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**Overcoming Ethnocentrism through Developing Intercultural Communication
Sensitivity and Multiculturalism**

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Abstract

This study, based on a survey of 419 young adults, found that high levels of individuals' intercultural communication sensitivity and multiculturalism are significant predictors of reducing individuals' ethnocentrism. As a leading country in diversity, equality and democracy, the United States is expected to continue its leading position in appreciating cultural diversity and respecting ethnic/cultural identities. The results suggest that promoting intercultural communication sensitivity and multiculturalism is a possible measure to overcome ethnocentrism and reduce conflicts among intergroup interactions. Limitations and suggestions for future research are provided.

Introduction

The United States is a country of immigrants and it is critical for the country to promote cultural diversity and appreciate different cultural heritages (Dong, 1995). Ethnocentrism is viewed as lacking acceptance of cultural diversity and intolerance for outgroups (Berry & Kalin, 1995). This lack of acceptance of cultural diversity has a strong tendency to lead to negative stereotypes toward other cultural/ethnic groups, negative prejudice and negative behaviors against these group members. As the world becomes a global village and more and more people with diverse cultural backgrounds interact with each other constantly, it is imperative to investigate what factors could help overcome ethnocentrism. This study, by examining two of these factors, hopes to identify a better route to look for ways and means to overcome people's ethnocentrism. Reducing ethnocentrism would greatly facilitate accommodating diversity in the United States, making it a model country for diversity, equality and democracy.

In this study, the authors focus on three constructs: ethnocentrism, intercultural communication sensitivity, and multiculturalism. Research has shown that ethnocentrism tends to be negatively correlated with intercultural communication sensitivity and cultural diversity. In order to explore ways to overcome ethnocentrism, the study has three major objectives. First, it examines the impact of intercultural communication sensitivity on overcoming ethnocentrism. Second it investigates the impact of multiculturalism on overcoming ethnocentrism. Third, it proposes some measures for researchers, policy makers, and educators to use in overcoming ethnocentrism.

Literature Review

Ethnocentrism

The theoretical concept of ethnocentrism, as developed by Sumner (1906), suggested that in most intergroup contexts, one's own group is the center of everything, and all other things are related to or dependent on it. Berry and Kalin (1995) pointed out that the ethnocentrism concept tends to be viewed as "the synonym for general antipathy towards all outgroups" (p. 303). The two Canadian scholars conducted numerous studies on this topic and observed that ethnocentrism shows that "a lack of acceptance of cultural diversity, a general intolerance for outgroups and a relative preference for one's ingroup over most outgroups" (p. 303).

Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) developed a generalized ethnocentrism scale (GENE) to assess how individuals feel regarding their own culture. The scale was modified and adapted for examining people's ethnocentric views by a number of communication researchers. The GENE is a valid measurement of ethnocentrism that may be experienced by anyone, regardless of culture.

Ethnocentrism has been described as an individual psychological disposition which has both positive and negative outcome (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). On the one hand, ethnocentrism serves as an antecedent towards "patriotism and willingness to sacrifice for one's central group" (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997, p. 389) and helps in constructing and maintaining one's cultural identity (Chen & Starosta, 2004). On the other hand, ethnocentrism leads to misunderstandings (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997) and reduced levels of

intercultural-willingness-to-communicate (Lin & Rancer, 2003).

Studies have also shown that ethnocentrism may be mediated by culture. Lin, Rancer, and Trimbitas (2005) found that Romanian students were more ethnocentric than American students. The authors proposed that these results may result from Romania's history of conflict with the Hungarians and being a polarized country. Neuliep, Chaudoir, and McCroskey (2001) found that Japanese students scored higher on the GENE than their American counterparts. They noted that Japan's 'parochial' psychology, that serves as the foundation for modern Japanese thinking and their homogenous culture, may account for these results. In Japan, the term "gaijin" is used to describe "people from the outside" (p. 140). In both studies, men scored higher than women (Lin et al., 2005), suggesting that socialization accounts for this difference (Neuliep et al., 2001).

Ethnocentrism is also highly related to individuals' identity formation. Kim, Kim, and Choe (2006) reviewed identity's link to ethnocentrism as it relates to multicultural issues. Kim et al. found that Koreans were more ethnocentric in comparison to Japanese and native English speakers. Koreans also scored highest in identity measurement.

According to Chen and Starosta (2000) intercultural communication sensitivity is a prerequisite for intercultural communication competence. As one's intercultural communication sensitivity increases, one's competence in intercultural communication increases. Hence, ethnocentrism can be viewed as "an obstacle to intercultural communication competence" (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997, p. 389).

Intercultural communication sensitivity

It is crucial for individuals to develop intercultural communication competence today due to the fact that almost all of us are dealing with intercultural situations every day and everywhere. According to Chen and Starosta (2000), intercultural communication competence has two prerequisites: intercultural communication awareness and intercultural communication sensitivity. Although intercultural communication sensitivity may be related to many cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of our interactions with others, it focuses primarily on individuals' affective abilities, such as managing and regulating emotions. Cultural awareness provides the foundation for intercultural communication sensitivity, which in turn, leads to intercultural communication competence (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

Research suggested that individuals with higher intercultural communication sensitivity tend to do well in intercultural communication settings (Peng, 2006). Bennett (1993) proposed a Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which suggests that individuals with intercultural sensitivity tend to transform themselves from the ethnocentric stage to the ethno-relative stage. This model includes six developmental stages (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). The first three stages of denial, defense and minimization are viewed as "ethnocentric." Individuals view their own culture as central to reality, and individuals act by "avoiding cultural differences through denying its existence, raising defense against the differences and minimizing its importance" (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p.153). The next three stages (acceptance, adaptation, and integration) are viewed as "ethno-relative." During these stages, people experience the culture in the context of other cultures, and can be construed as "seeking cultural difference through accepting its importance, adapting a perspective to take it into account, or by integrating the whole concept into a definition of identity" (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p.153).

The intercultural sensitivity model suggests that as one's experience of cultural difference increases, one's competence in intercultural situations goes up (Greenholtz, 2000). Olsen and Kroeger (2001) discovered that university staff and faculty members who were highly proficient in a language other than English and who had diverse cultural experience would have greater likelihood of possessing higher intercultural communication skills. One study showed that students who studied abroad developed a much higher average increase in terms of ethno-relativism than students who did not (Williams, 2005). This study indicated that in order to receive the gains of increased intercultural communication skills, individuals must interact in the culture. Another study found that employing analysis and evaluation of cultural difference in general education curriculum is more effective in improving students' levels of intercultural communication sensitivity (Mahoney & Schamber, 2004).

Multiculturalism

"Immigration has been one of the most persistent and pervasive influences of the United States" (Dong, 1995, p. 9). Due to immigration, globalization and ethnic diversification, multiculturalism is a pronounced characteristic of the United States. Multicultural ideology refers to "overall evaluation of the majority group addressing the degree to which they possess positive attitudes toward immigrants and cultural diversity" (Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver, 2002, p. 252). When individuals hold a positive overall evaluation, they tend to appreciate cultural diversity and cultural maintenance of ethnic groups.

Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver (2002) suggested that one main principle of multiculturalism is to focus on cultural diversity which, however, is perceived differently by majority and minority group members. People in minority groups, such as those in new immigrant groups, tend to promote multiculturalism, believing that multiculturalism helps them protect their cultures, self, and identity. On the other hand, people in the majority groups tend to have a mixed view of multiculturalism. On the positive side, they believe multiculturalism brings diverse views and stronger economic forces to the country. On the negative side, they view multiculturalism as a desire of immigrant groups to maintain their own culture and challenge the superior cultural and social status (Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver, 2002).

Multiculturalism is viewed as a "paradox in dealing with the question of how to construct a society that accommodates universal rights with the rights of minority groups" (Bailey & Harindranath, 2006, p. 304). Over the past five decades, the viewpoint of multiculturalism has been clearly becoming more and more visible and a popular perspective across the Western societies according to Bailey and Harindranath. In their study, the two authors argued that alternative media help produce a forum of cultural expression, "enabling a dialogue across and within cultures-both minority and majorities on what constitutes such shared values and rights, and for the redefinition of the identities of multicultural nations in the West" (p. 299). They suggested that alternative media provide a means of engaging ethnic minorities in political discourse to help address issues of marginalization of minority cultures.

One of the most prominent areas in promoting multiculturalism is the field of education. Statistics showed that most hate crimes occurring in schools or colleges are related to racial bias, religious bias, and bias against victims' ethnicity or national origins (Arizaga, Bauman, Waldo, & Castellanos, 2005). Therefore, teachers play an important role in helping students develop a

multicultural perspective to appreciate cultural diversity and other perspectives. Efforts have been made to educate teachers in multicultural issues to increase their knowledge about cultural similarities and differences (Arizaga et al, 2005). In addition, teachers are required to attend education programs to develop a better understanding of diverse population to overcome prejudice.

In summary, the review of literature shows that it is potentially fruitful for communication researchers to examine the factors which can help reduce individuals' ethnocentrism in Western democratic society like the United States. Berry and Kalin (1995) defined ethnocentrism as "a lack of acceptance of cultural diversity, a general intolerance for outgroups, and a relative preference for one's ingroup over most outgroups." The literature suggests that ethnocentrism has the potential to lead to negative stereotypes, negative prejudices, and negative behaviors against minority or ethnic group members. Chen and Starosta (2004) suggested that intercultural communication sensitivity may help promote an individual's ability to respect cultural differences, foster multiple cultural identities, and maintain multicultural coexistence. Furthermore, they suggested that a multicultural mindset may enable individuals to be successful in the diverse cultural environment like the United States. The review of the literature suggests that both intercultural communication sensitivity (Chen & Starosta, 2004) and multiculturalism (Berry & Kalin, 1995) promote cultural diversity and appreciation of cultural maintenance of different cultural groups, thus, motivating people to overcome ethnocentrism. In order to explore these relationships in terms of empirical evidence, this study proposes two hypotheses:

H1: Those who have a higher level of intercultural communication sensitivity tend to have a lower level of ethnocentrism.

H2: Those who have a higher level of multiculturalism tend to have a lower level of ethnocentrism.

Method

Sample

Participants were 419 undergraduate college students from two universities located in the western United States. The sample for the study included 248 (59%) undergraduates from a small, private university and 171 (41%) from a large, state university. The participants ranged in age from 17 to 51, with a mean of 20.6 years. In the sample, 138 (33%) were male participants while 276 (66%) were female respondents. Not including ten respondents who did not indicate their race/ethnicity, the racial/ethnic composition of the sample was 50% Caucasian, 33% Asian American, 5.5% African American, 7.2% Hispanic, and 2.4% selecting Others.

Procedures

A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to subjects during class sessions. The five-page questionnaire contained seven sections including instruments to measure intercultural communication sensitivity, multiculturalism, and ethnocentrism. The participants were told that the purpose for conducting the study was to investigate communication behaviors. Every

participant was informed that the survey was voluntary and the information was completely confidential and anonymous. The survey took 10-15 minutes for the participants to complete.

Measurement

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. The Intercultural Communication Sensitivity items were those of Chen and Starosta's (2000) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. This scale contains 24 five-point Likert items with nine items reversed scored. The ICS scale is intended to measure individuals' feelings about interacting with people who have different cultural backgrounds. The scale includes five sub-scales, interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. The 24 statements include "I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures," "I respect the values of people from different cultures," and "I am open-minded to people from different cultures." The alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.88.

Multiculturalism scale. Berry and Kalin (1995) developed the multiculturalism ideology scale to assess support for having a culturally diverse society in Canada. This measurement consists of 10 five-point Likert-scale items with a high score to indicate a stronger support for cultural diversity and appreciation of maintenance of different cultural groups. These ten statements include "You can learn a lot from cultural groups," "Cultural groups should mix as much as possible," and "The more cultural groups there are, the better it is for society." The alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.79.

Ethnocentrism Scale. Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) developed a revised Generalized Ethnocentrism Scale (GENE) that was adopted for the study. This scale is designed to assess people's feelings regarding their culture. The 22 five-point Likert scale statements include "Most other cultures are backward compared to my culture," "My culture should be the role model for other cultures," and "Other cultures should try to be more like my culture." The alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.89.

Results

The means for the three variables were 3.9 for intercultural communication sensitivity, 3.5 for multiculturalism, and 2.6 for ethnocentrism. Standard deviations for the three variables were 0.4 for intercultural communication sensitivity, 0.5 for multiculturalism, and 0.4 for ethnocentrism, suggesting considerable variability on all three across respondents.

Correlation analysis was also performed. As predicted, there were significant negative correlations between ethnocentrism and both intercultural communication sensitivity and multiculturalism. As Table 1 indicates, the more an individual exhibited intercultural communication sensitivity, the less the individual scored on ethnocentrism ($r = -0.42$; $p < 0.01$). Similarly, the higher an individual scored multiculturalism, the lower the individual scored on ethnocentrism ($r = -0.37$; $p < 0.01$).

Table 1 Correlation Analysis of Three Key Factors

Variables	1	2	3
Ethnocentrism	1		
Intercultural Communication Sensitivity	-0.42**	1	
Multiculturalism	-0.37**	0.45**	1

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A stepwise regression analysis (see Table 2 for details) explored the relative contribution of each variable. The results suggests that intercultural communication sensitivity plays a stronger role in overcoming individuals' ethnocentrism since it was entered as the variable explaining the greatest amount of variance in the dependent variable, ethnocentrism (Beta = - 0.32, $p < 0.01$). Multiculturalism was found to explain additional variance unexplained by intercultural communication sensitivity (Beta = -. 0.23; $p < 0.01$). If these results are taken as evidence of causal effects, then both intercultural communication sensitivity and multiculturalism make unique contributions to the reduction of ethnocentrism. Thus, both hypotheses were supported.

Table 2 Hypothesis testing (Stepwise Regression Analysis) Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Ethnocentrism (N=419)
(Dependent variable = Ethnocentrism)

Variables	B	SE	t	Beta
Intercultural Comm Sensitivity	- 0.27	0.04	- 6.48	-0.32**
Multiculturalism	- 0.17	0.04	- 4.63	-0.23**

** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

The findings of the study suggest that additional attention should be given to potential factors that may reduce ethnocentrism. As a number of studies have shown, ethnocentrism has the potential to lead to negative stereotypes, negative prejudice, and negative behaviors against ethnic/minority group members. Therefore, it is possible for researchers to make a significant contribution to the reduction of ethnocentrism. Currently, there are very few empirical studies in this area examining which specific factors help reduce ethnocentrism. This study focused on two likely potential factors related to ethnocentrism, and the results indicated that both intercultural communication sensitivity and multiculturalism are significant predictors of ethnocentrism.

The major significance of this study is that it provides empirical evidence that higher levels of intercultural communication sensitivity and multiculturalism may lead to reduced ethnocentrism.

These findings provide useful evidence to researchers, politicians, educators, and students. Researchers will continue to explore this highly social impact area to develop theories as well as practical solutions to deal with intergroup communication patterns and issues. Politicians should consider this issue and how this issue affects the diversity, equality, and democracy in our society. The United States is a leading country in the world in terms of democracy, equality, and freedom. If it has a high level of ethnocentrism, it will be very hard for people to enjoy democracy, equality and freedom. Educators and students are the two sides of the coin. Ethnocentrism tends to affect students more, and educators should play a crucial role in educating students to develop an open mindedness, appreciating cultural diversity and respect different cultural values, attitudes and ideals.

This study suggests that practitioners should promote intercultural communication sensitivity and multiculturalism at schools, in neighborhoods, communities, and other locations to educate people to “be sensitive” to others’ cultures and “be appreciative of” others’ cultures. This sensitivity and appreciation will greatly help us develop ethno-relative mindsets and move away from ethnocentrism mindsets. How they can effectively do this, however, is not quite so clear. Day (1998), in reviewing approaches to increasing respect for other cultures, has suggested that lectures advocating positions that would encourage decreased ethnocentrism and prejudice are less likely to be effective than first-hand, one-on-one encounters with members of other cultures.

The study has three major limitations commonly seen in studies. First, the sample was selected from college students at the university setting. The homogeneous population might limit the generalizability of results. People’s differences in age, social economic status, and other demographics may affect people’s attitudes towards the concept of ethnocentrism.

Secondly, the current study only focused on two possible predictors: intercultural communication sensitivity and multiculturalism. These two key factors are important but there must be additional factors that deserve further investigation.

Finally, although the survey is a powerful method to generate perception information about individuals, other research methods including experiments, field research, focus group and personal interviews should be explored to investigate ethnocentrism to generate rich data to the timely issue facing communication researchers.

There are additionally a number of caveats specific to this study. First, the greater strength of intercultural communication sensitivity as a predictor of ethnocentrism may in fact be an artifact of measurement. The lower reliability of multiculturalism is likely to result in an underestimation of its effect on ethnocentrism, thus suggesting the need to exercise caution in attributing a greater influence to intercultural communication sensitivity.

Second, all three variables in this study are constructs in part shaped by measures. The sets of attitudinal statements or self-reported behaviors may overlap in ways which result in correlations being found not because one variable influences the other but because the constructs in part measure the same underlying factor.

Finally, exploring the causal connections between these three variables will be challenging because neither intercultural communication sensitivity nor multiculturalism can be manipulated as a treatment to see how they affect ethnocentrism. If these two variables are seen as “causes” of ethnocentrism, then interventions which are expected to affect these variables would need to be applied in a causal model which sees these variables as mediating variables. Evidence for the plausibility of this model would need to look at goodness of fit statistics comparing this mediating

effect model with alternative ones.

In terms of suggestions for future research, the authors would like to see large cross-sectional surveys conducted, including different ethnicity, ages, social economic status and education backgrounds. Additionally, as noted above, longitudinal or experimental studies that track how these variables change in relationship to each other would be insightful in better developing a causal model of the inter-relationships among these variables. Future research would also benefit from other paradigms and methodologies which look for the best solutions to deal with this timely and highly critical issue and problem.

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