

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

Intentional or unintentional messages about cultural identity

**Example A1.3.1 Girls on the bus**

A public bus in south-east England was mainly occupied by school children returning home to the villages after attending school in the city. Several of the other passengers were annoyed by what they considered noisy bad language from some of the children. The most vociferous and extreme swearing was from a group of girls.

The bus stopped and a further schoolgirl got on. She joined the group, one of whom shouted, 'Hello, you big fat tart', to which the new girl loudly retorted, 'Fuck off bitch'. This exchange seemed to serve as a greeting as the two did not appear in any way genuinely angry with each other. The volume of their utterances was also noticeably loud enough for all the bus occupants to hear – in other words, it was unnecessarily loud for communication to occur just between themselves.

The first interactant then admired a new item of jewellery her friend had around her neck: 'Where did you get that, you dirty slag?' The friend answered: 'None of your business, you fucking nosy cow!'

After this, the first interactant's attention became fixed upon a school boy, who was smaller than the girls, sitting several seats away. 'Darren! Oi, Darren! Fucking listen to me Darren! Are you a poof, Darren?' The girls laughed and the boy looked embarrassed and at a loss as to how to reply. 'No I'm not,' he finally protested, and looked out of the window, no doubt hoping the girls' attention would wander to someone else. Then another girl's voice: 'Darren, Michaela says you're a poof.' Darren's bus journey was going to be a longer one than he might have hoped!

**Deconstruction**

In this example we see a group of schoolgirls asserting their cultural identity to the outside shocked world

There are several related concepts at work:

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

## **Cultural identity and multiplicity**

The two girls derive and achieve an identity by signalling belongingness to the particular culture of swearing girls on the bus.

swearing – the mastery of a complex code which only insiders can fully understand and which can be used to exclude outsiders.

Thus, apparent insult is read as greeting or endearment between the initiated girls, but as real insult and exclusion when directed at the boy.

### *Identity card*

‘*This* is how we *are!* We use bad language; we shock; we make boys feel uncomfortable; we don’t care about annoying people around us.’

The two girls are not simply *being* members of a culture; they are *doing* the culture in order to *communicate* something to the people around them. In this sense, they are *playing a particular identity card*.

Swearing is often considered a territory occupied only by males displaying their toughness.

They use misogynistic male lexicon of derogatory terms for women: ‘slag’, ‘bitch’, ‘tart’, ‘cow’. They thus subvert the potentially wounding power of these terms

The girls are very vocal and thus also occupy the acoustic space of the bus: the old notions of men not swearing in the presence of the ‘weaker’ and ‘daintier’ sex are completely challenged – indeed inverted – here. This incident would seem to have a lot to do with the notion of ‘girl power’.

## **Territory**

a powerful new territory for presentation of self against the identities that are imposed upon them by others.

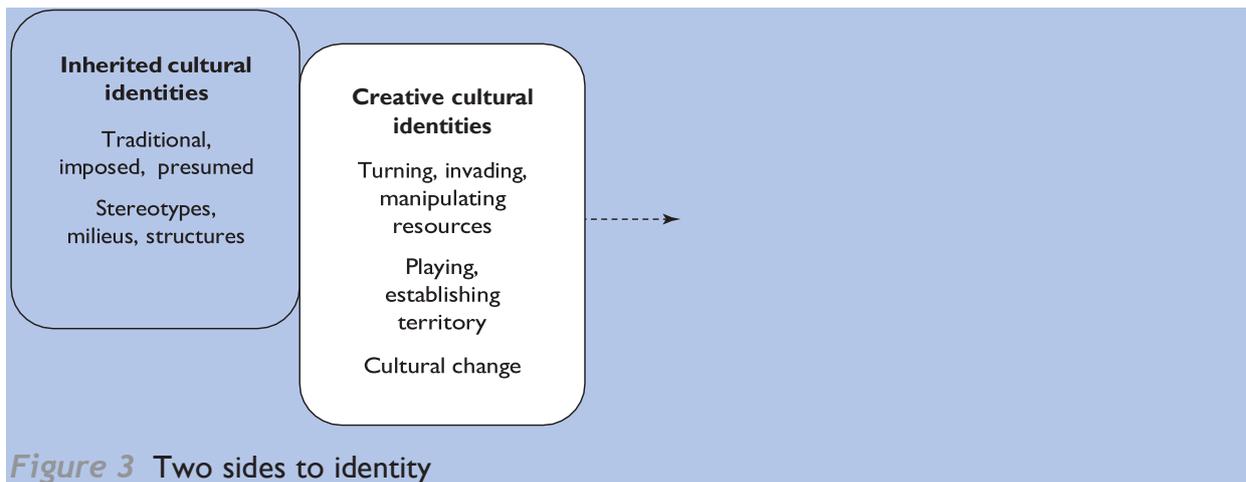


Figure 3 Two sides to identity

## Communication

we need to understand something about how they present themselves as being or **belonging** to certain groups.

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

We need therefore to see communication with anyone as a **dynamically creative process.**

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



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

- Think of a situation you have been in that is like the girls on the bus example and describe it in similar detail.

SECTION

A

## Theme 2 Otherization

### Theme 2

#### Addressing the Other

coined by the neuroscientist **Kathleen Taylor**

Otherisation: the way in which individuals or groups may be **perceived as different** and **separate**.

'otherising' = focus on that **difference** and exaggerate it, often as a prelude to dehumanisation.

grounded in basic human emotions= Perceiving others as '**others**' causes **fear, anger** or disgust, universal 'primitive' responses to **threats** whose physiological mechanisms are relatively well understood.

Ex. Thus the Nazis regarded Jews as disease vectors, viruses contaminating Aryan society, which needed to be cleansed from such contamination: a metaphor that is repeated by perpetrators of genocide (ex. Cambodia and Rwanda)

## UNIT A2.1 COMMUNICATION IS ABOUT NOT PRESUMING

### Falling into culturist traps

#### Experience

Try not to fall into the trap of Othering.

#### Example A.2. 1.1 The Smith family?

A while ago John had neighbours, the Smiths, who, by their own declaration, belonged to a religious group that was not part of the mainstream. John took this as a matter of fact because Mr Smith told him so several weeks after moving in during a residents' meeting. However, from the very first impression he had of them he suspected something of the sort. There were six children. The girls and Mrs Smith were dressed in long dresses with aprons, which came down to their mid-calf, and wore headscarves over long hair. The boys had long shorts with braces [US suspenders] which also came down to mid-calf. Mr Smith was clean-shaven except for a beard around his chin.

As they were moving in John could see that their furniture was like old-fashioned wooden school furniture; and they didn't seem to have a television, stereo or video. There was, however, a piano and John could hear them making their own music for entertainment in the evenings. This reminded John of the image of the religious community in the Hollywood movie *Witness*.

Several events took place after the family moved in which began to reveal the way in which John was thinking about them. One afternoon John was in his garage pottering about when Mr Smith came out and got into his large people carrier. John guessed he

was waiting for the rest of his family before going out with them. He really was amazed when Smith turned on the car's CD player and listened to music. John had thought that because they didn't have a television or stereo in the house, their religion forbade them to listen to such things.

It was the time when the whole country seemed involved in the events surrounding the wedding of a popular member of the royal family. Mr Smith's parents were staying with them; and Meltem, John's wife, had encountered Mr Smith's mother in the driveway. Mrs Smith senior told her that because there was no television or radio in her son's home, and no-one was allowed to read newspapers, it was difficult for her and her husband to find out what was going on, and felt they were missing out on seeing the wedding on television. Despite the incident with the car stereo, this confirmed to John that the Smith family were indeed religious fundamentalists who did not allow the watching of television, and that he had been right all along about how they abstained from modernity.

John was therefore shocked and indeed concerned that it would be an inconsiderate invasion of their religious *culture* when Meltem suggested inviting Mr and Mrs Smith senior, and indeed the whole Smith family, in to watch the wedding on the television. He really felt that this invitation would put the whole Smith family in a very difficult position. It would be like inviting Muslims to eat pork. Meltem said that it would be impolite to invite Mr and Mrs Smith senior alone, and that anyway they all had the choice to refuse.

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

## Deconstruction

John reduced his neighbour to a prescribed stereotype

John had made a mistake

Stereotype

- Prejudice

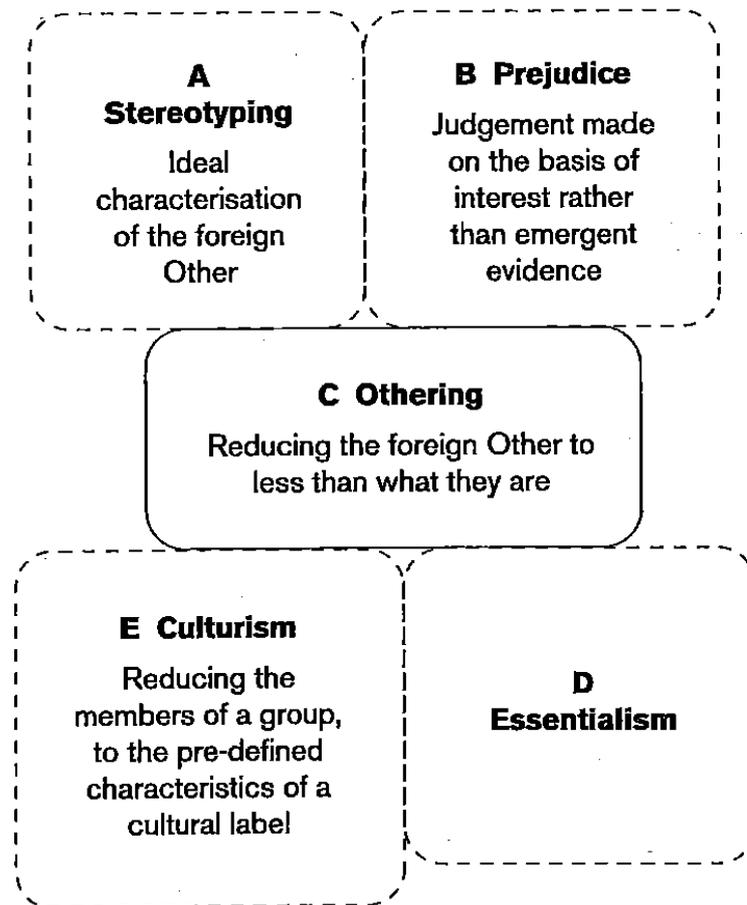
Othering

- Culturism.

### ***From stereotype to Othering***

John had formed a *stereotype* with the popular image of a religious group presented in a Hollywood movie..

stereotypes are often infected by *prejudice*, which in turn leads to *Othering*.



**Figure A2.1.1** Constituents of Othering

*a priori stereotype*. The reference to the Hollywood movie shows where his stereotype of his neighbours come from.

Othering of his neighbours reduced them to people who would *never* do some things

### **Culturism**

we can *imagine* or *reify* 'cultures' as objects, places, physical entities (imagine something that is not real)

John saw the Smith family as **members of a religious culture**, characterised by the stereotypical traits of austere appearance, disdain for modernity etc., **which would govern all aspects of their behaviour.**

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

Whatever Mrs Smith did, John *explained* it as being her religious culture. And if she did something which did not fit the explanation, she was no longer, or 'not really' a member of that culture, or had lost her culture.

## Communication

In the light of the experience of this unit, we must therefore (numbered from previous unit):

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

### Task A2.1.1 Thinking about the Smiths

)>- Think of a situation you have been in which is like the Smiths example and describe it in similar detail.

## u NIT A2.3 POWER AND DISCOURSE

We must be careful what we say

### Experience

be careful when talking about and to people who we consider to be Other

#### Example A2.3.1 Understanding supervisor

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

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

She could see at their first tutorial that he really was trying his best, but he still

maintained his slow tone of voice. At least he wasn't shouting as some people did when they thought you might not understand. Then – he began to explain to her that he understood something about 'her culture', and that therefore he would be able to help her to meet deadlines and to 'understand concepts' that might be 'alien' to her. He even said that he knew what it was like, with her 'history', that she had to 'suddenly have to compete in every sphere'. It took her a moment to understand what he was getting at. Then she realised that he was having the ignorant audacity to be thinking that she might have difficulty keeping up with people from what she imagined he would call 'his culture'.

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

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

## Deconstruction

Jeremy believes he is being supportive, Jabu feels she is the victim of racism.

**essentialist** notion of her culture- in his naivety he does not realise it

iii Thinking you are being understanding when in fact you are **patronising**

False sharing

Culturist language.

Patronizing

he makes the usual essentialist mistake of imagining that everyone in South Africa is the same.

**Making her 'special' inhibits her ability to integrate** and makes her feel labelled as less capable than the other students (row c).

**Table A2.3.1** Difficult communication

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