertaking their own locally relevant research projects. Tasks are designed for work in groups or for individuals working on their own. They can be readily included in award courses in Applied Linguistics or as topics for personal study and research.

The books also contain a glossarial index, which provides a guide to the main terms used in the book, and a detailed, thematically organised further reading section which lays the ground for further work in the discipline. There are also extensive suggestions for further reading.

The target audience for the series is upper undergraduates and postgraduates on language, applied linguistics and communication studies programmes as well as teachers and researchers in professional development and distance learning programmes. High-quality applied research resources are also much needed for teachers of EFL/ESL and

foreign language students at higher education colleges and universities worldwide. The books in the Routledge Applied Linguistics Series are aimed at the individual reader, the student in a group, and at teachers building courses and seminar programmes.

We hope that the books in this series meet these needs and continue to provide support over many years.

The Editors

Professor Christopher N. Candlin and Professor Ronald Carter are the series editors. Both have extensive experience of publishing titles in the fields relevant to this series. Between them they have written and edited more than 100 books and 200 academic papers in the broad field of applied linguistics. Chris Candlin was president of AILA (International Association for Applied Linguistics) from 1997–2002 and Ron Carter is Chair of BAAL (British Association for Applied Linguistics) from 2003–2006.

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Acknowledgements

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How to use this book

The book is divided into three sections:

> Section A Introduction: Defining concepts, which aims to present concepts that will be the basis for study throughout the book
>
> Section B Extension, which will develop and continue to explore these concepts in dialogue with a series of readings
>
> Section C Exploration, which will realize the discussions of the first two parts within a series of research tasks, and which will establish a methodology for addressing intercultural communication.

Each section will also be divided into three themes.

> Theme 1 Identity deals with the way in which we all bring with us our own discourses and feelings of culture and negotiate these in communication.
>
> Theme 2 Otherization deals with a major hindrance to communication in the way in which we over-generalize, stereotype and reduce the people we communicate with to something different or less than they are.
>
> Theme 3 Representation looks at the way in which culture is communicated in society, through the media, professional discourses and everyday language. It focuses on how we need critically to recognize and address the ways in which these representations influence our own perceptions if we are to communicate effectively

It is a tenet of the book that the disciplines presented in Section A and applied to research tasks in Section C are usable in all intercultural communication contexts, and as it is argued that all communication is intercultural, that this book is ultimately about developing skilled communication strategies and principles in a globalizing world.

Examples that are drawn on and which are from the writers' own cultural milieux and experiences are thus simply catalysts for illustrating larger principles that readers are expected to apply and use in their own cultural milieux and contexts. Because the book is not based upon the principle that cultural differences exist as real and tangible entities, but are intersubjective and negotiated processes (admittedly affected by power structures) the book cannot attempt to be a manual of cultural differences and therefore does not aim to collect exotic examples of cultural behaviours. To do this would indeed be to enter into the process of otherization decried as a major problem in intercultural communication in the world today. The examples used are simply those that the authors

have felt sufficiently familiar with and confident enough to be able to describe and use to promote the readers' thoughts and sensibilities about their own communicative behaviour in the interactions, wherever these may be.

The use of examples in the book from, for example, the Middle East in Section A and from Britain and the Spanish-speaking world in Section C, is thus a consequence of the locatedness of the authors. It is expected that readers will be able to generalize out from these examples; and in Section C there is an invitation for readers to bring their own cultural milieux into research activities.

SECTION A
Introduction: Defining concepts

Each unit in Section A will comprise the presentation of an *experience* or situation in the form of an example, and a *deconstruction* of this example through which basic concepts will be introduced. By deconstruction we mean 'taking apart' to enable greater insight and analysis. This is an essential skill which will prepare readers to be able to look at their own interaction with others analytically and with fresh eyes in order to solve the puzzle of what is going on. It is particularly important, where we feel that much intercultural communication is marred by prejudice, to be able to take apart and undo this prejudice. The concepts introduced in Section A can then be responded to in the rest of the book. The emphasis is not only on people with different nationalities, but also with other senses of belonging, whether community, class, occupational, gender and so on. There will then be a final section in each unit which focuses on what is needed for successful communication. This will take the form of *disciplines* about what to be aware of in the process of intercultural communication, which will then be collected together at the end of each theme.

These disciplines will not be based on what a person from culture X is like and therefore how we should communicate with them. There is enough published along these lines, which we consider to be largely essentialist and reductive. By essentialist we mean presuming that there is a universal essence, homogeneity and unity in a particular culture. By reductive we mean reducing cultural behaviour down to a simple causal factor. The disciplines will thus be basic principles about understandings which need to be achieved in order to interact with different individuals in different contexts. This order of example, deconstruction, disciplines, binds the book together and our belief is that intercultural communication should grow from an understanding of people, culture and society generally. The deconstruction of the examples will attempt an understanding, and observations about communication will grow from them. Each unit will also finish with a task which will help you to link the examples and concepts it provides with your own experience.

The examples in each unit are reconstructed from actual experience. They have been edited, sometimes mixed together, the characters, genders, nationalities changed, with fictitious names and situations, so that no one can be recognized, and also to bring out the issues we have found important. The approach in this part of the book is therefore novelistic. The deconstruction of what happens in each example is subjective. We do not however feel that the subjectivity is problematic. As in more formal qualitative research, each instance speaks for itself, its value being in the resonance or dissonance each example creates – in the degree to which the reader can say 'This makes sense to me; I can recognize this type of thing from my own experience', or 'This makes no sense; I need to think about this more'.

The examples are all about particular people in particular situations. They have been taken from a range of nationalities and social groupings. However, really, it does not matter which nationality or group they come from, as the aim is not to describe what someone from a particular culture is like and then suggest how to communicate with them. Each example shows one or two people struggling with their differences, perceived or real, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing, sometimes understanding, sometimes falling into an essentialist trap. If the balance is more on the side of people failing, followed with discussion on how they went wrong, this is because in the majority of

cases we do indeed get things seriously wrong, and this is something which needs to be dealt with. It needs to be realized that the reason for failure is essentialism.

Section A introduces a non-essentialist view of culture which is then followed up in the rest of the book. It focuses on the complexity of culture as a fluid, creative social force which binds different groupings and aspects of behaviour in different ways, both constructing and constructed by people in a piecemeal fashion to produce myriad combinations and configurations.

The difference between 'non-essentialism' and 'essentialism', which are terms used by social scientists in their discussion about the nature of culture (e.g. Keesing 1994), is described in Table 1. We realize that this, like all other dichotomies, is harsh and ignorant of the fact that in reality views range between the two extremes. Nevertheless, essentialism in the way we see people and culture is the same essentialism which drives sexism and racism. The equivalent condition, culturism, similarly reduces and otherizes the individual and underlies many of the problems in the world today. By otherization we mean imagining someone as alien and different to 'us' in such a way that 'they' are excluded from 'our' 'normal', 'superior' and 'civilized' group. Indeed, it is by imagining a foreign Other in this way that 'our' group can become more confident and exclusive. Essentialism therefore needs to be defined strongly, recognized and fought against wherever it is found. This particular definition of essentialism might be different to that of others. As with racism and sexism, the concept needs to be discussed and continuously revisited.

It is perhaps noticeable that the entries on the right-hand side of the table (for non-essentialism) represent more complex and perhaps obscure ideas than those on the left-hand side. In this sense, essentialism is the 'easy' answer for culture, which has become popular, usable and marketable in, for example, management studies and foreign language education where people are looking for simple formulae for communicating with clients, students and colleagues from 'other places and backgrounds'. For this reason, the tone of this book is to go against these 'easy' answers, to struggle with dominant discourses and to problematize what is normally thought.

The final row in the table addresses the final question posed by this book, developing strategies for intercultural communication. Again, whereas the essentialist side provides an answer, the non-essentialist side poses more of a problem which is complex and requires an understanding of things which are not at all clear and different to what we imagine. Thus, the angle on communication within the theme of *identity* will be how identity is constructed and how individuals define their own identities. Within the theme of *otherization*, the focus will be how to avoid the trap of over-generalization and reduction when describing and interacting with others. Within the theme of *representation* the emphasis will be on deconstructing the imposed images of people from the media and popular discourse.

The purpose of this book is to engage in a dialogue with the reader. We do not believe there is only one route to achieving successful intercultural communication. You will therefore encounter different perspectives, possibly contradictory, within the book.

Table 1 Essentialism vs. non-essentialism

	Essentialist view of culture	How people talk about it	Non-essentialist view of culture	How people talk about it
Nature	i 'A culture' has a physical entity, as though it is a place, which people can visit. It is homogeneous in that perceived traits are spread evenly, giving the sense of a simple society.	'I visited three cultures while on holiday. They were Spain, Morocco and Tunisia.'	ii Culture is a social force which is evident where it is significant. Society is complex, with characteristics which are difficult to pin down.	'There was something culturally different about each of the countries I visited.'
Place	iii It is associated with a country and a language, which has an onion-skin relationship with larger continental, religious, ethnic or racial cultures, and smaller subcultures.	'Japanese culture', 'European culture', 'Hindu culture', 'Black culture', 'Japanese secondary school culture.'	iv It is associated with a value, and can relate equally to any type or size of group for any period of time, and can be characterized by a discourse as much as by a language.	'There is a more homogeneous culture of food in Japan than in Britain.' 'Schools in Britain have a more evident culture of sport than schools in Japan.'
Relation	v The world is divided into mutually exclusive national cultures. People in one culture are essentially different from people in another.	'When crossing from Japanese culture to Chinese culture . . .'; 'People from Egypt cannot . . . when they arrive in French culture.'	vi Cultures can flow, change, intermingle, cut across and through one another, regardless of nationalfrontiers, and have blurred boundaries.	'There is more of a culture of . . . in China than in India', 'Schools throughout the world have a lot of cultural similarities.'
Membership	vii People belong exclusively to one national culture and one language.	'No matter how long she lives in Italy, she belongs to Austrian culture', 'Which culture do you originally come from?' 'One can never totally learn a second culture.'	viii People can belong to and move through a complex multiplicity of cultures both within and across societies.	'I feel most British when I travel abroad to places where that is meaningful. A sense of Iranian culture from my family and upbringing comes into play when I listen to Iranian music, speak the

Behaviour	ix 'A culture' behaves like a single-minded person with a specific, exclusive personality. People's behaviour is defined and constrained by the culture *in* which they live.	German culture believes that . . .', 'In Middle Eastern culture there is no concept of . . .'; In Chinese culture, people . . .'; 'She belongs to Norwegian culture, therefore she . . .'	x People are influenced by or make use of a multiplicity of cultural forms.	language and think of global politics. At the moment the strongest cultural force in my life comes from the international women's group to which I belong, through conferences, journals and email contact. These are the people to whom I feel culturally closest. The people I find most culturally strange are my children's friends and the village where I was a child. My Iranian-ness enriches my perceptions of and participation in British society, and vice versa.'
Communication	xi To communicate with someone who is foreign or different we must first understand the details or stereotype of their culture.	'When you want to greet a Swedish business man, you need to know that in Swedish culture . . .'	xii To communicate with anyone who belongs to a group with whom we are unfamiliar, we have to understand the complexity of who she is.	'What you have to understand about her is that she does not conform to the stereotype of Middle Eastern women that we see in the media, which she considers false and ignorant. In reality she is different to what we expected.'

Theme 1
Identity

This theme will explore how people construct their own identities.

PEOPLE LIKE ME
'This is whom I want to be represented by'

Experience

This unit explores the complexity of people's cultural identity in terms of how they want to represent themselves. Consider Example A1.1.1.

Example A1.1.1   Being represented

Parisa had been coming to international conventions on food processing for several years. She had made several good friends, especially from among the Europeans; but there was a gnawing problem which always came back unresolved. She was the only person at the convention who came from Iran; and no matter how friendly and sincere, she knew that her European colleagues saw her in a particular way which just wasn't her at all. It was from their passing comments, their casual, unguarded turns of phrase, in which they seemed to show surprise when she was creative, assertive or articulate, as though she *ought* to be somehow unable to be good at all the things she did. One of her colleagues did not actually say 'Well done!' but certainly implied it in her tone of voice. She also felt isolated as the only person from her particular background at these conventions. There was nobody else to represent who she was. It also hurt her when someone said that she was 'Westernized' and 'not a real Iranian'. This seemed like a no-win situation. If her behaviour was 'recognized', she was not real; and if she was considered 'real', she wasn't supposed to behave like that.

Then something happened which both confirmed her fears and gave her support. She invited three of her colleagues to see one of the films which was showing as part of a festival of Iranian films at the local university. They came willingly – very interested – and then to another one. When she asked one of her colleagues what she found so fascinating, her colleague replied that she was particularly impressed by the female characters who portrayed such strong women. Indeed, one of them played a major executive role in a film crew. She hired and fired people and drove around in a jeep.

Her colleague said that she had no idea such women existed in Iran, and that she always thought Muslim women were supposed to be subservient. Parisa was also pleased because the women on the film were certainly 'real' Iranians in that they wore the hejab, and the woman who drove the jeep wore the black hejab and long coat that she imagined fitted the 'stereotype'.

Shortly after this, another Iranian arrived at the convention. Parisa was very pleased that he was educated, worldly, urbane, well-dressed and also extremely articulate. This was no more or less than *she* would expect of an Iranian man; but she was pleased because here was further evidence for her other colleagues of the sort of people she belonged to. Moreover, it was very clear that he had tremendous respect for her as an equal, an academic and a professional. Parisa wondered though if they considered *him* a 'real Iranian'. After all, he wore a tie and didn't have a beard.

Deconstruction

Apart from the problem of being stereotyped and otherized, perhaps on the basis of the popular media images, which may depict Muslim women as lacking in power, Parisa's predicament in Example A.1.1.1 is that she lacks other images on the basis of which the people around her can judge who she is. Although her colleagues have got to know her and see her as their friend, they lack real knowledge of what sort of group she belongs to in order to place her. In this sense, they are also in a predicament, and indeed vulnerable to the stereotypes with which they are presented from other sources. Two concepts which need to be focused on are:

■ the multi-facetedness of Other people and societies
■ the way people talk.

Multi-facetedness

At one level one might say that Parisa wants to be associated with a certain type of Iranian person – educated, worldly, a working woman in the same way as her new male colleague is a working man – which she does not perceive as conforming to the popular stereotype. However, at another level it is more complex than this. Her society, like all others, is complex and multi-faceted, and in order for anyone to show who they really are, this complexity has to be visible. The Iranian films that her friends saw show this complexity, as often art forms are able to do more than any other media form. The woman, covered in black Muslim clothes, driving a jeep, being her own person, educated and a working woman, yet looking like all other women, hiring and firing extras for the film she is involved in making, begins successfully to show the layers and depths of a complex society in which identity is multi-faceted and shifting.

Another element in Parisa's quest to be recognized is her desire to be associated with other people. Again, at one level she wants to be associated with people like her in that they are middle class and so on, but at a deeper level, they should represent the same many-faceted complexity that she sees in herself. Thus, the new male colleague is also

different to what she imagines her other colleagues would expect – not conforming to the stereotype, while at the same time being what 'she would expect of an Iranian man' in his civility, good manners, worldliness, and, moreover, respect towards her and the qualities she wishes to be noticed for by others.

The way in which these elements contribute to a person's recognition of where she comes from is depicted in Figure 1. As well as evidence of complexity, layers and facets, there is the unexpected juxtaposed with what is expected. The unexpected is inevitable where any society must always be far more than any outsider can imagine.
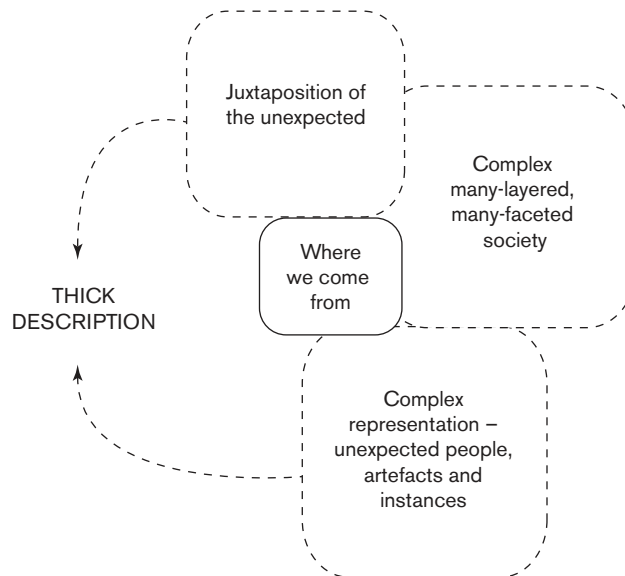
Figure 1 Elements of where we come from

The principle of discovery is also implicit in *thick description* – seeing the complexity of a social event by looking at it from different aspects. The figure shows that the knowledge derived from understanding the juxtaposition of unexpectedness (e.g. the woman in the film), complexity (e.g. the layers in the film), and encounters with people, artefacts and instances (e.g. Parisa's new colleague, the film, how the new colleague treats Parisa) results in thick description. Thick description as a term comes from anthropology and qualitative research and involves two elements:

■ deriving meaning from a broad view of social phenomena which pieces together different, interconnected perspectives
■ exploration, in which sense is made from an ongoing emergence of social phenomena, which may not immediately seem to connect, and which may indeed be unexpected.

One possible explanation of Example A1.1.1 is that something which troubles Parisa is the knowledge that her colleagues feel she is not a 'real' Iranian because she appears 'Westernized'. She also suspects that her new compatriot colleague will also be seen as

not being 'real'. The fact that her colleagues consider her Westernized is more to do with their essentialist view of culture and the way in which they construct her particular 'national culture'. Because they see it as essentially different (Table 1 cell v) from their own 'Western' culture they cannot imagine that it would share features which they consider essentially Western. There is also a marked 'us'–'them' attitude. Hence, if Parisa in any way behaves like 'us', she must have become like 'us' and left the essentialist attributes of 'them' behind. The non-essentialist view has no difficulty with the notion that cultural attributes can flow between societies (Table 1 cell vi). Parisa desperately needs her colleagues to understand that her society is sufficiently complex and big to include the cultural attributes which they *consider* Western, but which are in fact normal for many people who come from Iran.

The way people talk

At a deeper level than these issues is what Parisa gleans from 'passing comments, their casual, unguarded turns of phrase, in which they seemed to show surprise when she was creative, assertive or articulate' – 'no matter how friendly and sincere' her European colleagues seemed. There are several possibilities here.

1. The thinking implicit in these comments is essentialist. Once again, there is the belief that the behavioural traits belonging to 'that' culture must be all packaged in the same stereotypical personality (Table 1 cell ix). Hence, if Muslim women are 'subservient', they cannot be 'creative, assertive or articulate'.
2. This thinking is deep in everyday discourse; and people are probably unaware of it.
3. They do not see it as derogatory.

In all three cases the passing comments are in conflict, in Parisa's view, with apparent friendliness. The possibility of 1 is especially worrying because it implies a deep-seated essentialism in people's attitudes and socialization – an issue which will be taken up in Theme 2 Otherization. If 3 is the case, her colleagues are in effect being profoundly patronizing in that they assume they think it appropriate to comment on, perhaps praising, unexpected 'achievement' for someone from 'her culture' – rather as they would a child who achieves above their years – 'well done!'

Communication

Especially considering the above points about the way people talk, there are important considerations in this unit with regard to communication. We have seen how Parisa herself feels, not only about direct communication but also about asides and tones of voice. Parisa *may* be more sensitive than many, but this one instance – as in the case of any qualitative analysis – illuminates a particular predicament which makes one see intercultural communication in a certain way. It becomes clear that for Parisa's colleagues to communicate with her effectively they do not need information about her presumed national culture. This would be prescriptive and indeed essentialist in that it

would tend to define the person before understanding the person. Rather than being a matter of prescribed information, the non-essentialist strategy is a moral one to do with how we approach and learn about a person as a human being (Table 1 cell xii). There are several disciplines that might be observed here.

1. Respond to people according to how you find them rather than according to what you have heard about them.
2. Avoid easy answers about how people are. Bracket – put aside simplistic notions about what is 'real' or 'unreal' in your perception of 'another culture'.
3. Appreciate that every society is as complex and culturally varied as your own.
4. Learn to build up thick descriptions of what happens between you and others – to work out how to communicate as you go along.

★ Task A1.1.1   Thinking about Parisa

➤   Think of a situation you have been in that is like the Parisa example and describe it in similar detail.
➤   Explain how you can better understand one or more people in the situation with the help of Figure 1 and the disciplines listed above.
➤   What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?

UNIT A1.2   ARTEFACTS OF CULTURE
Telling cultural stories, closing ranks

Experience

This unit continues to unravel the complexities of cultural identity by looking at what might lie behind what people say about their culture.

Example A1.2.1   Chinese teachers

Janet is American and got to know Zhang and Ming, who are Chinese, when they were doing their master's course together. She found that Zhang talked a lot both in class and at other times about Confucianism and how it was the basis of Chinese culture. They soon got into an ongoing discussion about what teachers and students could be expected to do in his university English classes. He said that because of Confucianism, just as it was impolite for children to question their parents, it was impolite for students to question their teachers. This meant that all sorts of things which happened in classrooms in the West, like discovery learning and classroom discussions, were culturally inappropriate in China.

As the master's course progressed, Janet noticed that Zhang was getting increasingly unhappy. She asked Ming what Zhang's problem was. He explained that some people found it more difficult than others to cope with being in a foreign environment. She had noticed that Zhang was very silent when there was a class discussion, and she asked Ming if this was to do with Confucianism. Ming said that this was certainly a factor; but when Janet told him what Zhang had told her about students having to obey their teachers in China, Ming said that this was not strictly true – that he knew lots of teachers who were prepared to be engaged in discussion by their students, that students were certainly not always prepared to submit to teachers who would not listen to them, and that in modern China many parents no longer held the sort of authority that Zhang was talking about. Janet told him that this shocked her because it was not just from Zhang that she had heard about this. There were so many books she had read about Chinese culture which reported how it was bound by Confucianism. There were also two other people on the course who said that all the Chinese people they had met said the same thing. Ming said that there were different ways of looking at this. On the one hand, it could not be denied that Confucianism had been a very powerful influence on Chinese society for thousands of years. On the other hand, not everyone had to be bound by this influence; and different people could be influenced in different ways.

Janet then read an article which said that people in the developing world had tended to exaggerate their own cultural identity in order to counter the powerful influence of the West. She read Kubota (2002). When she put this idea to Ming he said that there was no need to read too much into Zhang's statements about Confucianism. He thought it was really far more simple than that. He had seen so many American people in China who had seemed far more 'American' than anyone he had seen here. Surely was it not the case that *all* people drew more heavily on certain cultural resources when they felt culturally threatened by strange behaviour. So does that mean that Confucianism is a 'cultural resource' she wondered.

Deconstruction

In this example we see an American teacher trying to make sense of conflicting messages about Chinese culture. The first impression that Zhang presents her with tends towards the essentialist view – that 'Chinese culture' is characterized by Confucianism, which in turn determines the behaviour of parents, children, teachers and students (Table 1 cell ix). The conflicting impression that Ming presents is more non-essentialist – that what Zhang says is not necessarily true, that the influence of Confucianism is far from straightforward. If we assume that Janet has read Unit A1.1 and learnt that the essentialist view denies the complexity of one's identity and society, Zhang's point of view becomes even more puzzling for her. What, therefore, are the reasons for Zhang's essentialist point of view? Ming and Janet herself have already gone some way in answering this question.

■ When people are in a difficult, strange environment, they can close ranks and exaggerate specific aspects of their cultural identity.

■ Different cultural resources can be drawn upon and invoked at different times depending on the circumstances.

In both cases, because of the strength of statement, there can be an *appearance* of essentialist national culture. We shall now look in more detail at these phenomena, and at a related third.

■ What people *say* about their cultural identity should be read as the image they wish to project at a particular time rather than as evidence of an essentialist national culture.

Closing ranks

The factor which Janet read about, reaction to a powerful cultural threat from the West, could certainly be a reason for closing ranks – though there could also be threats from other national, international or global quarters. In this case they could be invading a person's, or indeed a whole society's, home territory. There may indeed be a connection here with religious and ethnic fundamentalism. Difficult, strange environments are also encountered, as Ming states, when travelling to foreign places. Adrian Holliday remembers an example of this where otherwise left-wing, long-haired young Englishmen displayed a deep interest in British military music from the Coldstream Guards while living in Iran in the 1970s. An interesting inverse of this may be where people in strange environments also construct essentialist descriptions of 'local people'. British people in very diverse foreign locations commonly see the 'locals' as 'subservient, hierarchical, corrupt, inhibited by extended families and arranged marriages, lacking in individualism, unable to make decisions' and so on. Such descriptions are more likely to be British constructions of the opposite of what they consider themselves to be than grounded in the behaviour they observe around them.

The case of the Chinese people reported by both Zhang and Janet's British colleagues to be Confucian in all their actions, and that of the interest in military music for the young Englishmen abroad, may be a reaction to perceived Western pedagogies or at least 'modern' pedagogies which they find too difficult to deal with. This reminds one also of the observed behaviour of Japanese students in British classrooms. Their silence and apparent 'passivity' may be more a reaction to the, to them, strange classroom rules which confront them than an effect of cultural behaviour in Japan.

Cultural resources

Confucianism for the Chinese teachers thus becomes a convenient cultural resource around which to marshal their threatened identity (Table 1 cell x). As can be seen by the way in which the British abroad define the foreign Other as opposite to themselves, the particular resources which are chosen may well be the ones which are most opposite to the cultural features of the threat. There are also arguments that the very strong description of Japaneseness which has recently pervaded international commerce is actually a ploy to promote a marketable exoticness (e.g. Moeran 1996).
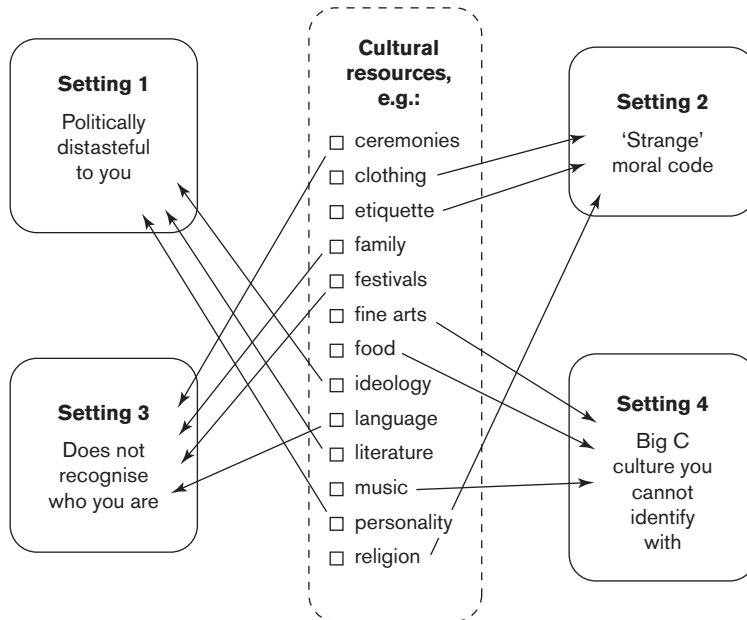
Figure 2 Making use of culture

Figure 2 is a rough attempt to show how different cultural resources can be used by a particular person in particular settings. By cultural resources we mean aspects of culture that exist in our society which we can draw on at different times and for different reasons. The central bubble lists quite randomly the sorts of things which *might* be resources. There could be many other things on the list. The surrounding bubbles are examples of cultural settings which are 'foreign' and present a particular threat in different ways. The arrows match resources to settings, showing that only some resources would be relevant to dealing with each setting. 'Particular' is the key word here because this is *by no means* a set of universals. Every person who reads this would use different resources to deal with each setting, and you might indeed find it fascinating to imagine how the arrows might link different resources to the settings if it were you. It is also important to note that you would appear quite culturally differently in each setting. If you used the resources in the same way as in the figure, in each setting your 'culture' may appear to be characterized by the following.

■ You find the politics of the society or social group in Setting 1 'distasteful'. You counter this by drawing on a particular aspect of personality, literature and ideology from your own society or group and present *your culture* as being left-wing activist.

■ You find the moral code in Setting 2 'strange'. You reassure yourself by drawing on religious beliefs, clothing and etiquette in your own society or social group and present *your culture* as a religious one with particular dress codes.

■ The people in Setting 3 do not understand who you are because they have no knowledge of where you come from. You strengthen your identity by drawing on ceremonies, festivals and family values in your society or social group and present these as the basis of *your culture*.

■　You cannot identify with the 'high culture' (arts etc) of Setting 4. You draw on the fine arts, 'cuisine' and music of your society or social group and present these as the defining ingredients of *your culture.*

One may think that the 'you' in each of these cases is being deceitful or duplicitous, playing with or selecting what they like from their culture in this way. This would be an essentialist view. The non-essentialist view would be that culture is a shifting reality anyway, and people make of it what they need to as live their identities in different circumstances. This view of culture as a shifting reality can be compared with Text B0.1.1 by Hannerz in **Unit B0.1**, where there is a reference to people being 'more or less Confucian', and to the multiplicity of cultural identity reported by Baumann in Text B0.1.2, also in **Unit B0.1**.

Artefacts of culture

There are dangers with the non-essentialist view just as there are with the essentialist view. It would be a grave mistake for the essentialist to think Ming was not a 'real' Chinese because he did not conform to the Confucian essence. In the same way it would also be a grave mistake to think that Zhang was not to be taken seriously because he was being 'naïve' about the role of Confucianism. Even though it might be the case that Zhang's statements about how Confucianism determines the behaviour of teachers and students might be considered essentialist, these statements are still extremely meaningful to him, just as the behaviour of all the people mentioned in this unit would be extremely real to them. In each case, these are constituents of how individuals need to work their own personal identities. If we as communicators are to take people from other backgrounds seriously, we should take every fact of what they do and say seriously. In this sense, every instance of behaviour becomes an artefact of who people are. Thus, what *can* be said about Zhang is that his discourse about Confucianism is part and parcel of his cultural identity. The *way* he talks about Confucianism is an artefact of what *he* believes about Confucianism; and this in itself may indeed be cultural. Indeed, if more and more Chinese were heard to talk about Confucianism in this way, one may conclude that there is a tendency for some Chinese to say that Confucianism influences every part of their lives. Table 2 demonstrates this. On the left, essentialist descriptions are based on prescription, while on the right, non-essentialist descriptions are very cautious and

Table 2　What people say

Essentialist description based on stereotypes	*Non-essentialist description based on observation*
In Chinese culture people's behaviour is determined by Confucianism.	Some Chinese feel it important to say that their behaviour is determined by Confucianism. Others say that this is an overgeneralization.
In Japanese culture students are silent and passive in the classroom.	Some Japanese prefer to remain silent when in British language classrooms.
In 1970s British culture young people liked military music.	Some young British people found military music comforting while living abroad.

qualified, based on no more than what can be observed. Indeed, the non-essentialist descriptions should also be *ephemeral* – that is, perhaps true at a particular time, but changing. For those British readers, the bottom left statement will show the ridiculousness of some essentialist comments; yet it would have been easy for Iranians to generalize thus when they saw the way two particular British people behaved while in their country.

Communication

The lessons to be learnt about communication from Example A1.2.1 build on those in the previous unit. Janet has indeed learnt some of the lessons from Unit A1.1 and listens carefully to Zhang and Ming and places what she learns against what she has heard from her own compatriots about things related to Confucianism – thus creating her own thick description. Taking a non-essentialist line, she sees Ming, despite his doubts about Confucianism, as just as 'real' a Chinese as Zhang. If she believes Ming's doubts about Confucianism, how should she therefore respond to Zhang? The answer may be that she should follow these disciplines, which follow on from the four disciplines listed on page 10.

5. While respecting whatever people say about their own culture, take what they say as evidence of what they wish to project rather than as information about where they come from.
6. Take what people say about their own culture as a personal observation which should not be generalized to other people who come from the same background.

Task A1.2.1   Thinking about Zhang and Ming

➤ Think of a situation you have been in that is like the Zhang and Ming example and describe it in similar detail.
➤ Explain how you can better understand one or more people in the situation with the help of the explanations in the Deconstruction section, Table 2 and the disciplines listed.
➤ Use Figure 2 and describe what sorts of cultural resources were being used by one of the participants and why.
➤ What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?

IDENTITY CARD
'I am who I can make myself and make others accept me to be'

Experience

This unit explores the principle that while one person may be exchanging information with another person, they are both, be it intentionally or unintentionally, also sending messages about their cultural identity – about how they want the other person to see them. The example is different to those in previous units in that it does not concern people from different societies. It is about people in the same society, but from very different cultural groups. This is to illustrate the non-essentialist point that cultural difference by no means has to be connected with national difference (Table 1 cells vi and viii). Also, by looking at a small, rather than a large culture, it is easier to see the details of cultural formation. See the discussion of small cultures in Holliday in Text B0.2.3, Unit B0.2, Section B. Consider the event given in Example A1.3.1.

> **Example A1.3.1   Girls on the bus**
>
> A public bus in south-east England was mainly occupied by school children returning home to the villages after attending school in the city. Several of the other passengers were annoyed by what they considered noisy bad language from some of the children. The most vociferous and extreme swearing was from a group of girls. The bus stopped and a further schoolgirl got on. She joined the group, one of whom shouted, 'Hello, you big fat tart', to which the new girl loudly retorted, 'Fuck off bitch'. This exchange seemed to serve as a greeting as the two did not appear in any way genuinely angry with each other. The volume of their utterances was also noticeably loud enough for all the bus occupants to hear – in other words, it was unnecessarily loud for communication to occur just between themselves. The first interactant then admired a new item of jewellery her friend had around her neck: 'Where did you get that, you dirty slag?' The friend answered: 'None of your business, you fucking nosy cow!'
>
> After this, the first interactant's attention became fixed upon a school boy, who was smaller than the girls, sitting several seats away. 'Darren! Oi, Darren! Fucking listen to me Darren! Are you a poof, Darren?' The girls laughed and the boy looked embarrassed and at a loss as to how to reply. 'No I'm not,' he finally protested, and looked out of the window, no doubt hoping the girls' attention would wander to someone else. Then another girl's voice: 'Darren, Michaela says you're a poof.' Darren's bus journey was going to be a longer one than he might have hoped!

There are a lot of terms you might not be familiar with in this example. See Task C1.4.2, in Unit C1.4.

Deconstruction

In this example we see a group of schoolgirls asserting their cultural identity to the outside world who are represented by the culturally different Other people on the bus, who are in turn shocked and perhaps disgusted by their explicit display. In many ways, the girls are doing the same as Parisa in Unit A1.1 and Zhang in Unit A1.2, but whereas they were pulling elements from their distant homes to reinforce identity in the face of strangers, these girls are on their home ground and we see the details of actual cultural formation – still, though, in the face of strangers. There are several related concepts at work:

■ the multiplicity of identities
■ the creation of an identity card
■ the marking out of territory.

Cultural identity and multiplicity

The two girls derive and achieve an identity by signalling belongingness to the particular culture of swearing girls on the bus. Belongingness among the members of any group partly involves the learning and use of particular discourses. It is a person's familiarity and ease of use of these discourses that demonstrates their membership of a particular group – that is, the cultural territory to which they stake a claim. In the case of Example A1.3.1, the discourse is one of swearing – the mastery of a complex code which only insiders can fully understand and which can be used to exclude outsiders. Thus, apparent insult is read as greeting or endearment between the initiated girls, but as real insult and exclusion when directed at the boy.

However, the two girls are not only members of the culture of swearing girls on the bus. As with Parisa, Zhang and Ming in Units A1.1 and A1.2, they belong to a complex society which allows a multiplicity of choices. They could also define themselves as members of an age group, a nationality, an ethnic group, a social class, a religion, a scout group, an aerobics class, a hockey team, a school class group. We are all, as individuals, members of a vast number of different cultural groups (Table 1 cell viii), and hence have a multiplicity of identities. Adrian Holliday notes that he has an identity as a member of his family, part of which (through his wife) is Iranian, the university where he did his graduate studies, a professional group, part of which (through Applied Linguistics) is international, a university department, a local community of artists, and so on, besides being a member of a particular nation, which at the moment is moving between 'British' and 'English'. With each identity he has a certain communal bond with a group of other people: we are linked through a common experience, we have our icons, our ideologies and our communal history to draw on, and we encapsulate all of this in our discourses. Because all of us inhabit different cultural groups, we are in fact all unique in our cultural identities.

Identity card

There is also a very strong sense of cultural assertion in Example A1.3.1: '*This* is how we *are!* We use bad language; we shock; we make boys feel uncomfortable; we don't care about annoying people around us.' And in the paragraph above we use the term 'define themselves' rather than simply 'are'. The two girls are not simply *being* members of a culture; they are *doing* the culture in order to *communicate* something to the people around them. In this sense, they are *playing* a particular identity card.

In a way they are playing with the cultural stereotypes expected by other members of their society. Swearing is often considered a territory occupied only by males displaying their toughness. Indeed it would seem that girls have invaded this traditional male territory and taken it over. They have also invaded the misogynistic male lexicon of derogatory terms for women: 'slag', 'bitch', 'tart', 'cow'. They thus subvert the potentially wounding power of these terms, neutralize them by their frequency of use, and convert them into the normal phatic functions of greeting and 'small talk'. And in so doing, they increase the shock effect by voicing yet twisting what the audience of bus passengers may consider taboo. On the other hand, these terms have become very much the domain of women generally in their in-talk, whereas outsider men will use them at their risk.

The girls are very vocal and thus also occupy the acoustic space of the bus: the old notions of men not swearing in the presence of the 'weaker' and 'daintier' sex are completely challenged – indeed inverted – here. This incident would seem to have a lot to do with the notion of 'girl power'. Further attack is made upon maleness by the bullying of the boy and the questioning of his sexuality. Again the weapons of reductionist and derogatory sexual labelling are used by the girls on the boy rather than vice versa.

Although we are not fully in control of the resources that make up our identity, and we cannot choose our ethnicity, sex and so on, we can decide how to play the hand of cards that we have been dealt. We can work with the discourses available to us according to how we wish others to see us and how we wish to influence others' perceptions of the hand of cards we have been dealt. Indeed, through such discourse action over time these very cards can become viewed in different ways. This is true, for example, of how women have changed the way femininity is constructed and perceived over the last century, or of how anti-slavery discourses in the early 19th century changed the way that Black Africans were perceived in British society. Identity is therefore not in essence a stable concept, but one that is achieved through the skilled manipulation of discourses in society.

Territory

By being creative with the act of swearing, the girls are in effect marking a powerful new territory – an identity terrain which they occupy in their struggle for presentation of self against the identities that are imposed upon them by others. This territory is fought over and at times conceded during interactions. In the case of Example A1.3.1, the act of swearing becomes a critical marker of this territory.
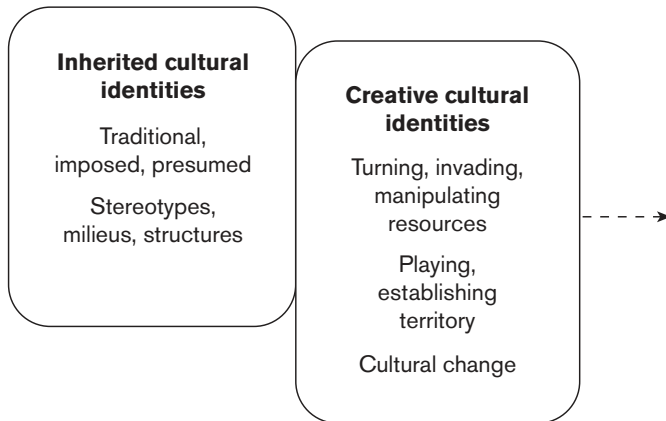
Figure 3 Two sides to identity

Figure 3 shows two sides to cultural identity. The left-hand bubble represents a state of affairs which, though imposed by the way in which society defines us – and indeed other societies define us, in the case of national cultural perceptions – can be seen as the resources of the material that we have to work with. In the case of the girls on the bus, these might comprise 'traditional' notions that girls do not swear, but are sworn at. The right-hand bubble signifies a dynamic movement away from this establishment, in which, through playing with the resources, individuals or groups can create new identities and, indeed, create culture change. Although a similar process, this is subtly different to what can be seen in Unit A1.2, as represented in Figure 2. There, cultural resources are used ephemerally to defend identity; here they are used to create the fabric of identity.

Communication

Being sensitive to and understanding others' cultural productions and the way in which they play with the various identities available to them (discourses on their identities currently available in the context of their interactions) is a crucial part of good intercultural communication. A good interpersonal communicator, therefore, needs to be aware of issues surrounding the concept of identity. Before we can communicate with people who are different to ourselves, we need to understand something about how they present themselves as being or belonging to certain groups. This goes deeper than the observations about Zhang in Unit A1.2, where we note that one should respect what people say about themselves and see this as an artefact of who they are without over-generalizing. The creative element in Example A1.3.1 takes this further. Hence the first discipline for this unit must be that we should do the following (disciplines 1–4 appear on page 10, and 5–6 on page 15).

7. Understand how people are creating and indeed negotiating their cultural identity in the very process of communicating with us.

We need therefore to see communication with anyone as a dynamically creative process. Also, this surely teaches us something about ourselves, which should be evident from all the examples in this theme – that the whole thing is, of course, a two-way process, in that we should also do the following.

8. Appreciate that you are creating and negotiating your own cultural identity in the process of communicating with others.

Furthermore, as the process of communication is also personal – as all the examples in these units are to do with interaction between individuals – we should do the following.

9. Appreciate that the creation and negotiation of cultural and personal identity are the same thing.

★ Task A1.3.1 Thinking about the girls on the bus

➤ Think of a situation you have been in that is like the girls on the bus example and describe it in similar detail.
➤ Explain how you can better understand one or more people in the situation with the help of Figure 3 and the disciplines outlined.
➤ What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?

Theme 2
Otherization

This theme will explore a major inhibition to communication by looking at how, so easily, we can construct and reduce people to be less than what they are. Continuing from Units A1.1, A1.2 and A1.3 within the Identity theme, the angle on communication will be how we must discipline our own perceptions if we are to communicate successfully. However, Units A2.1, A2.2 and A2.3 will look more deeply at the forces that prevent us all from seeing people as they really are. The weight of responsibility is on 'us' to understand ourselves, rather than on essentialist categories of 'them'.

COMMUNICATION IS ABOUT NOT PRESUMING
Falling into culturist traps

UNIT A2.1

Experience

Continuing to follow the principle that we should try to understand people before we can communicate with them, in this unit we explore how easy it is to be misled by our own preconceptions and to fall into the trap of otherization. As with Unit A1.3, we use an example from within our own society to demonstrate how the tendency to reduce the foreign Other is deep within the roots of society generally. We hope therefore to show how even easier it is to misconstruct people from other societies. Consider the experience given in Example A2.1.1.

Example A2.1.1 The Smith family

A while ago John had neighbours, the Smiths, who belonged to a Christian sect related to the Amish. John and his family took this as a matter of fact because Mr Smith told them so several weeks after moving in during a residents' meeting. However, from the very first John's family saw of them they had suspected something of the sort. There were six children. The girls and Mrs Smith were dressed in long dresses with aprons, which came down to their mid-calf, and wore headscarves over long hair. The boys had long shorts with braces [US, suspenders], which also came down to mid-calf. Mr Smith was clean-shaven, except for a beard around his chin. As they were moving in John and his family could see that their furniture was like old-fashioned wooden school furniture; and they didn't seem to have a television, stereo or video. There was, however, a piano

and John could hear them making their own music for entertainment in the evenings. They were also American.

Several events took place after the family moved in which began to reveal the way in which John was thinking about them.

One afternoon, John was in his garage pottering about when Mr Smith came out and got into his large people carrier. He guessed he was waiting for the rest of his family before going out with them. He really was amazed when Mr Smith turned on the car's CD player and listened to music. He had thought that because the Smiths didn't have a television or stereo in the house their religion forbade them from listening to such things.

It was the time when the whole country seemed involved in the events surrounding Princess Diana's death. Mr Smith's American parents were staying with them and his wife had encountered his mother in the driveway. Mrs Smith senior told her that because there was no television or radio in her son's home, and no one was allowed to read newspapers, it was difficult for her and her husband to find out what was going on, and they felt they were missing a critical aspect of being in England. Despite the incident with the car stereo, this confirmed to John that the Smith family were indeed fundamentalists, and that he had been right all along about how they abstained from modernity. He was therefore shocked and indeed concerned that it would be an inconsiderate invasion of their religious *culture* when his wife suggested inviting Mr and Mrs Smith senior, and indeed the whole Smith family, in to watch Diana's funeral on the television. John really felt that this invitation would put the whole family in a very difficult position. It would be like inviting Muslims to eat pork. His wife said that it would be impolite to invite Mr and Mrs Smith senior alone, and that anyway they all had the choice to refuse.

John was amazed again when the whole Smith family accepted the invitation and all ten of them came into their living room, the children sitting on the floor, to watch the whole funeral. He was even more amazed when Mrs Smith later wrote his wife a note to say that they had all really appreciated the opportunity.

Deconstruction

This example shows John reducing his neighbour according to a prescribed stereotype – very much as Parisa's colleagues reduced her to a stereotype in Unit A1.1. What makes this particularly significant is that it is so easy to fall into traps like this. It is therefore extremely important to deconstruct exactly how this can happen.

It seems clear from Example A2.1.1 that John had made a mistake both about the nature of the Smith family and about how to communicate with them, whereas his wife had been successful at least to the extent of achieving significant interaction that seemed to be appreciated by both sides. In an attempt to explain why this happened we are going to explore the four interconnected concepts, some of which will be familiar, some less so, and link them with the concept of essentialism introduced in Units A1.1, A1.2 and A1.3:

■ stereotype
■ prejudice

- otherization
- culturism.

From stereotype to otherization

John had formed a *stereotype* based on his observation of wooden furniture, abstention from exposure to the media, austere clothing, a large family, Mr Smith's chin beard, Mrs Smith's and the daughters' long hair, put together with the popular image of the Amish presented in the Hollywood movie, *Witness*. Many argue that it is natural to form stereotypes and that they indeed help us to understand 'foreign cultures' – that they act as a template, or as an ideal type, against which we can measure the unknown. We disagree with this view. One reason is that we do not behave sufficiently rationally in intercultural dealings to be able to work objectively with such templates. A major reason for this is that stereotypes are often infected by *prejudice*, which in turn leads to *otherization*. This process is summarized in the top half of Figure 4. We have chosen the words for the bubbles in the figure carefully because this is a complex, dangerous area.

The 'foreign Other' (bubbles A and C) refers not only to different nationalities, but also to any group of people *perceived* as different – perhaps in terms of so-called ethnicity, religion, political alignment, class or caste, or gender. This is 'so-called' ethnicity because the term is particularly relative and disputed (e.g. Baumann 1996 in Unit B0.1). We also do not list culture because all the other things listed can be said to have cultures or to be cultural. Interest (bubble B) could similarly be ethnic, religious, political, class or caste, or gender. This would colour, bias or infect the way in which the foreign Other is seen. Emergent evidence (bubble B) would be based on what can be learned on the basis of deeper understanding. This is clearly very difficult to achieve, as interest of one sort or another is always with us. Attempts are made in various types of social science. Reduction (bubble C) is where the different facets, the variety of possible characteristics and the full complexity of a group of people are ignored in favour of a preferred definition. In our view, as the figure implies, stereotyping, prejudice and otherization interact with each other; however, it is the negative impact of the latter which makes the other two undesirable.

A basic feature of this process is the way in which information is brought from outside the situation, a priori. The reference to the movie, *Witness* (above), shows that it was images that John already had about Amish people that gave rise to his stereotype of his neighbours. (We shall explore the influence of such social representation in more detail in Theme 3.) If he had simply observed what he saw and heard of them in situ, without these prior images, he would have had a far more complex picture of them. To compound this, were his a priori negative feelings about so-called 'fundamentalist' Christians – his prejudices – so that his final otherization of his neighbours reduced them to people who would *never* watch television, would *always* think it evil and, by extension, would not *appreciate* the complexities of such *modern* phenomena as Diana's funeral. One may think, so what? Amish people *are* strange and odd, and restrict their behaviour and opt out of 'normal' life. The point is that John judged his neighbours, and categorized them, and decided what they would and would not be *before* really investigating who they were as individuals.
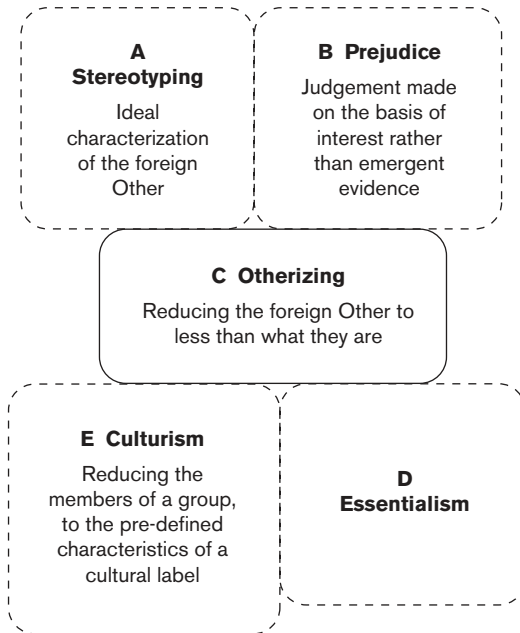
Figure 4 Constituents of otherization

Culturism

The lower half of Figure 4 reveals another aspect of otherization, which addresses the issue of culture. Following our comment regarding bubbles A and C (23), the groups of people who we characterize as the 'foreign Other' can be said to share between them something cultural. The problem is that 'we' can very easily take this too far and allow the notion of 'culture' to become greater than the people themselves. Just as we too easily form stereotypes which can pre-define what people are like, we can *imagine* or *reify* 'cultures' as objects, places and physical entities within which and by which people live (Table 1 cell i). By reification we mean to imagine something to be real when it is not. Hence, essentialism is born (bubble D). Therefore, in Example A2.1.1:

■ John saw the Amish as a religious culture characterized by the stereotypical traits of austere appearance, disdain for modernity and so on, which would govern the behaviour of the Smith family. He thus saw them through the filter of 'in Amish culture. . . .' (Table 1 cell ix)

From essentialism there is just a small step to *culturism* (bubble E). This is similarly constructed to racism or sexism in that the imagined characteristics of the 'culture' (or 'women' or 'Asians') are used to define the person. Thus:

■ whatever Mrs Smith did, John *explained* it as being Amish. And if she did something which did not fit the explanation, it was that she had somehow lost her culture, was no longer, or 'not really' Amish, or had been 'secularized'.

Again, the reader might think this argument inconsequential, because 'everyone knows' that the Amish 'are in fact like that'. Nevertheless, if one applied the same culturist rule to women, we would get:

■ whatever Mrs Smith did, John *explained* it as being due to her being a woman. And if she did something which did not fit the explanation, it was that she had lost her femininity.

Communication

The disciplines for intercultural communication arising from this unit carry the same basic message as those in Unites A1.1, A1.2 and A1.3, except that here they can draw attention to the factors which help *prevent* us from misinterpreting other people's realities. In the light of the experience of this unit, we must therefore do the following (disciplines 1–4 appear on page 10, 5–6 on page 15 and 7–9 on pages 19–20).

10. Avoid falling into the culturist trap of reducing people to less than they are – in the same way as we must avoid racist and sexist traps.

Task A2.1.1   Thinking about the Smiths

➤ Think of a situation you have been in that is like the Smiths example and describe it in similar detail.
➤ Pinpoint where the elements of otherization depicted in Figure 4 show themselves in the situation, and list the perpetrators and victims.
➤ What can you learn from this about intercultural communication? How might you go about conforming to the discipline described?

CULTURAL DEALING
What we project onto each other

UNIT A2.2

Experience

This unit looks at the problem of otherization on a macro scale when two communities of people come together and behave according to their images of each other. Consider this example (first used in Holliday 2002):

Example A2.2.1   Tourists and business

Agnes has joined a tour group which is travelling through North Africa visiting archaeological sites. The group is made up of German, Italian, French, Swedish and

British tourists. They stay in a small hotel near one particular site for three days. It is 30 kilometres from the nearest town, but there is a village nearby. The villagers work in the hotel and have also set up a string of small shops in which they sell local handicrafts and souvenirs.

Agnes forms a brief relationship with François. She is really amazed at herself for succumbing to his charms. She thinks it is, after all, such a cliché. She has of course seen the film *Shirley Valentine*, in which a middle-aged Englishwoman falls in love with a local restaurant owner while on holiday on a Greek island. She has never had such a casual relationship before; but her marriage is struggling and she has come away to escape. She is also sure that François, who seems a real gigolo, does this sort of thing with every European woman who comes along.

François is amazed at himself for getting involved like this. He is unmarried and has never had an affair with a woman before. He is engaged to be married, and has a high sense of personal morality. Indeed, he will not have had sex with his fiancée, and his relationship with her will have been carefully chaperoned. He has actually fallen in love with Agnes, but is at the same time smitten by remorse because he is being unfaithful to his fiancée, whom he also loves deeply. After a very short time he becomes horrified at Agnes's behaviour. She suddenly 'throws herself at him' and is readily prepared to have sex. It must after all be true what everyone says about European women – that they are loose, have no morals and will have sex with anyone.

They part in anger. She goes back to her fellow travellers and indulges more than ever in the stories of how North African men swindle tourists and mistreat their women. He goes back to his village and indulges more than ever in the stories of the corrupt West.

Deconstruction

Here we can see François and Agnes getting into a very difficult relationship made more so by a complexity of personal and cultural complications. Basic concepts here are as follows.

- When people from different backgrounds meet, a middle culture of dealing is set up within which they interact, which in turn is influenced by respective complexes of cultural baggage.
- What people see of each other is influenced by the middle culture of dealing, which may be very different to what they think they see which is a product of otherization.

Middle cultures of dealing

Figure 5 can be interpreted not in the essentialist terms of 'European culture' and 'North African culture' (Table 1 cell iii), but in terms of a far more complicated mélange of interacting and overlapping cultural entities (Table 1 cell vi). This is demonstrated in Figure 5. Bubbles B and D represent the small cultures of the tourists and of the villagers *while* they are trading with the tourists. These are the cultures which initially come into

A Multiplicity of related
background influences: being
European, Western, British, German,
etc.; age, class, education, cultural
interest, etc.

• Projecting and
  otherizing
• Intercompetence

B Tourist
culture

C CULTURE OF
DEALING

D Trading-with-
tourists culture

E Multiplicity of related background
influences: village, being North
African, family, religion, education,
class, age, peers, business, etc.

Figure 5 Culture of dealing

contact with each other and which act as the primary source of information for each group. The broader cultural influences of being European or villagers and so on are in the background in bubbles A and E. What exactly these influences, as cultural resources, might be will also depend on the specific circumstances (Unit A1.2 Figure 2). In this case, village and family might have a stronger impact on François because of their proximity, and being European on Agnes because of the group of people she is with as a tourist. The tourist culture and the trading-with-tourists culture (bubbles B and D) are more temporary and yet specific to the activities in hand. Anyone who has seen a group of tourists, among whom are their own compatriots, will recognize that they are behaving very differently (in bubble B) to when they are at home (bubble A), forming a new type cohesiveness among themselves with perhaps new artefacts such as cameras, water bottles, sun hats, backpacks and so on. At the same time, the village trading culture (in bubble D) will have different characteristics to the culture of the village itself (bubble E), with perhaps use of languages, currencies, codes of politeness and so on which are tuned to the foreign customer. This trading-with-tourists culture (in bubble D) may be seen as an extension or outcrop from the village culture (in circle E); and it will not be the only one. Similar cultures (bubble D) will grow when people go to school or university, travel to cities or deal with other people who come to the village – thus exemplifying that the village culture (bubble E) is always far from the confined exclusivity in the essentialist sense.

Bubble C, in the centre of the figure, represents a further extension of all the other cultures where the actual interaction between François and Agnes takes place. This is a culture of dealing because it is set up between the two interactants who enter into a relationship of culture-making.

We do not wish to give the impression in this model of behaviour that the cultures in bubbles B to D are 'subcultures' which are hierarchically subordinate, or deviant, to the respective 'parent' cultures (bubbles A and E). A more open-ended picture seems more appropriate, in which the 'small cultures' of the tourists, the village, the tourist–tourism business and so on have a multiplicity of relationships both within and transcending larger entities (Table 1 cells iii–iv). Furthermore, Figure 5 presents only one way of seeing what happens between the villagers and the tourists. Another way of seeing this might be in terms of discourses, rather than small cultures, as discussed in Unit A3.2 and by Gee in Unit B1.3. Whether these can be called discourses or cultures might depend on the degree to which they are represented by ways of talking or behaviour and artefacts.

This model of multiple cultures means that what François and Agnes actually see of each other is very much defined by the specific situation in which they meet. The cultural influences of Europe, from where Agnes comes, are only part of the picture. The culture of tourism is closer, and its influence is evidenced in Example A2.2.1 by the reference to the *Shirley Valentine* film in which the behaviour of a middle-aged English woman is changed by being away from home in an 'exotic' place. For François, it is the culture of trading with tourists which brings him into contact with Agnes, leaving the social influences of the village and his engagement relatively distant. When François and Agnes actually meet, it is within the very new culture of their dealing with each other that they see each other's behaviour directly. It could be argued that in this new culture their behaviour becomes intercompetent (Holliday 2002:152) – anomalous, sometimes mixed up, still approaching the competence people achieve in longer-standing cultures, as they learn how to behave in this very new culture. Put more simply, they see each other very much out of character in this clumsy new culture.

Nevertheless, the basis upon which they *perceive*, or think they see, each other is very different. Inaccurate otherization and culturism become rampant. Although Agnes, as a tourist, is behaving differently because she is on holiday, François explains her behaviour – as a 'loose immoral' woman – according to the common stereotype of Europeans he brings from his village. Agnes similarly explains his behaviour – as a 'swindler, gigolo and misogynist' – according to the common stereotype of people who work in the bazaars of North Africa she brings from home. They both thus miss totally the fact that each of them is involved in an intense moral struggle precipitated by the strangeness of the situation in which they find themselves.

What needs to be realized here is that in a non-essentialist paradigm, we are not looking at the foreign Other as though it is locked in a separate foreign place. In all the examples so far used there are people who are operating at cultural borders. Moreover, their struggle for identity is very much connected with this border activity – how they are being seen by people who do not know them. We showed in Unit A1.3 and in Unit A2.1 that this is to do with people moving not just between different societies but also between small cultures within a particular society. Figure 6 shows that what we actually see in a person's behaviour and what they say about themselves interacts *both* with the

cultural resources they bring with them and the new culture they encounter. Hence, Zhang's talk about Confucianism in Unit A1.2 is his projection onto the circumstances in which he finds himself in the foreign society of the master's programme.

What is particularly unfortunate here is that very often the resources we bring with us from our familiar cultural experience (right-hand bubble of the figure), and which we then project onto the unfamiliar culture which we confront (left-hand bubble) are very often stereotypes that arise from our own discourses about the Other. Then, after subsequently unsuccessful interaction with the Other, we return, like François and Agnes, to the same comfortable discourses – hence the two-way arrows in Figure 6.
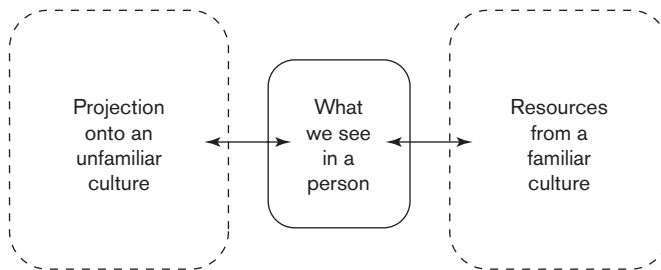
Figure 6 Identity on the cusp

Communication

As a result of this unit it is possible to build on the disciplines from Unit A1.3, which dealt with communication as cultural negotiation. From our understanding of the complex cultures surrounding communication, we need to do the following (see other disciplines listed previously).

11. Be aware that what happens between yourself and others is influenced very much by the environment within which you are communicating and your own preoccupations.

Because of this, we need to do the following.

12. Become aware of our own preoccupations in order to understand what it is that people from other backgrounds are responding to.

This in effect means that we need to research ourselves just as much as we research those who are strange to us. This links with the disciplines in Unit A1.1 about building a thick description of the whole communication scenario.

⭐ **Task A2.2.1   Thinking about cultural dealing**

➤ Think of a situation you have been in where there is an element of cultural dealing and describe it, using Figure 5 to help you.

➤ Evaluate Figure 5 and try to improve on it so that it fits the situation you have described better.

➤ Explain how you can better understand one or more people in the situation with the help of Figure 6 and the disciplines listed.

➤ What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?

UNIT A2.3   **POWER AND DISCOURSE**
We must be careful what we say

Experience

This unit considers how careful we must all be when talking about and to people who we consider to be Other, because we may be unaware of the power our words may carry. Indirectly, the unit will consider the issue of political correctness, a much-contested concept. Consider Example A2.3.2.

Example A2.3.1   Understanding supervisor

Jeremy is a lecturer in an Australian university. He was very pleased when he heard he was going to supervise a black student from South Africa. Several years ago he had been involved in a three-year science education project in secondary schools in South Africa, and he felt he knew the place more than his colleagues. He felt he would clearly be the best person to help Jabu to get through her research project. He had also read quite a few things on cultural differences, which interested him a great deal.

Jabu first met Jeremy during a class he was teaching on introducing science research. She was the only 'overseas' student there and felt quite angry when, during introductions, he announced to all the other student that he knew her 'context' very well. She was not sure whether it was something about his tone of voice – as though he was speaking about someone who had a handicap of some sort – or his speed of voice – as though she might not understand normal English – or that she was being separated out from all the other students as needing some sort of special attention – which annoyed her. Or perhaps it was that Jeremy was making out that he understood her and was on her side. What could he possibly know about her and her background which would give him this right!? Even her closest friends at home did not presume they knew her so well that they could speak for her like this – except perhaps her mother, and every daughter knows that story!

She could see, at their first tutorial, that he really was trying his best; but he still maintained his slow tone of voice. At least he wasn't shouting as some people did when they thought you might not understand. Then he began to explain to her that he understood something about what he called 'black culture in South Africa' and would therefore be able to help her to meet deadlines and to 'understand concepts' that might be 'alien' to her. He even said that he knew what it was like, with 'the history of black people' that she 'suddenly had to compete in every sphere'. It took her a moment to understand what he was getting at. Then she realized that he was having the ignorant audacity to be thinking that she might have difficulty keeping up with 'white people'.

This sort of thing became the norm for Jeremy and Jabu's meetings. When she showed him work he always made a big thing about saying how well she had done – as though he was surprised that she could do it at all. Then there were lots of informal 'friendly' bits of conversation, in which he always put on a very 'kind' face, about 'food', 'rituals', 'marriage practices' and 'ceremonies' 'in black culture'; and once he even asked her if she was 'still in contact with her tribe'. He was also supervising a German student; and she was sure he never asked *him* about 'food', 'rituals', 'marriage practices', 'ceremonies' and 'tribes'.

One day Jabu really felt like giving up the whole thing and going home. She was walking down the corridor towards Jeremy's office. He was standing in the corridor talking to a colleague. He hadn't seen her, and he was saying, 'Well she does have some difficulty meeting deadlines; but of course that's something deep in black African culture, isn't it?' She knew as a matter of fact that she was having no more difficulty than any of the other students; and anyway, even if she was, why should it have anything to do with being black African? There was a Welsh student who always missed deadlines, and no one would dare suggest this was anything to do with 'Welsh culture'.

Deconstruction

This example clearly shows two very different perceptions of what is going on. Jeremy believes he is being supportive, inclusive and understanding, whereas Jabu feels she is being treated badly and indeed the victim of racism. Jeremy is, we are sure, trying his best to do what he can for Jabu; but in our view he is making a basic mistake which derives from his essentialist notion of her culture, which prevents him from dealing with her as she sees herself. Her predicament is similar to that of Parisa in Unit A1.1, though it remains unresolved in this example. Jeremy falls into the same trap as John does in Unit A2.2; but in his naivety he does not realize it; and this lack of realization goes deep into his language. We shall discuss the details of this problem in terms of the following concepts.

- Thinking you are being understanding when in fact you are patronizing.
- False sharing.
- Culturist language.

Being patronizing

This is detailed in Table 3. Basically, in row i, Jeremy does not base his understanding of Jabu on what he observes of her, but on pictures he himself has constructed from his own experience in South Africa. Here, he makes the usual essentialist mistake of imagining that everyone in South Africa is the same; and the basis of his construction in the first place is likely to have been stereotypical (Table 1 cell ix). His reading into 'cultural difference' also implies an essentialist fascination with comparable, collectible cultures as objects (Table 1 cell i). All of this drives his behaviour – talking not really to her but to an image of who she is. Moreover, his treating her as a cultural category sets her apart from the other students (Table 5 row ii). Making her 'special' inhibits her ability to integrate and makes her feel labelled less capable than the other students (Table 5 row iii). This notion of 'special needs' is also strengthened by the essentialist idea that arriving in a 'new' culture, like learning a new language, puts Jabu in a deficit position. See for example (Table 1 cells vii–viii and x). ('Special needs' is an issue which also affects the inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds and abilities within state education.)

Table 3 Difficult communication

Jeremy thinks he is being understanding and inclusive because:	*Jabu feels patronized, otherized and the victim of racism because:*
i He shows he understands her cultural circumstances and special needs.	She does not want to be made 'special' by someone who could not possibly understand. He has no right to presume she has special needs. He is treating her as inferior to others because of a limited understanding of who she is. She feels invaded.
ii He rationalizes her shortcomings in terms of her culture.	He makes her a special cultural case. He implies the inferiority of her culture. He fails to imagine she could be like others.
iii He speaks slowly and carefully.	Before he even meets her, he assumes she will have difficulty understanding. He treats her as though she is handicapped.
iv He shows interest in her culture.	He over-emphasizes 'exotic' aspects, which imply backwardness.
v He makes reference to cultural concepts she will understand.	He uses language which implies her inferiority.

The final straw for Jabu is when she overhears Jeremy in the corridor making what can be no less than a culturist comment – that her lateness in meeting deadlines is caused by her being a 'black African'. The blatant error in this judgement is revealed by Jabu's observation that she certainly is not being treated equally with other students. Indeed, it is Jeremy's over-generalization that her lateness is a product of her national culture which prevents him from seeing a far more common explanation – that she is really more like other students than different to them.

False sharing

This category of otherization is complex. It corresponds with row iv in Table 5. Again, Jeremy is probably right and sincere in wanting to share; but he is sharing with an image of Jabu which he has constructed, while the real Jabu exists in a very different world. What reveals Jeremy's mistake is Jabu's observation that if she were German, he would not be making references to 'marriage practices', 'ceremonies' and 'tribes'; and as German society must be complex just like hers, he must have selected these topics when he talks to her because they have some sort of exotic value, which in turn implies, for her, some sort of backwardness. This type of otherization is often difficult to pin down. Jeremy could equally have cultural imaginations about German society, which would indeed be reflected in his choice of topics when talking to his German student – perhaps connected with being organized or militaristic. In Jabu's case, coming from a part of the world where there is a colonial history, there is indeed an expectation of another type of cultural imagination, akin to Orientalism in the Middle and Far East, where certain aspects of societies have been sensationalized by the West to feed a deep view that they are indeed 'backward' and 'lascivious'. (See the discussion of Orientalism in Unit B2.1.) The key word in Jeremy's choice of topics is 'tribe'. Although this term might be in common usage to refer to certain types of social grouping, perhaps even by Jabu herself, when used by Jeremy it rings of 'primitive', lacking in state organization and 'pre-literate', and colours his reference to the other things on his list. Therefore, 'marriage *practices*', 'ceremonies' and 'rituals' become 'primitive'. Jabu is thus being 'tribalized' by Jeremy (see, e.g., Nzimiro (1979), Wagner (1981:29), and Baumann (Text B0.1.2) in Unit B0.1). This is therefore similar to the situation seen in Unit A1.3, where we see a group of school girls using terms of abuse to create social cohesion which would be considered misogynistic if used by outsider men.

Culturist language

The significance of Jeremy's use of 'tribe' and 'practices' draws attention to the role of language in otherization (Table 5 row v). A major point here is that he does not seem to be aware of the effect of the language he is using, and investigating this hidden area takes us into critical discourse analysis and the uncovering of the way everyday talk hides our ideologies (e.g. Fairclough 1995 and Holliday 2000). Although we do not have the full text of what Jeremy says to Jabu, from what we do have in Example A2.3.1, it is possible to see the traces of Jeremy's essentialist culturist ideology in some of his phraseology. Talking of helping Jabu to 'understand concepts' that might be 'alien' to her is not in itself particularly significant in a tutorial supervision context. However, when this is put alongside 'the history of black people' and that she would 'suddenly have to compete in every sphere', understanding concepts seems to become dependent on racial factors. This is certainly the connection which Jabu makes – 'keeping up with white people'.

This attention to language raises the issue of political correctness. What has become known as 'PC' in some circles has been attacked quite a lot for (a) preventing people from speaking their minds and stating the obvious, and (b) being over-sensitive to

apparently innocent language which carries hidden racist or sexist references – for example, 'clearing the decks' being a non-PC gender-related phrase because it refers to the navy, which is a male-dominated institution. (It refers to removing unnecessary objects from a warship's deck in preparation for battle, and it used to mean tidying up in preparation for a new activity.) While we would tend to agree with (b), where the sanitization of language might indeed be being taken too far, we do not agree with (a). We really do feel that Jeremy needs to be extremely careful with his language. We certainly regard his statement that Jabu's inability to meet deadlines is connected with 'something deep in black African culture' as something that needs to be 'politically corrected'. This is not just Jeremy speaking casually in an unguarded moment when he thinks Jabu is not listening. The question tag, 'isn't it?' is there to involve a colleague in a discourse which is essentially racist and culturist. This type of unguarded language is thus in danger of normalizing a potentially very destructive way of speaking and thinking about others. Responding again to objection (a) above, Jeremy may indeed be stating what seems to *him* to be obvious. The point is that, as Jabu rightly rationalizes, what he says is *not* based on immediate empirical evidence, but on inaccurate stereotyping leading to prejudice (Figure 4 bubbles A and B).

We would therefore state that political correctness is very necessary in the sense that everyone needs to:

- take great care of connections they make between people, their behaviour and generalizations about the categories in which we place people – culture, gender and race being but examples;
- be disciplined in considering evidence which is not connected to these categories.

The discipline in the second point is a form of *bracketing* – a device used in qualitative research for avoiding the easy answers which most readily spring to mind because of their presence in dominant discourse (e.g. Holliday 2002:22, 185). Jeremy thus needs to be aware that he is already conditioned by an essentialist dominant discourse which will always tend to explain the behaviour of people from certain parts of the world in terms of their national or ethnic culture. If he really wants to help Jabu, he should attend to this rather than indulging unguardedly in his prior experience of her exoticness.

We think it is important to spend a moment to comment about the relationship between culturism and racism in this example. Basically Jeremy is otherizing and reducing Jabu to less than what she is by means of a prescribed image of what he thinks she is. Whether this is racist, culturist or even sexist depends on which aspect of her persona, in his eyes, is the driving force behind his image of her. If it is her blackness, which implies for him, and subsequently her, race, then this is racism. If it is her gender, then this is sexism. If it is her culture, then this is culturism. Although Jabu reads Jeremy's attitude as racism, his primary interest is in her culture. Therefore, we see his reducing of her as culturism.

Communication

This unit is very much about restraint. Learning from Jeremy's mistakes, we need to do the following (see other disciplines listed previously).

13. Avoid being seduced by previous experience of the exotic.
14. Monitor our own language and be aware of the destructive, culturist discourses we might be conforming to or perpetuating.

Task A2.3.1   Thinking about Jabu

➤   Think of a situation you have been in that is like the Jabu example and describe it in similar detail.
➤   Explain how you can better understand one or more people in the situation with the help of Table 3 and the disciplines listed.
➤   What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?

Theme 3
Representation

This theme will take a more macro look at how society constructs the foreign Other on our behalf.

CULTURAL REFUGEE
We have been different to what we are now

Experience

This unit will look at the issue of refugees, not just because it is extremely important in today's world, but because the refugee predicament as cultural traveller with problematic status serves to teach us a lot about the nature of culture and cultural representation. Consider Example A3.1.1.

Example A3.1.1   Life before

When Martha first met Reza he seemed to her the typical newly arrived refugee, drably dressed and unsure of himself. She was new to teaching people like him but found a lot of support from conferences, colleagues and textbooks; and it made a lot of sense to her to follow the approach within which her job was not just to teach the English necessary for Canadian citizenship, but to empower her students by encouraging them to express their identity. Reza was a good example of this need. He was from Afghanistan. She was lucky that there was so much information around in the media about the plight of people in Afghanistan. Martha felt that coming to the West would enable Reza 'to express himself and articulate his identity in ways he had never been able to before'. She knew that even in Kabul, people had absolutely nothing.

At first, as everybody said, Martha found Reza clearly unable to deal with the requirements of Western society. He was terribly prejudiced against basic freedoms. Even when she was sure he had the basic English, he refused to talk about his culture, he seemed to resent having a female teacher, which one would expect from a culture 'where women were not even considered second-class citizens', and the only coherent statement she heard him make was that he would never let his daughter marry a Canadian. There was an odd incident she would always remember. He cut his finger rather badly. When he came back from the hospital he was extremely agitated and kept

on talking about the nurse who had stitched it. Martha presumed that he just could not cope with being touched by a woman. Eventually she had to give up on him as a hopeless bigot.

Martha then met Reza a year later. He was sitting in the cafeteria while waiting for a friend who was signing up for her programme. Martha thought he looked somehow different – less angry and desolated. She accepted his invitation to sit down and have coffee. He told her he was working as a supervisor in a furniture factory. His English was better; and it seemed more appropriate now to ask him about his life before he was a refugee. Martha was astonished when he told her he was a judge, but that he hadn't been as successful as his sister, who was a university professor in the US, and his eldest daughter, who was specializing to be a gynaecologist in Moscow. He said he remembered her being annoyed with him in class, and that she needed to understand what a difficult predicament he was in at that time, entering a new country at the bottom of the system as a casual labourer, and feeling totally powerless and isolated – a member of the Canadian underclass who found it hard to appreciate the 'freedoms' of the West about which they had heard. He explained that although it might seem silly and unimportant now, the last straw had been the accident with his finger. All he had wanted to do at that point, despite everything that was happening there, was to return home to get it treated. She asked him why, when surely there was no decent medical care in Kabul. Reza said that this is just one of the things that everyone misunderstood about Afghanistan. In fact there were excellent hospitals there, where of course he would not be treated like a refugee who couldn't think. He finished by saying that he felt his greatest achievement in Canada was seeing his teenage daughter doing well at school and taking part in the full range of activities that young people deserved.

Deconstruction

In this example we see Martha working with Reza, a refugee in her language class, according to representations of the foreign Other which are present in society. She then discovers that he is very different to these representations. Reza's plight is not dissimilar to that of several of the people in these units who are culturally misunderstood; and Martha is no more nor less to blame for not seeing his reality than other people who misunderstand them. This unit does not tell a different story, but focuses on a different aspect of how cultural misunderstanding comes about through the following sources of representation in influencing Martha in the way she sees Reza:

- media images
- professional images.

To deal with this, we shall discuss the need to:

- bracket popular representation.

Media images

A major source of Martha's prejudging of Reza, a refugee from Afghanistan, is the information she gets from the national media. In modern society we are constantly fed images of the foreign Other by television, radio and the press, in the explicit form of news, documentaries and current affairs discussion, which report and describe people and events across the world, often with graphic visual material, and more subtly through the images of people and places that we see creatively manipulated in advertising and elsewhere. Afghanistan is a particularly good example here because of the very large amount of material there has been about the 'war against terrorism' which has depicted many, but very similar, images of the country and its people. It is not therefore at all surprising that Martha should see Reza in these terms – derelict, war-ruined streets with little evidence of urban facility, and a society in which women are covered and deprived of the most basic rights. It is not just Afghanistan which suffers from such a limited media image. Many more countries less well known to the West, usually in the developing world, are represented very selectively in world media in terms of their most saleable, sensational, 'exotic' images which are the basis of the reductive Orientalism discussed in Unit A2.3. Hence, it would be easy for many Western people not to know that many Arabs do not wear the kufiyah or the *hejab* (traditional scarf- or shawl-like headwear for men and women respectively), that many Arabs are not Muslim, that many Muslim women do not wear the *hejab* or veil, that many people in the developing world do not live in traditional souks, bazaars, shanty towns, thatched villages or war-torn streets with livestock, and that a very large slice of the population all over the world is middle-class, owns cars and computers, lives in orderly suburbs, and dresses and goes about its daily business very much like 'we' do. Significant for Martha to know is that many refugees, though they have fallen on hard times because of war, political oppression or economic catastrophe, have in the not-too-distant past had what one might consider to be sophisticated, educated lives.

What is perhaps strange is that while people may be naturally cynical about much of what the media shows us, they may well be often less critical of images of the 'exotic'. This is shown in Figure 7, which is our own interpretation of the relationships between the individual and forces of representation in society. The representations created by the media are in bubble B. There is a subtle dialogue between this and the tastes and opinions of the public in bubble E. The nature of this dialogue will vary from society to society, depending on the freedom of the media; but in the West, the representations in the media will very largely respond to public demand – and at the heart of this demand is the desire to essentialize.

Professional images

Apart from the possible Othering of the developing world, in the case of 'the war in Afghanistan', the representations we see cannot be disconnected from a particular political point of view which depicts a derelict country in need of rescue by the West. During colonial times, images of the South and East as deficit cultures were often constructed, consciously or unconsciously, to justify 'civilizing' conquest. This strategy
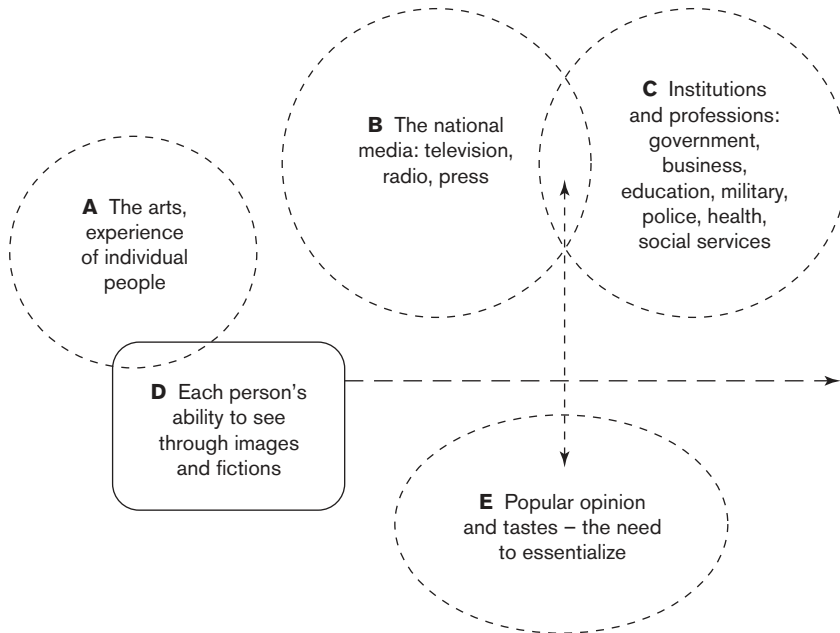
Figure 7 Forces of representation

for reproducing certain types of representation can, we think, be connected with the professional image which Martha gets from 'conferences, colleagues and textbooks'. In our view, the discourse of the professionalism which Martha employs also projects a 'civilizing conquest' over refugee students. Instead of simply teaching Reza the language he needs to live and work in a new country, justified by the image of Afghanistan as derelict, Martha is intent on 'empowering' him to 'express' his identity in ways 'he had never been able to before'. She thus sees 'them' and 'their culture' as lacking basic human capacities. It is also noticeable that she is disappointed because Reza is 'not a woman', thus denying her the opportunity of 'liberating' even more deeply oppressed individuals.

There is a similar relationship here between popular tastes and opinions and professional representations (Figure 7 bubbles E and C) as there is with the media. In bubble C we have also listed other institutions and professions which produce representations of the foreign Other, all of which, in turn, to varying degrees, with their own strong discourse of reality, feed, influence and provide the content for the media in bubble B.

Bracketing popular representations

The relationship between bubbles B, C and E in Figure 7 imply an almost hegemonic set of beliefs and images in which the mainstream opinion, tastes, media and institutions of a society collude to produce established representations of the foreign Other. By hegemonic we mean achieving a domination which pervades all aspects of society to such a subtle degree that it may be invisible. There can, however, be breakthroughs, the

source of which we have placed on the left of the figure. This is of course an extremely simplistic representation in itself of very complex social forces; but we wish to make the simple point that the individual actor (bubble D) in whatever society is able to form their own images and break away from – see through – the established essentialism. Some of the resources which can be used here (bubble A) have already been exemplified in these units. The conference colleagues in Unit A1.1 are introduced to a film by Parisa and see an alternative (to the established) picture which reveals a more complex reality of who she is. Janet and John in Units A1.2 and A2.1 arrive at such pictures through encounters with individual people in Zhang and Ming and the Smith family, as do the observers of the school girls in Unit A1.3. Something happens which makes us bracket the easy answer and look at things differently. We have listed the arts generally in the bubble because we think that it is in this domain – broadly from quality television drama through to music and painting and, indeed, more critical television documentary – that more critical, creative images *can* come. We have not listed travel and international contact because, as we see with Jeremy in Unit A2.3, and Agnes and François in Unit A2.2, *contact* with 'other cultures' may confirm rather than question the essentialist point of view.

Returning to Martha's experience, there were several cultural presumptions she formed in her initial encounter with Reza which she will need to reassess in the light of her second encounter. She explained both his unease in class and his dissatisfaction with regard to his hospital visit as a misogynous dislike of contact with female teachers and nurses. Apart from one statement about how he did not want his daughter to marry a Canadian, these presumptions stem directly from the overall cultural stereotype of Afghanistan and all its male population being entirely in support of limiting women's rights. Such a view is enforced by news footage, documentaries and political speeches. The fact that few, if any, of these report any men in Afghanistan itself supporting women's rights, serves to package together the Taliban, the ruling party of Afghanistan before being ousted in 2002, the Northern Alliance that deposed them, and the entire male population, with selected images of still-bearded men in street scenes showing apparent discomfort at some women discarding the burka, the traditional female covering. It is entirely on the basis of this background that Martha judged Reza's behaviour. That he was uneasy in class and at the hospital, he himself confirms; but the explanations for this could be many; and in effect she had no direct evidence arising from the situation itself to support misogyny. In Martha's second encounter with Reza, he explains his reason for discomfort in class and in the hospital as to do with being a newcomer in very difficult social circumstances. His statement about how he left Afghanistan to give his daughter better opportunities also goes against Martha's assumption about his attitude towards his daughter. Indeed, feeling isolated and a member of the Canadian underclass might well make him cautious about his daughter integrating into a society seen from that point of view. The hospital incident is significant because Martha had simply assumed that there was no infrastructure in Kabul. She had also assumed that there were no Afghans who had the social sophistication to deal with their own identity – that this was the exclusive domain of Western society.

All of these assumptions about Martha and Reza are, of course, grey areas and in the realm of rough generalizations. However, it is not difficult to imagine that a major reason why Martha saw Reza as a bigoted misogynist was that he did not respond to

her strategy to reconstruct him. In effect, he was neither a misogynist nor in need of reconstruction. In terms of a methodology for understanding, she did indeed observe him closely, but her observation may have been clouded by a certain prejudice.

Communication

The disciplines within this theme need to focus on our awareness of the images from our own society which influence they way we see other people. This takes us further into the need for us to research ourselves (Unit A2.2). Taking heed of the experience in this unit, when communicating with others, we therefore need to do the following (see other disciplines listed previously).

15. Be aware of the media, political and institutional influences in our own society which lead us to see people from other cultural backgrounds in a certain way.
16. See through these images and fictions when we encounter people from other cultural backgrounds, and always try to consider alternative representations.

Task A3.1.1   Thinking about Reza

★

➤   Think of a situation you have been in that is like the Reza example and describe it in similar detail.
➤   Explain how what happens in the situation can be understood in terms of the types of images and representations described in the Deconstruction section and Figure 7.
➤   Explain what you therefore need to know in order to understand people like Reza better. Refer to the disciplines listed.
➤   What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?

COMPLEX IMAGES
We have no idea how deeply we get things wrong

UNIT A3.2

Experience and deconstruction

In this unit we will look more deeply at some of the profound errors of representation of the foreign Other within our own society. The images we show will present a familiar picture; but what we need to do is fathom the unfamiliar which they hide. We will not present a description of one event, but instead a series of descriptions of different media events. These really took place, but they are of course our personal impressions of them, coloured by our desire to undo essentialism. The examples all come from British or American television, radio and publications; but we are purposely not revealing their

origin and are also changing one or two key aspects which do not change the overall significance in order to maintain anonymity. As in previous units, the examples are presented as vignettes. This unit also combines the Experience and Deconstruction sections, which will allow us to deal with each example in turn. The first example speaks for itself.

> **Example A3.2.1 Indian or British art?**
>
> There is a television discussion programme about the arts in India. The discussants include two women writers from India, a writer and a film-maker who are both British Asian women, an academic and a presenter who are both white British. The point being made by the majority of the speakers is that Indian art is being changed by new art produced by British Asians. The two British Asians try to counter this idea by insisting that their art is *not* part of Indian art at all, but contributes to a growing multicultural British art form. However, they fail to make any impact in the discussion.

'British Asian' is commonly used in Britain to refer to people who have an ethnic origin in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. We use the term 'white' to refer to British people who have their ethnic origin in the British Isles. It is important, however, to note that these are shifting and politically charged labels.

 This television discussion might not seem particularly problematic to the majority of viewers, who would most probably see things in the same way as the majority of the discussants – that British Asian art *is* part of Indian (or perhaps Pakistani or Bangladeshi) art. The programme did not make this clear to the audience; but let us presume that the two British Asian women come from families which emigrated from India (rather than what is now Pakistan or Bangladesh) a generation ago, so that the issue is not to do with a confusion between Indians and other people from the subcontinent. What is then evident is that the inability of the discussants to respond to the idea that the art of these two British Asians could be considered British rather than Indian is because it does not conform to a dominant discourse – that all people and what they do can somehow be traced to India as part of 'Indian culture'. The following definitions are our own.

- Dominant discourses are ways of talking and thinking about something which have become naturalized to the extent that people conform to them without thinking.
- Discourse, in this sense, is a way of using language which promotes a particular view of the world.
- Naturalization occurs when a social phenomenon becomes sufficiently routine and natural to be internalized into everyday 'thinking-as-usual'.

Naturalization is very similar to institutionalization (where new behaviour becomes established practice in an institution), reification (where something which is only an idea is considered real) and routinization (where new behaviour becomes a routine). All these processes can happen by themselves as part of the natural way in which society works, or be socially engineered by managers, spin doctors, governments, the media, political parties or anyone who has influence over other people.

An example of *a discourse* might be sexist discourse, where phrases which reduce women (e.g. 'the woman's place is in the kitchen', 'women can't be managers') are used in such a way that the ideas behind them are promoted as normal for the group who use them. Discourses can thus be associated with group identity and exclusivity. Anyone who has had to mix socially or work with a group of people who use sexist language as the norm, and who has found that not joining with the discourse would mean being excluded, will understand how discourses work. Sexist discourse becomes *dominant* when it begins to rule over other discourses in a larger group or society. The media can play a significant role in promoting discourses and making them dominant. At the time of writing there is a discussion in the British media about how certain national newspapers are promoting a particular 'way of talking about' people from other countries who are seeking political asylum – 'asylum seekers' – which demonizes them. There is a fear that this discourse will become dominant. The people who speak against it are promoting a *counter discourse* which is trying to prevent it from being naturalized.

Dominant discourses can be so *naturalized* that people become unaware of them (Fairclough 1995). In Example A3.2.1 the dominant discourse is such that the argument of the two British Asian women does not seem to be opposed so much as simply not heard. This may be because the ideas the British Asian women express do not correspond with what the other discussants normally think about. In other words, their ideas do not conform to the thinking-as-usual of the other people. Thinking-as-usual is a term used in sociology to mean what people have got used to thinking of as being normal. It is an essentialist dominant discourse which insists that once born in India, simplistic notions of national culture will follow even the adult activities of one's children who are born and brought up elsewhere. The women writers from India might have had their own interests in colluding with the dominant discourse and seeing British Asian art as theirs. In Britain, this dominant discourse is connected with the tendency to explain all activities of perceived immigrants in terms of an ethnic-national culture (Table 1 cell ix).

The next example shows how the media can feed dominant discourses about cultural stereotypes. It is in two parts, the first looking at a travelogue and the second seeing a probable effect of this.

Example A3.2.2   Middle East travelogue

Part 1
A well-known television travel correspondent is doing a series of programmes on Middle Eastern countries. At the end of her programme on Turkey, she is filmed standing on the Syrian border and announcing that her next programme would take her to 'fundamentalist' Syria. The next programme on Syria fronts images of men in kufiyahs and women in abayahs (traditional Arab women's dress) in the old quarters of Damascus and Aleppo.

Part 2
Matthew recently visited Damascus with a group of colleagues, all of whom were well-travelled and sensitive to issues of otherization. Nevertheless, he found himself on

the edge of a discussion of how the dress code for women visitors might be relaxed because there was 'now' a new president. The implication was that 'now' Syrian society might be more modern ('equals liberal' 'equals less fundamentalist' 'equals allowing women to cover less'). He had been in Damascus fifteen years before when the previous government had prohibited university students from wearing Islamic hejab (the head cover for Muslim women) and *abayahs* on the campus; but he did not feel it appropriate to bring this up on the edge of this casual conversation as they were getting on the conference bus. He thus allowed the dominant discourse to rule.

The views of Matthew's colleagues, who were not at all familiar with Syria, were fed by news items and documentaries of the type described in the first part of Example A3.2.2. It would not be surprising if the correspondent in the example did not purposely *choose* to *select* only the images which would support the notion of 'Arab country', 'therefore Muslim', 'therefore fundamentalist', 'moreover anti-Israel', 'therefore anti-West' – hence images of people who *looked* like the people one sees in media images of men and women with covered heads throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. The dominant discourse is so strong that the correspondent probably did not notice the other images, which prevail in Damascus, of young men and women, intensely conscious of high European fashion, which they integrate into their own styles, walking by elegant boutiques and sitting in restaurants. And of course it might well not occur to someone with these dominant views that people wearing the traditional dress of the region might not be fundamentalist at all, and might not even be Muslim but Christian. A very similar dominant discourse is present in the next example.

Example A3.2.3   Traffic problems

In a popular tourist guide series, which has the reputation of being progressive and culturally sensitive, there is a reference to traffic problems in Tehran. It is commented that the inhabitants of this country are just beginning to learn to use traffic lights.

The reference to traffic lights is motivated by what appears to the writers of the guide to be a less improper use of traffic lights than might have been observed elsewhere. It is indeed true that the use of traffic lights in Tehran is different to their use in, say, Britain. One can observe, for example, that motorcyclists will sometimes position themselves in front of motorists, in front of the line at which motorists have stopped; and indeed the line itself might be interpreted liberally by some motorists. It might also be true that in recent years the practice has become more like that of, say, Britain. It is however factually inaccurate to say that Iranians are just learning to use traffic lights. The culture of traffic-lights use is as long-standing as it is in any Western country, but different. The rules for use are as sophisticated, but being mysterious to the British observer, they are depicted as being primitive. If there *is* a change in the behaviour at traffic lights, it might be more a result of globalization than anything else.

As tourism to more 'exotic' locations becomes more accessible to the West, tourist guides become a more influential part of the media which influences the way in which we see each other. As with the case of Matthew's well-travelled colleagues in Example

A3.2.2, a significant twist in first part of Example A3.2.3 is the intended intellectual sensitivity of the text, which is thus all the more likely to draw the discerning reader into the discourse. The issue of tourism in a postcolonialist discourse is taken up in Unit B2.4.

The next example moves us into the more politically sensitive domain of the Arab–Israeli conflict, which has become more emotionally charged since the events of 11 September 2001 in New York and the subsequent 'war on terrorism'.

Example A3.2.4   Israeli schoolchildren

There is a short piece on a news programme about how children in an Israeli school are coping with the atmosphere of terrorism surrounding the Palestinian–Israeli conflict in the spring of 2002. The school and the children look affluent and middle class. Those who are interviewed speak calmly and articulately. This is followed by a scene of Palestinians throwing stones at Israeli soldiers in a West Bank urban setting with dust, rubble and unfinished building sites.

This is a very complex case. One of the authors' major feelings at the time of seeing these news items was how easy these contrasting images made it for a middle-class viewer like himself to identify with the (to him) familiarly middle-class image of the Israeli school children, who seemed 'normal', 'calm' and (presumably) therefore more 'civilized', than of the stone-throwing Palestinians. In fighting this seduction he also wondered why we in the West do not see comparable images of middle-class Palestinians in the media, which might help to break the dominant discourse of 'them as terrorists and funda- mentalists' – very similar to that discussed in Example A3.2.2 generated by Syrian street scenes. On the other hand, there are complex issues of identity here. Who are *we* to presume the images by which *we* would like other people to be represented simply in order for me to undo *our* reductive preoccupations?

The final two examples are also sensitive in that they are connected with the emotions surrounding personal abduction and abuse. Each case deals with a serious issue which it is the responsibility of the media to reveal. In Example A3.2.5 the women and children in question are clearly suffering. The question is, how is the cause of their suffering represented and is it a simple one-sided matter?

Example A3.2.5   Abducted children

A television documentary tells a story of a group of British (Anglo-Christian) women travelling to a Middle-eastern country to see their children who have been 'abducted' by their Middle-eastern ex-husbands. The men are characterized as despotic; they do not respect prior agreements; they will imprison their children; women and children in their society have no rights.

The real anguish of the women in this example has to be respected. However, the documentary is one-sided in that there is no discussion of the complex cross-cultural

history of each relationship which must have led up to this state of affairs. There is no discussion of the point of view of the husbands, who are rarely heard to speak. Some or all of the traits of the Middle-eastern husbands might have been true in some or all of the cases in the documentary, but there was no exploration of the possibility that they might not. Exploration of any of these issues would have implied a diversity in 'their' foreign society perhaps as diverse as 'our' own society – which the discourse of otherization does not allow (Table 1 cell ix). Thus, the essentialist packaging of the Middle-eastern Other is perpetuated. It seems strange that the level of sophisticated analysis one might expect of the British documentary was suspended in this case.

There is also a degree of sensationalism present in Example A3.2.5. A media message is sensational when it exaggerates particular features in order to appeal to the emotions. There was perhaps no *intention* in this documentary to be sensational. Indeed, the emotions connected with the abduction of children are real and do not need to be exaggerated. However, if we consider Edward Said's arguments about how the West constructs an imaginary exotic image of the East (see Unit B2.1), the documentary could be criticised for exoticizing and sensationalising the Middle-eastern husbands as distant and alien imprisoners of women and their children, instead of as ordinary men with different principles and laws governing child custody.

Our final example demonstrates a similar case of 'Eastern' people being exoticized sensationally as imprisoners of women.

Example A3.2.6   Abuse of women

An item about the abuse of British women by their husbands appears on a radio discussion programme. However, it quickly becomes apparent that the focus of the item is Hindu and Muslim Asian families. Another radio discussion features a British Asian academic who makes the point that outsiders to 'British culture' might well think that it is characterized by paedophilia, given the quantity of discussion of this issue in the British media.

This was an important item in that such abuse should be revealed and its causes discussed. It may or may not be the case that such abuse is more common within Asian families than within other British families. However, the phrase 'in Islam' was used in such a way as to imply that abuse of women was a default feature of Islam. 'Arranged marriages' were also referred to; and one immediately sees how the packaging of this particular 'foreign' Other begins to be formed. Otherization of the Asian community might have been far from the agenda of the journalist involved, but it was deep in the discourse of the item. There are perhaps parallels in British society whereby arranged marriages also exist in an Anglo-Christian community where money, property and dynasty are at stake. Some of our soap operas pivot around this fact. Neither will it draw attention to the fact that 'arranged marriage' might not be a bad thing, or that not all Muslim marriages are arranged, because these facts are not part of the packaging. A friend of Adrian Holliday's (author of Section A of this book) from Leeds commented that the radio story did not sit easily with the 'liberated young Asian women who jump on the bus with me each morning'. They are not part of the package either. Perhaps

we feel that they are not 'real Asians', or that they are 'Westernized' (like Parisa in Unit A1.1). It is the second news item in Example A3.2.6 which shows us the reality of this reductive distortion. 'We' Western people would not like to think that 'they' could so easily reduce 'us' to a 'British culture' in which children are abused.

Communication

In this final unit in Theme 3 Representation, it is important to build on the advice of Unit A3.1 and look deeper into some of the origins of essentialist prejudice in the media. We can see from all the examples in this unit that it is important to think about dominant discourses, which continue from other disciplines listed in Section A.

17. Be aware of dominant discourses which are easily perpetuated by the media, and which lead us to 'think-as-usual' that familiar images of the foreign Other are 'normal'.

From Examples A3.2.2 and A3.2.3 especially, we can see how prejudice is sometimes hidden behind intellectual sensitivity.

18. Be aware that even images projected by sensitive, intellectual sources can seduce our own sensitivities and intellects into thinking that they are 'true'.

From Examples A3.2.5 and A3.2.6 especially, we can see that there is often a hidden sensationalism.

19. Although sensationalism in the media is something we know about and guard against, we need to appreciate how deeply it exists in our traditional views of the foreign Other.

Task A3.2.1   Thinking about representation

➤ Think of a situation you have been in or observed that is like one of the examples presented in this unit and describe it in similar detail.
➤ Provide an example of naturalization in the description and try to link it with a dominant discourse.
➤ Thinking about the disciplines listed, consider how far we really do need to search out hidden forces.
➤ What can you learn from this about intercultural communication?

DISCIPLINES FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

As we reach the end of Section A it is now possible to put together all the disciplines covered in Table 4. These disciplines have been derived from analysis of the situations discussed throughout the section. The right-hand column provides a summary which clarifies their relationship with each of the three themes that run throughout the book. Along with further discussions connected with the readings presented in Section B, these disciplines will be taken forward to Section C, where they will be realized in research projects.

Table 4 Disciplines

Discussion	Statement	Summary
	Identity	
Unit A1.1 page 6	1. Respond to people according to how you find them rather than according to what you have heard about them.	Seek a deeper understanding of individual people's identity by:
	2. Avoid easy answers about how people are. Bracket – put aside simplistic notions about what is 'real' or 'unreal' in your perception of 'another culture'.	a) avoiding preconceptions
	3. Appreciate that every society is as complex and culturally varied as your own.	b) appreciating complexity
	4. Learn to build up thick descriptions of what happens between you and others – to work out how to communicate as you go along.	c) not overgeneralizing from individual instances.
Unit A1.2 page 10	5. While respecting whatever people say about their own culture, take what they say as evidence of what they wish to project rather than as information about where they come from.	Achieve this by employing *bracketing* to put aside your preconceptions, *thick description* to enable you to see complexity, and an appreciation of *emergent data* to signal the unexpected.
	6. Take what people say about their own culture as a personal observation which should not be generalized to other people who come from the same background.	
Unit A1.3 page 16	7. Understand how people are creating and indeed negotiating their cultural identity in the very process of communicating with us.	
	8. Appreciate that you are creating and negotiating your own cultural identity in the process of communicating with others.	
	9. Appreciate that the creation and negotiation of cultural and personal identity are the same thing.	

Table 4 (continued)

Discussion	Statement	Summary
	Otherization	
Unit A2.1 page 21	10. Avoid falling into the culturist trap of reducing people to less than they are – in the same way as we must avoid racist and sexist traps.	Seek a deeper understanding of the prejudices, preoccupations and discourses which lead you to otherize.
Unit A2.2 page 25	11. Be aware that what happens between yourself and others is influenced very much by the environment within which you are communicating and your own preoccupations.	Use this to enable bracketing and to manage your own role in communication.
	12. Become aware of your own preoccupations in order to understand what it is that people from other backgrounds are responding to.	
Unit A2.3 page 30	13. Avoid being seduced by previous experience of the exotic.	
	14. Monitor our own language and be aware of the destructive, culturist discourses we might be conforming to or perpetuating.	
	Representation	
Unit A3.1 page 36	15. Be aware of the media, political and institutional influences in our own society which lead us to see people from other cultural backgrounds in a certain way.	Seek a deeper understanding of the representations of the foreign Other which are perpetuated by society.
	16. See through these images and fictions when we encounter people from other cultural backgrounds, and always try to consider alternative representations.	
Unit A3.2 page 41	17. Be aware of dominant discourses which are easily perpetuated by the media, and which lead us to 'think-as-usual' that familiar images of the foreign Other are 'normal'.	
	18. Be aware that even images projected by sensitive, intellectual sources can seduce our own sensitivities and intellects into thinking that they are 'true'.	
	19. Although sensationalism in the media is something we know about and guard against, we need to appreciate how deeply it exists in our traditional views of the foreign Other.	

Although for the most part the disciplines relate directly to the substantive knowledge required for successful intercultural communication, there is also a research methodology, focused on bracketing, thick description and emergent data, which comes directly from mainstream qualitative research. This will be the main approach presented in Section C.