

## Intercultural interactions and cultural transformation

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Increasingly psychologists are going beyond the study of cultural differences to study *cultural dynamics*, the formation, maintenance, and transformation of cultural representations over time (Kashima, 2008). At the vanguard of this movement, Kashima (2014, this issue) elucidates how communication pragmatics involving ‘common ground’ work to create and then perpetuate cultural representations and identities. Common ground is ‘a set of meanings that are mutually known, believed, presupposed, or taken for granted by the participants of a joint activity’ (Kashima, 2014, this issue). People form common ground in an interaction not only through what is explicitly said but also through what they infer from the other’s affiliations and histories. In a conversational process called grounding, one interactant checks his or her interpretation of the other’s words and the other confirms this interpretation. As a result, both interactants are left with the perception that the other shares the belief.

Similar results follow from broader forms of ingroup communications. When someone speaks in a way that assumes some belief (a comedian’s inside jokes, a politician’s use of coded rhetoric) and the audience acknowledges the point (laughs at the joke, claps at the political reference), everyone comes away with the sense that this belief is shared. Similarly, Anderson (2006) analyzed how mass media (nationally broadcast radio, widely circulated newspapers) contribute to citizens forming a notion of national common ground. In sum, perceptions of belief consensus (i.e. cultural representations) are the precipitate of ingroup interactions. These perceptions of belief consensus then contribute to people’s notions of what distinguishes their group from others (i.e. ingroup identities or prototypes).

Speakers use assumed common ground to tailor communication and to craft statements that are easily interpretable but not obvious (Clark, 1996). Audiences also use it to disambiguate and interpret a speaker’s utterances (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). Every act of using common ground increases the sharedness of a given belief (and the mutual perception of its sharedness). In sum, everyday ingroup communication exploits shared beliefs and also perpetuates them.

Although cultural formation and maintenance are underexplored problems, cultural transformation is an even greater challenge. Ultimately a science of cultural dynamics ought to strive to identify a common set of mechanisms that underlie both cultural persistence and cultural transformation. In this essay, we argue that some important forces for cultural transformation come from intercultural interactions – communicating, interacting and coping with other cultures. Kashima (2014, this issue) focuses on within-culture communication. This comes in a tradition of explaining a culture as internal to a discrete population, a view that Sperber (1996) summarized as ‘culture is the precipitate of cognition and communication in a human population.’ However, no culture is unaffected by its neighbors; cultures influence each other through the individuals who span them. So a given culture is shaped not only by within-group interactions but also by interactions across cultures.

Here we analyze how some of the same processes that Kashima (2014, this issue) describes in within-group interactions play out in across-group interactions. The same communication processes that work toward cultural maintenance in within-group interactions become springs for cultural transformation in across-group interactions. First we focus on how motives relevant to common ground distort people’s retelling of stories. While they perpetuate stereotypes in communication within a cultural group, they produce stereotype-challenging messages in communication across cultural groups. Second, we review findings from several literatures on how cross-cultural interactions affect cultural identities. As social identity research has found, people construct an image of the prototypical ingroup member in part by contrasting against salient outgroups. Recent cultural psychology research explores how inflows of foreign groups give rise, under some conditions, to cultural closure – defensive psychological processes and social movements that narrow ingroup identities.

### Story transmission biases and outgroups

The classic work of Bartlett (1932) on communication chains found that as students retell stories to their peers, the story content becomes increasingly conventionalized. If the original story corresponds to a culturally conventional plot

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in some respects but not in others, stereotype-inconsistent details drop out with each retelling. This conventionalization process contributes to the maintenance of cultural representations, as it converts a novel story into a conventional story.

While the common ground within any given group is ever evolving, two kinds of communicated information can be defined according to their congruence with the current common ground. Kashima (2014, this issue) proposes that these two kinds of information differentially serve two goals of communication – social connectivity and informativeness. Common ground *consistent* information in a message helps with interpersonal bonding because it is easily comprehensible, but it does not help the message be informative or newsworthy. Common ground *inconsistent* information is less useful for bonding but it raises the newsworthiness of the message. Hence, speakers are faced with an informativeness-connectivity dilemma. They choose how much common ground consistent information to include based on how much bonding is needed. Much everyday communication among neighbours or acquaintances is done in service of building or maintaining relationships, suggesting that the connectivity goal looms large. Consistent with this, Kashima's studies of communication chains find that as stories about a stereotyped character, such as a politician or football player, are retold, transmissions become more and more biased toward stereotype consistent detail (Clark & Kashima, 2007; Lyons & Kashima, 2006). The shared stereotype serves as common ground within ingroup audiences, and the goal of connectivity favours common ground consistent detail. Ultimately the stereotype is perpetuated by the conventionalized retellings that result. [Not only the audience but also the communicator would be more likely to believe the stereotype after the telling (Echterhoff, Higgins & Levine, 2009).]

Kashima notes some findings about conditions under which common ground *inconsistent* detail is transmitted, conditions where communication transforms rather than maintains shared cultural representations. Not surprisingly, stereotype-inconsistencies survive when their informativeness is emphasized – when the theme of the story is the falsity of the stereotype (Goodman, Webb & Stewart, 2009) or when the inconsistencies are explained in the story (Simpson & Kashima, 2013). More interestingly, inconsistencies survive when interactants are connected by a strong tie (friendship) rather than a weak tie (acquaintanceship), presumably because less bonding is needed (Ruscher, Santuzzi & Hammer, 2003).

We propose that communication with cultural outgroups is another condition that fosters the survival of stereotype-inconsistent details. With an outgroup audience, the goal of social connectivity does not imply a bias toward stereotype-consistent detail, because the stereotype would not serve as common ground with this audience. The freedom and crea-

tivity made possible by outgroup interactions is a classic sociological theme. Simmel (1908/1950) observed that when interacting with a stranger as opposed to an acquaintance, people are more likely to shed their inhibitions and express unconventional ideas. Park (1931) described the immigrant or ethnic minority as a 'marginal man' whose communications and interactions span two cultural communities, potentially leading to ideas that transcend the conventions of these communities.

Research in our lab (Liu & Morris, 2014) used Kashima's story retelling paradigm to test this by comparing chains of story retellings to ingroup members and outgroup members. Participants were given a written story describing a typically image-conscious, instrumental politician (adapted from the politician story used by Lyons & Kashima, 2006). The story consisted of equal amounts of details consistent with the politician stereotype and details inconsistent with this stereotype. Upon finishing some filler tasks after reading the story, participants unexpectedly were asked to retell the story to a purported audience so that he or she would be able to retell it to someone else. Participants were randomly assigned to either an ingroup audience, who was described as 'a person from Washington D. C., the capital of the United States. The person grew up, studied, and currently works in that city,' or an outgroup audience, who was described as 'a person from a tribe in KwaZulu-Natal, which is a province of South Africa under the reign of its own king. People there maintain the pastoral lifestyles of their ancestors, raising goats.' The retellings of the original story were passed to participants in the second position of the chain to read, and their retellings were then passed to those in the third position of the chain to read. In the ingroup condition, results replicated Kashima's standard finding. Participants included more stereotype-consistent information than stereotype-inconsistent information in their retellings of the original story. In the outgroup condition, however, this bias disappeared; participants included equal proportions of stereotype-consistent and inconsistent information from the original story.

This finding suggests that intercultural interfaces will be sites of cultural transformation. People who speak to outgroup audiences regularly will be less prone to the conventionalization bias in the serial transmission of information, a mechanism for cultural maintenance. These cosmopolitan circles, then, may be sites where observations that contradict conventional beliefs survive retellings and therefore have more chance of changing people's stereotypes.

## Identities and outgroups

While our argument that intergroup communication transforms cultural beliefs is relatively novel, the role of

intergroup interaction in the construction of ingroup identities has been explored in several literatures. Social identity research delineated how social perceivers make use of a salient outgroup in constructing perceptions of the ingroup's characteristics (Brewer, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1987). A particularly important representation of the ingroup identity is the image of the prototypical ingroup member, and this is determined in part by maximizing difference to members of the salient outgroup (Hogg & Terry, 2000). For instance, after Hong Kong was handed over as a territory from England to China, many of its denizens shifted from identifying as 'Chinese' (a contrast to the salient outgroup 'English') to identifying as 'HongKonger' (a contrast to the new salient outgroup 'Mainlander') (Chiu & Hong, 1999).

While social identity research explores effects of changes in the salient outgroup category, other research programs examine how exposure to artefacts and ideas from other cultures can spark cultural change. Globalization refers to the increased flow of people, organizations, products and images across national lines in recent decades enabled by changes in communication and transportation technology (Appadurai, 1996). People respond to inflows of foreign cultures in several ways. One way involves learning the second culture as stock of frames and practices. This produces changes in behaviour as individuals blend practices from two cultures in creative hybrid behaviours (Chiu, Gries, Torelli & Cheng, 2011; Leung & Chiu, 2010). Or individuals who have become bicultural can respond to cues of the foreign culture by adhering to its norms (Hong, Morris, Chiu & Benet-Martinez, 2000) or defying them (Mok & Morris, 2013). Some of the novel

practices borrowed from immigrant communities diffuse widely enough to become the new mainstream, changing the common ground and transforming the culture (e.g. curry in England).

Another way that people respond to foreign cultural inflows that can change the ingroup culture is construing them as threats. Individuals low in openness to other cultures respond to displays of cultural mixing with heightened need for cognitive closure (Morris, Mok & Mor, 2011) as well as judgments that exaggerate cultural differences and stereotype individuals (Chiu, Mallorie, Keh & Law, 2009). These changed judgments can become a new common ground. Political theorists have documented that reactionary social movements, whether fascist or fundamentalist, feature a narrowing of shared collective identities in response to perceived threats of foreign influx or contamination (see Morris *et al.*, 2011).

## Conclusion

In sum, the role of common ground in communication and identification provides a basis for a more dynamic cultural psychology. Here we have advocated extending Kashima's analysis of these processes to communication and interaction across cultural groups as well as that within groups. In this era of globalization, cross-cultural interactions occur more frequently than ever before. Hence, cultures may also be transforming more than ever before, in ways that are important to understand. We have tried to sketch some mechanisms that can underlie both cultural maintenance and cultural transformation.

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