



PASOS. Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural

ISSN: 1695-7121

info@pasosonline.org

Universidad de La Laguna
España

Matusitz, Jonathan

Relationship between Knowledge, Stereotyping, and Prejudice in Interethnic Communication

PASOS. Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural, vol. 10, núm. 1, enero, 2012, pp. 89-98

Universidad de La Laguna

El Sauzal (Tenerife), España

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=88123053008>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in redalyc.org

redalyc.org

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative

Relationship between Knowledge, Stereotyping, and Prejudice in Interethnic Communication

Jonathan Matusitzⁱ

University of Central Florida (USA)

Abstract: This study describes, analyzes, critiques, and synthesizes four theories pertaining to interethnic communication: the contact hypothesis, Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory, Cultural Theory, and the White Racial Identity Development Model. All center on the relationship between knowledge, stereotyping, and prejudice. What is valuable about those theories is that they attempt to integrate communication into a perspective on cultural, behavioral, social, interactional, and developmental transformations. What the four theories have in common is that the understanding and development of healthy interethnic relations and flexible interactions require a high degree of in-group communication and, at the same time, an equally high degree of out-group communication. To corroborate the major arguments put forward in this study, relevant research studies (and the methodological underpinnings thereof) are analyzed. Three levels of knowledge (highest level of knowledge, middle level of knowledge, and lowest level of knowledge) are also compared in an attempt to confirm, or disconfirm, the idea that increased knowledge of minority groups increases liking of such groups..

Keywords: AUM; Contact hypothesis; Cultural Theory; Interethnic communication; Knowledge; Prejudice; Stereotyping.

Título: Relaciones entre el conocimiento, los estereotipos y los prejuicios en la comunicación interétnica

Resumen: Este estudio describe, analiza, critica y sintetiza cuatro teorías sobre la comunicación interétnica: la hipótesis del contacto, Teoría de la gestión ansiedad/incertidumbre, Teoría cultural y el Modelo *White Racial* de desarrollo de la identidad. Todas se centran en la relación entre el conocimiento, los estereotipos y los prejuicios. Lo valioso de estas teorías es que tratan de integrar la comunicación en una perspectiva sobre las transformaciones culturales, conductuales, sociales, de interacción y de desarrollo. Las cuatro tienen en común la comprensión de que para el desarrollo de saludables y flexibles relaciones interétnicas se requiere un alto grado de comunicación dentro y fuera del grupo. Para corroborar los argumentos presentados en este estudio, se analizan las investigaciones y metodologías en este momento relevantes. Se comparan, además, tres niveles de conocimiento (alto, medio, bajo) en un intento de confirmar o refutar la idea de que un mayor conocimiento de los grupos minoritarios incrementa la aceptación y vinculación a los mismos.

Palabras clave: AUM; Hipótesis de contacto; Teoría cultural; Comunicación interétnica; conocimiento; Prejuicio; Estereotipo.

ⁱ Assistant Professor in the Nicholson School of Communication at the University of Central Florida.. E-mail: matusitz@gmail.com.

Introduction

This study describes, analyzes, critiques, and synthesizes four theories pertaining to interethnic communication: the contact hypothesis, Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory, Cultural Theory, and the White Racial Identity Development Model. All theories center on the relationship between knowledge, stereotyping, and prejudice. This study also analyzes relevant research studies and the methodological underpinnings thereof. As we have entered a new millennium, stereotyping and prejudice, two of the most recurrent interracial and interethnic problems in the United States and in the world today, are constantly on the rise. As humans, we are inclined to having prejudicial attitudes towards people whom we think are different than us. The reason undoubtedly stems from an insufficient amount of knowledge about others, the product of ignorance, lack of information, lack of education, or limited exposure to the members of other cultures and ethnic lifestyles (Lowy, 1991). No wonder why stereotypes are inherently “bad” or “wrong,” because they are illogical in origin, resistant in contradiction, and morally wrong (Hewstone & Giles, 1986). This human response to ethnic forms of differences, the ones that make human beings prejudice others on the basis of limited knowledge, especially if they are different from us, reinforces the boundaries dividing ethnic or racial groups and increases the likelihood of intergroup conflict. Truly, if we want to refrain ourselves from responding to such racist appeals, it would be better for us to understand how we are manipulated by them (Whillock & Slayden, 1995).

In the following section, a detailed literature review on stereotyping, prejudice, and their relationship with knowledge is provided. Three levels of knowledge (highest level of knowledge, middle level of knowledge, and lowest level of knowledge) are also compared in an attempt to confirm – or disconfirm – the idea that increased knowledge about and acquaintance with members of minority groups increase liking of such groups and make for tolerant and friendly attitudes.

Literature Review

Human beings have been learning about conflict since its origin as a species. Knowledge, then, is not an orderly package to be passed along or handed down. It is spread across humanity. It resides wherever humans live, work, and play. The ways of “doing” conflict in and between ethnic groups around the world are numerous. It is passed down from parent to child, from generation to generation. It is transmitted from one life experience to the next. It is created within generations, as humans learn better how to regulate their interaction with minimal cost. As Kim (1995) puts it, “American society has for decades been at the forefront in dealing with issues of ethnic interface” (p. 347). Nowadays, one of main social problems remains how to combat the nefarious social practice of racial stereotyping and prejudice.

Stereotyping and prejudice play a significant role in the human psyche. We all know that the targets of stereotyping and prejudice can be hurt by them. Besides, people who are the object of unfair bias can adopt the negative traits attributed to them (Seeber, 2001). The most extensively studied interventions designed to reduce racist attitude and stereotyping are based on Gordon Allport’s (1954) contact theory of intergroup relations. The necessary conditions for prejudice reduction suggested by contact theory are that: individuals be of equal status; individuals work toward common goals; competition for scarce resources be absent; strong support from relevant authorities be given; and, above all, interracial contact be sustained and individuals gain more knowledge about other ethnic groups. A detailed definition of stereotyping, prejudice, and their relationship with knowledge in interethnic communication is now provided.

Stereotyping

The mere stereotyping and categorization of people into groups is sufficient to trigger intergroup discrimination (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1987). Stereotyping occurs when the perception one has about the other is category-based, in which case he or she would be squeezing the other into a niche (Gamble & Gamble, 2002), judging the other on the basis of what he or she knows about the category to which he or she feels the other belongs. Yes, others – whom we label “perceivers” – do a stereotyping of us when they generalize and categorize us. As Fiske and Neuberg (1990) put it,

perceivers initially categorize others immediately upon encountering information sufficient for cueing a meaningful social category. This information may be in the form of a physical feature (e.g., skin color, clothing, hair style), a verbalized or written category label (e.g., “Melissa is a banker”), a configuration of category-consistent attributes that cue a label in the memory (e.g., young, male, disheveled, defiant expression, carries a knife), or some other forms of information that becomes accessible concurrently with the initial perception of the target individual (p. 4).

Stereotypes serve important functions, such as reducing the complexity of incoming information, facilitating rapid identification of stimuli, and predicting and guiding behavior (Hewstone & Giles, 1986). What is also important in the context of stereotyping is that individuals are perceived in a specific way because they are a member of a group, a particular socially-meaningful class, such as an ethnic group. Individuals belonging to the stereotyped ethnic group are assumed to be similar to each other, and different from other groups, on a particular set of attributes. The set of attributes is pinned on any individual member of that category and expectations about indi-

viduals will be formed on the basis of the ethnic group to which they belong, even if those individuals have never been met (Detweiler, 1986).

Stereotyping is a significant issue among minorities as it has been between Caucasians and minorities. In fact, a variety of ethnic groups share the same stereotypes as Caucasians. Stereotypes about Hispanics in the United States include that they are not educated, have a lot of children, and do not speak English. Commonly held stereotypes about Asians put forward the idea that they are emotionless, inscrutable, disloyal, and that they own restaurants and laundries. White Americans are stereotyped as being boisterous, loud, and money-oriented, whereas African Americans are categorized as dumb (Gamble & Gamble, 2002), employed in menial work, poorly educated, and stereotyped in the media (Hewstone & Giles, 1986).

Truly, it is very difficult to alter traditional racist stereotypes. A person with dark brown skin will trigger an image of "Negro" that is dominant in our mind. If the dominant category is "one composed of negative attitudes and beliefs, we will automatically avoid him or her, or adopt whichever habit of rejection is most available to us" (Allport, 1954, p. 20).

In line with these contentions, Europe has held a lot of stereotypes about groups that might be less prominent in the United States. For instance, gypsies are pigeonholed as stealers; Arabs are often disregarded for being criminals, jobless, and people living on social benefits provided by the government; and individuals from the Mediterranean area such as Greeks and Turks are considered as lazy and bellicose.

Prejudice

Prejudice is a false belief based on faulty generalizations about members of selected racial and ethnic groups. Prejudice is based on stereotypes and can impede effective and efficient intergroup communication. What makes prejudice so sinister is not just the act of prejudging a person or a group, but also the fact that it is inflexible, defends privilege, and even after evidence to the contrary will not change, so that the post-judgment is the same as the pre-judgment. In the definition of prejudice, the indictment is greater for post-judgment than for pre-judgment. If one does not have post-judgment in one's definition of prejudice, then one does not know what one is talking about. This is because racial prejudgment is the refusal to change one's attitude even after evidence to the contrary, so that one will continue to post-judge people the same way one prejudged them.

One of Pack-Brown's (1999) definitions of racism is a prejudicial attitude that subordinates individuals or groups of individuals because of physical characteristics, such as skin color and body features. Such use of subordination is, unfortunately, present in education as well. For instance, Johnson, Johnson, and Maruyama (1984) argue that prejudice exists among heterogeneous students, that

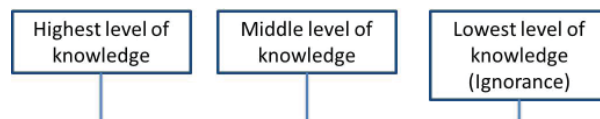
is, students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, prior to their interacting with one another in the classroom. When initial contact is made among heterogeneous students, their first impression is formed on the basis of potent characteristics, that is, superficial characteristics (e.g., skin color, but also hair, shape of the nose, etc.) that overshadow much observed behavior or even positive aspects of ethnic identity.

Knowledge about ethnic identity is only a beginning step in a complex process. Since knowing the self and one's subjective location allows one to interpret reality (Sefa Dei, 1999), then practice and experience are the contextual basis for knowledge and the mere fact of experiencing racial or ethnic oppressions could provide relevant and useful knowledge to work for anti-stereotyping and anti-prejudice change. A framework for understanding the role of knowledge in relation with stereotyping and prejudice is needed.

The Relationship between Knowledge, Stereotyping, and Prejudice

By definition, according to the Merriam-Webster College Dictionary, knowledge is familiarity with something or someone through experience or association, awareness of something or someone, understanding something or someone, or cognition, that is, the fact or condition of having information or of being learned, of something or someone. As one can see, the concept of knowledge is related to four terms: familiarity (or contact, or even association), awareness, understanding, and cognition. A distinction, however, should be drawn between knowledge – the product of a systematic, empirical process – and wisdom – which is derived from experience and where the evidence for a conclusion may not be articulated or may even be unknown.

Knowledge is linked with culture, identity, experience, and social practice (Sefa Dei, 1999). Culture is implicated in how we express our thoughts and experiences spiritually and cognitively. Knowledge is also produced through a given space. There are different types or, to be more precise, different levels of knowledge. Using a "knowledge" continuum, I would like to compare three levels of knowledge: the highest level of knowledge, the middle level of knowledge, and the lowest level of knowledge (or sheer ignorance).



On the left side of the continuum, the highest level of knowledge of another ethnic group implies that possessing a lot of information about a group's culture, behavior, language, and way of life in general should increase liking. Indeed, it is oftentimes believed that it is through

a great deal of knowledge that we are able to understand and appreciate the perspective of the other (Ward, 1991). Into an increasingly insecure and competitive environment, distinctions cast as ethnic differences can become the basis for distrust and fear (Hewstone & Giles, 1986). Therefore, it is considered imperative to know more about the other, which can help one quit his or her using of stereotypes and prejudice.

In the middle of the continuum lies the middle level of knowledge. We have seen that good knowledge of how an out-group member's racial identity interacts with his or her experience is crucial, as is the in-group member's awareness of her or his own racial identity. Now what happens when one "somewhat" knows about the other's ethnic identity? More stereotypes and discriminative behavior will occur. The generation of those fair – or even poor – knowledge forms about social practices of ethnic minorities undoubtedly contribute to various forms of racism. Through discursive practice, knowledge about ethnic minority groups is mostly produced, policed, and regulated in the academy. Unfortunately, the discursive practice responsible for constructing and regulating a specific body of knowledge about the "other" is sometimes lacking substantiality. No wonder why stereotypes exist.

On the right side of the continuum lies the lowest level of knowledge, that is, ignorance, the main cause of interethnic conflict, such as interpersonal and intergroup violence. Ignorance is simply the state of being destitute of knowledge about something or someone. Increased ignorance increases the likelihood of ethnic identification (strengthened ethnic boundaries); racism (hatred against ethnic competitors); and ethnic mobilization (movements and collective action). But, more importantly, ignorance leads to stereotyping, prejudice, and myth about the other.

Ignorance leads to stereotyping. Just as stereotyping is an obstacle to competent communication, it is ignorance or the lack of correct information that leads to such social grouping (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). The incorrect information one may have about people of diverse ethnicities multiplied by their use of stereotypes will lead to an unwillingness to let go of their old ideologies. However, there is no reason to use stereotypes. Bad information is the child of ignorance and ignorance is the mother of failure to communicate effectively. When one has the opportunity to meet or work with someone from a diverse background, one has to investigate for oneself. One will find that when one keeps an open mind, one will not be afraid because the person is more like oneself than one thought.

Ignorance leads to prejudice. There is no doubt that in the United States there is considerable attitude and mistrust between members of majority and minority groups (Johnson, Johnson, & Maruyama, 1984) due to ignorance. People learn from their childhood through media and parents' stories to adopt prejudicial attitudes towards out-groups. The familiar is preferred. What is different is regarded as sometimes inferior, less "good," although

there is not necessarily hostility against it (Allport, 1954).

Ignorance leads to myth about the other, those myths about differences that do not exist (Stephan & Stephan, 1984). Myth implies fictitious reality of the unknown. But why are we so often misinformed about groups? The answer is simple: the lowest level of knowledge about ethnic minority groups, as well as oppressed groups and those who are lower in social status, contributes to the belief that higher status groups are privileged and that it is legitimate. Therefore, myths about those ethnic minorities (i.e., that they will always remain inferior, that they are not educated, etc.) will persist.

However, one can wonder whether or not increased knowledge of other ethnic groups always confirms increased liking of other ethnic groups. One should be aware of the fact that not all individuals use their knowledge (or their ignorance) in the same way. Allport (1954) concludes that oftentimes "knowledge of other groups derived through free communication is as a rule correlated with lessened hostility and prejudice" (p. 226). In the same train of thought, much hope has been invested in the idea that stereotype-disconfirming contact with out-groups will reduce or erase stereotypes (Hewstone & Giles, 1986).

On the other hand, does gaining more information through education always influence positively our attitudes towards the "other"? According to Cortes (1995), by participating in the social construction of knowledge about ethnicity, education on race and ethnicity both interacts with and affects personal identity, both challenges and reinforces intergroup prejudice, contributes to both intergroup understanding and intergroup misunderstanding, and influences expectations, hopes, and fears about diversity. Cortes's answer is YES and NO. Knowledge is of many types. For this reason, our generalization is loose and taken by itself not very helpful. For instance, it seems probable that self-acquired knowledge, gained through first-hand experience, is more effective than information sprayed upon us by lectures, textbooks, or various media such as television.

One reason why it is difficult to determine if increased knowledge of the "other" reduces stereotyping and prejudice lies in the fact that knowledge is a social product (Brewer, 1995). Therefore, in the presentation of knowledge as "truth," the often contradictory constructions and contested meanings of identities and subjectivities of minority groups are often lost (Sefa Dei, 1999). Truly, is there legitimate knowledge about ethnicity? Knowledge, history, and politics have spiritual dimensions that are revealed in indigenous subjectivity and in the knowledge one brings to a progressive politics of social change. The self is a site of knowledge production (Sefa Dei, 1999).

All in all, different perspectives on knowledge have been offered. Increased knowledge may or may not confirm increased liking of other groups and the reduction of stereotypes and prejudice. In order to have a better understanding of the complex linkage of those two factors with knowledge, four theories were selected in this study: the contact hypothesis, Anxiety/Uncertainty Ma-

nagement (AUM) Theory, Cultural Theory, and the White Racial Identity Development Model.

Four Theories Linking Knowledge with Stereotyping and Prejudice

The Contact Hypothesis

The first theory is Gordon Allport's (1994) contact hypothesis, or contact theory.

The contact hypothesis rests on the premise that contact and interaction between members of differently identified groups are important to recognizing similarities and gaining knowledge of "the other" (Massey & Hodson, 1999). The contact hypothesis was created to shed light on the situation of differently identified groups of which the members have more or less contact with one another, of which the power is readily tied to national identity, and which recognize similarity of nationality as a viable basis for participation in political society.

What is more critical in the contact theory is that true knowledge of another ethnic group is very likely to lessen prejudice and stereotyping. Both knowledge about and acquaintance with out-groups lessen hostility toward them (Allport, 1954). One should be aware of the fact that absence of knowledge and barriers to communication lead to ignorance, which, in turn, makes a person an easy prey to rumor, suspicion, and stereotyping. In many existing situations, the limited amount of knowledge, due to a limited amount of intergroup and interpersonal contact, would oftentimes result in strained ethnic relations.

In line with these contentions, knowledge implies tolerance, and tolerance is greatest where heterogeneity is highest, barring a situation where numerically similar ethnic groups are in competition. According to the theory, levels of tolerance, prejudice, and stereotyping are largely a function of opportunities for contact, which stem, in turn, from demographic circumstances. Allport's work suggests that where people are isolated in enclaves there is less opportunity to build trust and forge identities and interests to mitigate ethnic intolerance (Massey & Hodson, 1999). The trend of evidence favors the conclusion that knowledge about and acquaintance with members of other ethnic groups make for tolerant and friendly attitudes.

The contact hypothesis was supported in a relevant research study conducted by Massey and Hodson (1999) who compared tolerance levels among majority groups and minority groups living in various parts of ex-Yugoslavia. The two authors' prediction was that mixed locales in Yugoslavia would display the highest levels of ethnic tolerance and express less prejudice and stereotyping. Consistent with Allport's contact hypothesis, they also expected majorities to be consistently less tolerant than minorities. Though minority group members' opportunities for contact with the majority population would be somewhat diminished in mixed areas than in majority-dominated areas, contact would still be substantial, and the level of tolerance among minority group members li-

ving in mixed areas should be similar to that of minorities in areas dominated by a majority group. For persons of the majority group, living and interacting on a regular basis with others in mixed areas should bring them more knowledge and temper their intolerance. Experiences of shared living should make both minority and majority group members less susceptible to the forces of insecurity, anxiety, and fear that can encourage negative attitudes toward others.

As would be expected from the contact hypothesis, nationally diverse republics and provinces evidenced greater tolerance levels as they had more contacts and increased their levels of knowledge of other groups. By the same token, they showed less prejudice and stereotyping. Rather than focusing on the particular cultural content of a national, racial, or ethnic identity, the two authors treated each group solely in terms of its minority/majority status and the numerical relationships between groups in majority-dominated areas, ethnic enclaves, and nationally mixed areas. However, majorities evidenced higher levels of intolerance than minorities across all three structural situations analyzed, and minority groups were most intolerant when living in an enclave as a local numerical majority.

On the whole, the contact hypothesis is powerful for several reasons. It is the first theory to predict that there should be more tolerance as a result of greater contact among groups, that knowledge about and acquaintance with members of other ethnic groups make for tolerant and friendly attitudes, and that a lack of knowledge oftentimes results in stereotyping and discrimination. Besides, the theory focuses on truly structural features of ethnic relations and rejects the seemingly simple truism that familiarity breeds contempt, which has enabled many other scholars to conduct studies on intergroup relations in other academic disciplines.

In spite of the success of the contact hypothesis and the fact that Gordon Allport's original insights into group contact and attitude stimulated decades of important research and thinking, it should be noted that the relationship between knowledge, positive attitude, and absence of stereotyping towards other ethnic groups is by no means perfect. Indeed, it might not always be the case that knowledge causes friendliness, or whether friendliness invites the acquiring of knowledge. As Allport (1954) put it, we are not totally ignorant of our worst enemies, as shown in his excerpt below:

Those who know most about other races and peoples tend to have favorable attitudes about them. However, while we tend to feel friendly to those nations about which we have most knowledge, we likewise have considerable knowledge about those nations we hate. In other words, the law of the inverse relation between knowledge and hostility fails to hold at the extreme degree of hostility (p. 226).

As we can see, one might think that increased knowledge of an ethnic group would lead directly to positive attitude, but it does not follow that attitudes will change

automatically and stereotyping will vanish. One may, for example, learn that Hispanic blood is not different in composition from Caucasian blood without thereby learning to like Mexicans or Cubans. Plenty of rationalizations for prejudice and stereotyping are available to people who have a good deal of sound knowledge.

Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM)

A second theory analyzed in this study is Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory, introduced by Gudykunst (1995). Based on Charles Berger's Uncertainty Reduction Theory, AUM was designed to explain effective face-to-face communication. It focuses on intercultural and interethnic encounters between in-groups and out-groups and assumes that individuals attempt to reduce uncertainty in initial interactions with strangers. Interethnic encounters between people where obvious differences exist trigger doubts and fears. Gudykunst replaced the word "doubt" with "uncertainty" and the word "fear" with "anxiety." Uncertainty is our lack of understanding and inability to predict outcomes (Gudykunst, Chua, & Gray, 1987). It is cognitive. Anxiety is the feeling of being uneasy, tense, or apprehensive about what might happen. It is affective. Anxiety and uncertainty are the basic causes of communication failure in interethnic situations.

Besides, during intercultural or interethnic encounters, people tend to overestimate the effect of cultural identity on the behavior of a group in an alien society and blur individual distinctions. Consequently, stereotyping and prejudice emerge. In order to avoid interethnic miscommunication – which oftentimes leads to stereotyping and prejudice – one needs to communicate more effectively through conscious competence, that is, the state of thinking about our communication and continually working at changing what we do in order to become more effective in interethnic encounters (Gudykunst, 1995). Consciousness competence is also called mindfulness. Mindfulness is the process of thinking in new categories, being open to new information, and recognizing multiple perspectives. For instance, if two foreign workers have to collaborate on an everyday basis and barely know the other's language, they would be considered mindful if they continually concentrate on their communication efforts and work very hard to get their messages across. Many times they would have to find different ways to communicate, such as non-verbal signals, to be more effective.

The theory also posits that effective communication is the process of minimizing misunderstandings and increasing knowledge (Gudykunst, Nashida, & Schmidt, 1989). As a matter of fact, increased knowledge of the other group's language, increased ability to share knowledge about the other group, and increased familiarity between an in-group and an out-group decreases uncertainty and anxiety, predicts the other's behavior (Gudykunst & Nashida, 1986), and increases personal confidence and liking of the other group. Since it increases the liking of the other group, it decreases the use of stereotyping and prejudice on the part of the in-group.

As one can see, knowledge is one of the main factors that can effect the levels of anxiety and uncertainty in interethnic encounters (Gudykunst, 1995). The fact that one is open to new information and motivated to gain knowledge about and experience the culture of an ethnic group helps ease the uncertainty and anxiety. Gaining information on an ethnic group's culture allows one to have reasonable expectations of the ethnic group, an awareness of the similarities and differences that could be experienced, as well as general background information. Increased knowledge of another group leads to increased liking of the group and, by the same token, a reduction of the use of stereotypes and prejudice.

Overall, Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory is powerful and heuristic. It is a strong theory that directly deals with effective communication through a process of minimizing misunderstanding and gaining more knowledge of the other ethnic group. Understanding AUM may help us explain and predict our own interactions with others in our own environments. The theory also sparks interest in managing uncertainty and anxiety and focuses on the scientific goals of prediction and explanation of human behavior (Gudykunst & Nashida, 1986). Indeed, it has significant explanatory power for explaining human behavior and is predictive in that it claims the same process occurs for each encounter between strangers.

However, AUM is somewhat difficult to maneuver. For instance, it seems that the theory does not thoroughly describe the role of self and self-concept in interaction with strangers. In other words, AUM only gives a broad picture of cultural encounters of in-groups and out-groups. Furthermore, it is very complex in that it has many different explanations for phenomena that happen in situations within the intercultural context.

Cultural Theory

A third theory analyzed in this study is Cultural Theory, introduced by Douglas (Douglas, 1994). Cultural Theory rests on the premise that people view the world through the lens of their way of life, generally interpret events in ways that reinforce that way of life, and do not try to gain knowledge about other groups' ways of life. The theory posits a limited number of viable ways of life, consisting of patterns of social relations. It also helps us think about the way other groups behave, as well as their reasoning. It analyzes various practices, draws out underlying patterns, and attempts to explain underlying similarities and differences between different groups without tying them to outward criteria such as wealth, religion, and so on (Douglas, 1992). In a similar fashion, the theory suggests that ways of life are composed of coherent, consistent packages of preferences and biases. Such preferences and biases, not surprisingly, lead to intergroup conflict. Ethnic group members will be biased towards their own groups and use generalizations (stereotyping), prejudice, and other forms of discrimination to describe other ethnic groups. In addition, within a community, there will be a variety of cultural biases among groups that com-

pete to define the public debate and control the direction in which society moves. One group may predominate and define terms for the community, but there will generally be competing ways of life. These ways of life will be found in dissenting groups or practices and embedded within dominant institutions (Wildavsky, 1985).

One major study was conducted in Nigeria (Spalding, 2000), where the three dominant ethnic groups are the Hausas, the Ibos, and the Yorubas. The three societies distinguish themselves by their ethnic preferences, biases, and attitudes, and above all, ethnocentrism. The Hausa society is organized on strong hierarchical principles, with many prescriptions, clear status differentials, and a strong group sense. Hence, the Hausas identify with their fellow group members, have poor knowledge about the Ibos and the Yorubas, whom they despise too, and follow the rules appropriate for their station in life. The Ibos, in contrast, are individualist; they value merit and personal achievement rather than ascription determined status; high rank is open to all; and group obligations are limited. They seek freedom, merit and competition, rather than order, as legitimate driving forces of society, and believe they have the unassailable right to compete openly. They have poor knowledge about the two other societies and display a negative attitude towards them. The Yorubas, threatened by the Ibos' aggressiveness, walk with a difficult balance, with a culture that is a balance of individualism and hierarchy.

This research shows that Cultural Theory adds to our understanding of the situation among ethnic groups, such as those in Nigeria. Overall, the theory is powerful in that it does not only suggest that all members of a community share one way of life, but also that there are a limited number of viable ways of life between which people will move, which, in turn, will have an effect on how those people view other ethnic groups. Since ethnic groups have different ways of life, every member will concentrate on their own group, gain knowledge about their own group, but not about other groups. However, if the three ethnic groups possess more knowledge about one another, they would like each other better, and, therefore, be less prejudiced. Each way of life has its own costs and benefits, so there are consequences on intergroup relations, often-times resulting in conflict, stereotyping, discrimination, and, above all, ethnocentrism.

More importantly, Cultural Theory adds to our understanding and knowledge of intercultural contacts and of other cultures' worlds (Inglehart & Carballo, 1997). It helps to explain why people have preferences, attitudes, and biases, and why they accept some circumstances and challenge others. However, Cultural Theory presents an important limitation. Although it describes clearly the position of a group in a given society, it does not compare the hierarchical status of different groups in a same environment, which could have helped readers to better understand why the Hausas, Ibos, and Yorubas are in conflict in Nigeria. Explaining intergroup tensions by their preferences, biases, or attitudes is insufficient if one does not

know which group has a low status and which group has a high status.

White Racial Identity Development Model

A fourth theory that is analyzed is the White Racial Identity Development Model, developed by Helms (1995). The theory rests on the premise that White individuals express certain feelings, behaviors, and attitudes towards other ethnic groups to deal with race-related information and incidents. Racial identification also occurs in response to the sociopolitical reality of the differential allocation of resources to racial groups. In the United States, this has resulted in unfair and unearned privilege for Whites and thus a sense of entitlement (Silvestri & Richardson, 2001). In contrast, other racial groups such as African Americans have experienced racial victimization. Another premise of the theory is that racial identity typically develops as people move from a lack of knowledge of their own racial background to knowledge and integration of their race in comparison with other races (Daniel, 2001).

Helms (1995) used six "ego statuses" to describe the White racial identity developmental process: (1) Contact: absence of knowledge due to obliviousness to or avoidance of racial stimuli; (2) Disintegration: misunderstanding about previously internalized and accepted beliefs regarding racial information; (3) Reintegration: distortion of information to enhance the status of an individual's own racial group; (4) Pseudo-Independence: distortion of information to be consistent with a "liberal" perspective; (5) Immersion/Emersion: actively gaining knowledge to create internalized racial standards; and (6) Autonomy: flexible interaction with and a complex understanding of racial stimuli (Silvestri & Richardson, 2001).

What is critical in the White Racial Identity Development Model is that it focuses on a set of emotional, behavioral, and knowledge-related processes that the individual uses to interpret and therefore interact with racial information in his or her environment. Helms (1995) proposed that more advanced statuses of racial identity allow for greater complexity in intrapersonal as well as interpersonal processes, especially when faced with ethnic groups one does not know. As one develops more advanced statuses of racial identity, one begins to abandon his or her using of stereotyping and prejudice in favor of a more complex understanding of situations (Helms & Carter, 1993), which leads to flexible interaction and increased liking.

One major research using the White Racial Identity Development Model was conducted in a community support center (Richardson & Helms, 1994). A number of people who experience discrimination through stereotyping and prejudice cope through reliance on family and other community supports, while others seek professional help. The majority of counselors are White, which often-times makes their experiences with discrimination limited. Consequently, their levels of knowledge are different than the victims'. During the study, specific attention was paid to the counselor's White racial statuses, the client's

ethnic background – usually an ethnic minority member – and how they interacted within the counseling process. The research concluded that counselors lacked knowledge about their clients' groups' cultures, which prevented proper help.

The study of racial identity development among counselors reveals that race is an important variable in the counseling process and that lower levels of counselor racial identity are related to negative client reactions (Evans & Foster, 2000). It is generally believed that multicultural training increases knowledge of the "other" and, therefore, increases pluralism and reduces prejudice and stereotyping among trainees, thus raising their levels of racial identity development. It is not surprising that higher levels of moral awareness, reasoning, and understanding, as demonstrated by the ability to use multiple cognitive schemas, have been associated with more advanced stages of White racial identity among European American counselor trainees. Through demonstrating knowledge of the client's culture, multicultural counseling skills (competencies), and offering a "gift," future counselors would be more able to offer help to their clients. For instance, initial meetings between counselors and their ethnic minority clients would be considered congruent if they were based on direct familiarity or experience with divergent racial or ethnic groups rather than didactic lectures. In addition, once intimacy has been established, longer term intervention strategies may be used (i.e., opportunity to process the direct experiences buttressed with information pertinent to divergent racial or ethnic groups), as well as personality characteristics. Counselors may increase empathic understanding of the ethnic group members' experiences through personal interviews and display tolerant and friendly attitudes.

Overall, Helms' theory is rather timely and comes at a point of our history when, in the rush to find an answer to our culturally divisive society, we are tempted to rely on unreasonable solutions (Mattai, 1990). The White Racial Identity Development Model has been regarded as a strong theory in that it has helped solve issues that are related to racial identity development and stagnation (Silvestri & Richardson, 2001). The theory also encourages the integration of race and ethnic-related concepts into mainstream psychological constructs, thereby providing more depth to studies using the theory. Thirdly, Helms' theory provides much help in avoiding the tendency to assume that "personal racism results from racial isolation for both groups, and regard racial identity as a core element only of Black personalities" (Helms, 1990, p. 205). More importantly, the theory provides a solid scientific and objective base for anyone interested in genuinely fostering meaningful interracial cooperation in society. However, the White Racial Identity Development Model presents two major weaknesses. Firstly, in some studies, it does not really describe identity development, but instead describes White people's awareness and sensitivity to people of other racial/ethnic groups. Secondly, it was initially developed only in relation to Whites' interactions

with Blacks, not with other ethnic groups (Daniels, 2001). Therefore, the six stages or "ego statuses" mentioned above might not be totally applicable for the comparison with other groups.

Discussion

What is valuable about those theories on knowledge, stereotyping, and prejudice is that they attempt to integrate communication into a perspective on cultural, behavioral, social, interactional, and developmental transformations. Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory, Cultural Theory, and the White Racial Identity Development Model conclude that increased knowledge of another group confirms increased liking of the group and, by the same token, a reduction of the use of stereotypes and prejudice. The contact hypothesis, on the other hand, posits that knowledge of another ethnic group does not always lead directly to positive attitude towards the group. What those four theories have in common is that the understanding and development of healthy interethnic relations and flexible interactions require a high degree of in-group communication and, at the same time, an equally high degree of out-group communication.

Nevertheless, more work needs to be done in interethnic communication. Some theories have provided only a sketchy, fragmented picture of ethnic issues, both because of limitations in the theoretical frameworks used for studying aspects such as stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice, and because of methodological problems in the researches themselves. Similarly, when compared, theories or studies on the same issues have drawn on widely differing theoretical frameworks. Moreover, theories tend to generalize, pigeonhole, and categorize members of ethnic groups, without taking into consideration the individual experiences and backgrounds of members of those ethnic groups. As Kim, Lujan, and Dixon put it (1998), "in stressing the importance of positive cultural identity, studies dealing with ethnicity have tended to downplay the rich complexity in the way individuals experience their group identity" (p. 253).

It may prove interesting for scholars who use Cultural Theory to not only stress that every ethnic group has its own preferences and biases, that they view the world through the lens of their way of life, interpret events in ways that reinforce that way of life, and do not try to gain knowledge about other groups' ways of life, which may lead to intergroup conflict and the adoption of stereotyping and attitude. They should also emphasize that individual preferences and biases in an ethnic group play a major role. Even though culture provides the cues that can be exploited to rally support, Cultural Theory should explain those cues by systematically addressing issue content and preferences concerning individual outcomes, which define the specific direction or shape interethnic conflict takes. By the same token, Cultural Theory will better explain why individuals accept some circumstances and challenge others.

More research is also needed to assess the use of integrating White racial identity constructs with more general theories of personality and individuality (Silvestri & Richardson, 2001). In addition, research is needed to continue to validate the White racial identity core theoretical positions such as the existence of knowledge-related and cognitive domains within White racial identity statuses, which would enable researchers to better explain why in-groups resort to using stereotypes and employing prejudice towards out-group members. Given that racial and ego attitudes at low developmental levels are incompatible with effective interethnic communication, researchers should focus more on assessing racial identity and ego developmental levels and ways to promote positive change. Such attention to the self and one's psyche could expand self-awareness and heighten conscious awareness.

Concerning Anxiety Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory, since anxiety and uncertainty are the basic causes of communication failure in interethnic situations, an approach considered by Gudykunst (1995) is to adopt mindfulness or consciousness competence to avoid interethnic miscommunication, which oftentimes leads to stereotyping and prejudice. Being mindful or "competent" means being more effective. However, being effective in that sense is an active not a passive process. The theory tells how an in-group should behave towards the out-group, but does not tell much about how the out-group perceives the in-group. Therefore, future research should focus more on ways that help the out-group – that is, the "other" ethnic group – perceive communication channels used by the in-group.

The contact hypothesis could be further corroborated and adapted to the 21st century. Although the theory has been refined since it was created in 1954, it should be emphasized that contact and interaction between differently identified groups have evolved, but are still important to recognizing similarities and to gain knowledge of "the other." Truly, a critical task in furthering our understanding of ethnic and racial issues is to strengthen those solid theories that integrate developmental and social or psychological perspectives, together with a consideration of contextual and individual factors, as a foundation for future research. I see this as an absolute priority for future work in interethnic communication and hope that the current theories and findings on ethnicity will be a significant step in this direction.

References

- Allport, G.
1954 *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Brewer, R. M.
1995 Knowledge construction and racist "science." *American Behavioral Scientist*, 39(1), 62-74.
- Cortes, C. E.
1995 Knowledge construction and popular culture: The media as a multicultural educator. In J. A. Banks & C. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 169-183). New York: Macmillan.
- Daniels, A. J.
2001 Conceptualizing a case of indirect racism using the White Racial Identity Development Model. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 23(3), 256-259.
- Detweiler, R. A.
1986 Categorization, attribution, and intergroup communication. In W. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Intergroup communication*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Douglas, M.
1992 *Muffled ears*. London: Routledge.
- Douglas, M.
1994 *Essays in Cultural Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Evans, K. M., & Foster, V. A.
2000 Relationships among multicultural training, moral development, and racial identity development of White counseling students. *Counseling & Values*, 45(1), 39-49.
- Fiske, S. T., & Neuberg, S. L.
1990 A continuum of impression formation, from category-based to individuating processes: Influences of information and motivation on attention and interpretation. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 23, 1-74.
- Gamble, T. K., & Gamble, M.
2002 *Communication works*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Gudykunst, W. B.
1995 Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory: Current status. In R.L. Wiseman (Ed.), *Intercultural Communication Theory* (pp. 8-58). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gudykunst, W. B., Chua, E., & Gray, A. J.
1987 Cultural dissimilarities and uncertainty reduction processes. *Communication Yearbook*, 10, 456-469.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Nashida, T.
1986 The influences of cultural variability on perception of communication behavior associated with relationship terms. *Human Communication Research*, 13, 147-166.
- Gudykunst, W. B., Nashida, T., & Schmidt, K. L.
1989 The influence of cultural relational and personality factors on uncertainty reduction processes. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 53, 13-29.
- Helms, J. E.
1990 *Black and white racial identity: Theory, research and practice*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc.
- Helms, J. E.
1995 An update of Helms's White and people of color racial identity models. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 181-198). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Helms, J. E., & Carter, R. T.
1993 Development of the White Racial Identity Inventory. In J. E. Helms (Eds.), *Black and White racial identity: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 67-80). Westport, CT: Praeger.

- Hewstone, M., & Giles, H.
1986 Social groups and social stereotypes in intergroup communication: A review and model of intergroup communication breakdown. In W. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Intergroup communication* (pp. 10-26). London: Edward Arnold.
- Inglehart, R., & Carballo, M.
1997 Does Latin America exist? A global analysis of cross-cultural differences. *Political Science and Politics*, 30(1), 34-46.
- Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Maruyama, G.
1984 Goal interdependence and interpersonal attraction in heterogeneous classrooms: A metanalysis. In N. Miller & M. Brewer (Eds.), *Groups in contact* (pp. 187-212). Orlando: Academic Press.
- Kim, Y. Y.
1995 Identity development: From cultural to intercultural. In B. H. Mokros (Ed.), *Information and behavior: Interaction and identity* (pp. 347-369). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Kim, Y. Y., Lujan, P., & Dixon, L. D.
1998 "I can walk both ways." Identity integration of American Indians in Oklahoma. *Human Communication Research*, 25(2), 252-274.
- Massey, G., & Hodson, R.
1999 Ethnic enclaves and intolerance: The case of Yugoslavia. *Social Forces*, 78(2), 669-694.
- Mattai, R.
1990 Beneath the color of the skin. *Child Study Journal*, 20(4), 293-296.
- Pack-Brown, S. P.
1999 Racism and white counselor training: Influence of white racial identity theory and research. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 77(1), 87-93.
- Richardson, T. Q., & Helms, J.
1994 The relationship of the racial identity attitudes to black men. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 73(2), 172-178.
- Sachdev, I., & Bourhis, R.
1987 Status differentials and intergroup behavior. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 17, 277-293.
- Seeber, M.
2001 Racism breeds ignorance. *Psychology Today*, 34(5), p. 28.
- Sefa Dei, G. J.
1999 Knowledge and politics of social change: The implication of anti-racism. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20(3), 695-710.
- Silvestri, T. J., & Richardson, T. Q.
2001 White racial identity statuses and NEO personality constructs: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 79(1), 68-77.
- Spalding, N.
2000 A cultural explanation of collapse into Civil War: Escalation of tension in Nigeria. *Culture & Psychology*, 6(1), 51-88.
- Stephan, W. G., & Stephan C. W.
1984 The role of ignorance in intergroup relations. In N. Miller, & M. Brewer (Eds.), *Groups in contact* (pp. 229-255 Orlando: Academic Press.
- Ward, J. V.
1991 Eyes in the back of your head: Moral themes in African American narratives of racial conflict. *Journal of Moral Education*, 20(3), 267-282.
- Wildavsky, A.
1985 Change in political culture. *The Journal of the Australian Political Studies Association*, 20(2), 95-102.
- Recibido: 21/05/2010
Reenviado: 31/08/2011
Aceptado: 09/09/2011
Sometido a evaluación por pares anónimos