Studying Interracial Communication

The Consequences of Racial Bias

A recent study by a team of researchers found that White college students avoid conversations about race, and even interracial interactions generally, primarily because they will say something that's not politically correct and may make them look prejudiced or racist. Some of their findings, given our experiences teaching interracial communication for the past few decades, aren't surprising. But what is striking about the study's findings is that many college students report being significantly unnerved by even minor interactions. This seems to support the findings of Trawalter, Richeson, and Shelton's (2009) study, which found that European Americans with racial bias had great difficulty in completing easy tasks after a brief interaction with African Americans (see "Racism Breeds Stupidity" box, this chapter). Based on your experiences, do you agree with the study's findings? Do you think that conversations about race, within interracial interactions, are getting more or less authentic? What cautions do you have about classroom discussions about race? Do you think that European American students and students of color experience some of the same anxiety in these contexts? Why, or why not?

Source: Trawalter, S., Richeson, J. A., Shelton, J. N. (2009). Predicting behavior during interracial interactions: A stress and coping approach. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 13,* 243–268. http://psr.sagepub.com/content/13/4/243.short.

In 1902, African American historian W. E. B. Du Bois predicted that the primary issue of the 20th century in the United States would be related to the "problem of the color line" (1982, p. xi). From where we stand today, his words—written more than 100 years ago—appear hauntingly accurate. Without question, race relations in the United States continue to be an important issue. But do you think that W. E. B. Du Bois could have anticipated all the changes that have occurred in the last century? Take a minute to reflect on some of

these events and how they have changed the nature of the United States: Land expansion and population shifts westward. The Great Depression. World wars. The Cold War. Civil rights movements. Race riots. Multiple waves of immigration. Drastic migration patterns. Technological advances. Population explosions. A competitive global economy. This list is hardly conclusive, but it does highlight some of the major events and developments that the United States experienced during the 20th century. Clearly, the world that existed in 1902 when W. E. B. Du Bois wrote his now famous prediction is drastically different.

Could Du Bois, and other civil rights leaders at the turn of the 20th century, have predicted that the 21st century would see the United States elect its first president of African descent? Most think that this would be doubtful, especially given that over 70% of people in the United States describe their belief that they would not see an African American U.S. president in their lifetime (cited in Orbe, 2011). For many, the election of an African American to the White House symbolizes the American Dream achieved. But what else does this accomplishment mean, especially regarding race and race relations? Given the advances made up to, and culminating in, 2008 the idea that the United States is now a post-racial society has gained a great deal of attention.

"It seems almost impossible to unlink the concepts 'post-racism,' 'post-race,' or 'post-racial from Barack Obama's presidency, given how often they are associated with him" (Ono, 2010, p. 228). The logic in this association is simple: Given Barak Obama's journey—as a person of African descent who was not born with great privilege—then racism can no longer be used as an excuse for the lack of accomplishment for African Americans. On a logical level, most individuals recognize that President Obama's election (or reelection, for that matter) "did not automatically and instantaneously end racism" (Ono, 2010, p. 228). President Obama has made this explicitly clear. When asked in a *Rolling Stone* magazine interview if race relations were any different than when he took office, he replied, "I have never bought into the notion that by electing me, somehow we were entering into a post-racial period" (as quoted in Washington, 2012).

Post-racial assertions are generally rooted in a decent, albeit misguided, belief that the United States has reached a moment where we are living out our lives on a level playing field regarding race (Vavrus, 2010). Post-racism, then, is the perfect solution to help the United States forget about the historical effects that are the result of racism (Ono, 2010). In other words, a post-racial society is a fantasy that hinges on the belief that racism no longer exists. Color-blindness is best understood as a strategy of post-racism; it is based on the logic that if a person doesn't see race, then they cannot be racist (Ono, 2010). While some significant advances have clearly been made since Du Bois's prediction, race has not vanished from personal, social, and institutional circumstances.

Despite their optimism and hope that is a part of visions for a post-racial society, such talk is problematic. Post-racism discussions make it difficult, even in the face of obvious racial discrimination, to label policies or individual behaviors as oppressive to people of color (Squires, 2010). As such, discussions of a post-racial society have worked to have a boomerang effect: When people of color challenge racism they are accused of bringing up race when it no longer has relevance. The result is that they are then described as being racists themselves (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

It would be an understatement to say that race continues to be a sensitive issue in the United States (Marable, 2005; Orbe, 2011). Despite the considerable progress made toward

racial equality, some researchers regard racial coding as the dominant feature of social interaction (James & Tucker, 2003). Discussions regarding race and ethnicity issues remain difficult, in part, due to significantly different perceptions and realities. Case in point: A national poll conducted by *ABC News* and the *Washington Post* in 2003 found that 54% of European Americans thought that race relations were "good" or "excellent," and 80% felt that African Americans have "an equal chance at jobs." In the same poll, only 44% of African Americans described race relations as good/excellent, and only 39% perceived equal opportunity in employment. Significant gaps between European American and African American perceptions (more than 30 percentage points) were also found in items related to "equal treatment from police," "equal treatment from merchants," "equal chance in housing," and "equal chance at good public schools" (as discussed in Marable, 2005). Such differences in perceptions present a challenge for effective interracial communication.

Box 1.1   Public Perceptions of U.S. Race Relations
The 2008 Presidential Election's Affect of Racial Attitudes

The election of Barack Obama as the 44th U.S. President, and the first self-identified African American U.S. President, had an immediate effect on perceptions of race relations. One day after his historic election, 70% of U.S. Americans surveyed said that race relations would improve (Washington, 2012). Subsequent national surveys were conducted periodically since President Obama's election. They found that, over time, people grew less and less optimistic about how his election could improve race relations. In April 2012, survey results indicated that only 33% described race relations as getting better. Forty-two percent felt that they were basically staying the same, and 23% reported that they were getting worse. According to Agiesta (2012), racial prejudice has increased slightly since 2008—especially for Latinos and African Americans. Given all the hope and optimism that came with President Obama's election, what do you think happened to drastically reduce people's assumption that race relations would improve? How do these public polls coincide with the idea of a post-racial society?

The basic premise of this book is that the field of communication, as well as other related disciplines, has much to offer us in working through the racial and ethnic differences that hinder effective communication. U.S. Americans from all racial and ethnic groups must learn how to communicate effectively with one another. During the early to mid-1970s, several books emerged that dealt specifically with the subject of interracial communication (Blubaugh & Pennington, 1976; Rich, 1974; Smith, 1973). These resources were valuable in setting a foundation for the study of interracial communication (see Chapter 6). Given the significant societal changes and scholarly advances in the communication discipline, however, their usefulness for addressing race relations in the 21st century is somewhat limited. Our intention is to honor these scholars, as well as countless others, by creating an up-to-date interracial communication resource guide that provides theoretical understanding and clear direction for application.

Toward this objective, the book is divided into two parts. Part I focuses on providing a foundation for studying interracial communication and includes chapters on the history of race and racial categories, the importance of language, the development of racial and cultural identities, and various theoretical approaches. In Part II, we use this foundation of information to understand how interracial communication is played out in a number of contexts (international, friendship and romantic relationships, organizations, conflict, and the mass media). The final chapter in Part II (Chapter 12) makes the connection between theory and practice explicit, especially as it relates to the future of race relations in the United States.

In this opening chapter, we provide a general introduction to the topic of interracial communication. First, we offer a specific definition of interracial communication, followed by a clear rationale of why studying this area is important. Next, we explain the concept of racial locations and encourage you to acknowledge how social positioning affects perceptions of self and others. Finally, we provide some practical insight into how instructors and students can create a positive, productive climate for discussions on issues related to race. Specifically, we advocate for cultivating a sense of community among discussion participants and suggest several possible guidelines toward engaging in interracial dialogue.

Two important points should be made before you read any further. First, we initially authored this book to be used in interracial and intercultural communication classes at the undergraduate level. As our vision for the book developed, we realized it could be a valuable resource in any number of courses, including those in sociology, psychology, ethnic studies, and education (both undergraduate and graduate). In addition, we hope

Box 1.2   Research Highlight
The Change in African American Stereotypes

The election, and reelection, of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States has forever changed racial relations. The larger question is: To what extent? A recent research project (Zhang & Tan, 2011) examined how participants from the United States and China reported changes in their stereotypes of African Americans. Two surveys—one administered on Election Day and the other after it—with identical items were used to measure attitude change regarding racial stereotypes of African Americans. Both U.S. and Chinese respondents rated African Americans more positively after the 2008 election. Interestingly, the change in racial stereotypes occurred more readily away from negative traits (e.g., African Americans are violent, loud, impulsive, and aggressive). Positive traits (e.g., African Americans are hardworking, faithful, honest, good morals, and generous) did not change after President Obama's election. Zhang and Tan used a media effects model to explain the source of the attitudinal change, and differences between Chinese and U.S. respondents. What do you think about this study's findings? Do you think that any change in existing stereotypes was long lasting?

Interracial Communication: Theory Into Practice will be useful for individuals and groups outside the university setting who are interested in promoting more effective race relations in the United States. Much of our focus in highlighting how communication theory and research is applicable to everyday life interactions occurs within the context of a classroom setting. However, in our minds, *a classroom is any place where continued learning/teaching can occur*. In this regard, the principles shared in this book can apply to community-based groups and formal study circles, as well as long-distance learning and other types of learning that occur through the cyberspace community. In a very real sense, the world is a classroom, and we hope this book is a valuable resource for those committed to using effective communication practices to improve the relationships between and within different racial/ethnic groups.

Second, we acknowledge the power of language, and therefore we have been careful about using specific terms and labels. Chapter 3 focuses on the importance of language in interracial communication and discusses why we use certain racial and ethnic labels over other alternatives. We think it is vital that you can understand why labels are important beyond issues of so-called political correctness. Both scholarly and personal evidence clearly shows that in most cases one universally accepted label for any specific racial or ethnic group does not exist. So, in these cases, we have chosen labels that are parallel across racial and ethnic groups (e.g., Asian American, African American, European American, Latino/a American or Latin@s, and Native American). In addition, we have decided to use both racial and ethnic markers (instead of focusing on race alone). This decision may initially seem odd, given that this is a book on interracial, not interethnic, communication. But according to most scientific information on race—including how the U.S. government currently defines it—Latino/a Americans (Hispanics) represent an ethnic group with members that cut across different racial groups. Thus, to include "interracial" communication that involves Latino/a Americans and other "racial" groups, we consciously use descriptors such as "race/ethnicity" or "race and ethnicity." This is an important distinction since ethnicity in some situations may be more important than race (see Chapter 5).

DEFINING INTERRACIAL COMMUNICATION

Early writing on **interracial communication** defined it specifically as communication between Whites and non-Whites (Rich, 1974) or more generally as communication between people of different racial groups within the same nation-state (Blubaugh & Pennington, 1976). Interracial communication was distinguished from other types of communication. **Interpersonal communication** traditionally refers to interactions between two people regardless of similarities or differences in race; the term is often synonymous with **intraracial communication**. **International communication** refers to communication between nations, frequently engaged through representatives of those nations (Rich, 1974). **Intercultural communication** was used specifically to refer to situations in which people of different cultures (nations) communicated. **Interethnic communication**, sometimes

used interchangeably with interracial communication, referred to communication between two people from different ethnic groups. Some scholars (e.g., Graves, 2004) use this term to expose the myths of racial categories (see Chapter 2). Others use interethnic communication to illustrate the differences between race and ethnicity and highlight how interethnic communication could also be intraracial communication (e.g., interactions between a Japanese American and Filipino American or between a German American and French American).

Over time, the study of intercultural communication has gained a prominent place within the communication discipline. It also has emerged as an umbrella term to include all aspects of communication that involve cultural differences. Currently, this includes researching interactions affected by age, race/ethnicity, abilities, sex, national origin, and/ or religion. Interracial communication, then, is typically seen as one subset of many forms of intercultural communication. We believe this framework has been a mixed blessing for interracial communication study. On one hand, scholars interested in studying how communication is experienced across racial lines are able to draw from a significant body of existing intercultural research and theory. Because of this, we have a "home" in the discipline complete with various frameworks to use in our research. On the other hand, such a positioning appears to have had a marginalizing effect on interracial communication study. Because intercultural theoretical frameworks are designed to apply generally to a variety of contexts, they do little to reveal the unique dynamics of any one type of intercultural communication. In addition, intercultural communication study has become so broad that minimal attention is devoted to any one particular aspect. Teaching a class on intercultural communication is challenging, because most instructors attempt to include materials from various areas of intergroup relations. Thus, issues of race are often covered in insubstantial ways. One of the major points of this book is that interracial communication is such a complex process—similar to, yet different from, intercultural communication—that existing treatments of it as a form of intercultural communication are not adequate.

For our purposes here, we are operating from the following definition of interracial communication: the transactional process of message exchange between individuals in a situational context where racial difference is perceived as a salient factor by at least one person. This working definition, like those of other communication scholars (e.g., Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987), acknowledges that interracial communication can be seen as situated along an interpersonal/intergroup continuum. For instance, can you think of examples of communication that have occurred between two individuals who may be from different racial groups, but whose relationship seems to transcend these differences? If racial differences are not central to the interaction, these individuals' communication may be more interpersonal than interracial. As you will see in Chapter 6, the idea of **transracial communication** (interactions in which members are able to transcend their racial differences) was first generated by Molefi Kete Asante (Smith, 1973). However, the more central role that perceived racial differences play within an interaction—from the perspective of at least one participant—the more intergroup the interaction becomes.

Box 1.3   Racism Breeds Stupidity
The Effect of Racial Bias on Cognitive Ability

The headline in the local newspaper read "Study Finds That Racism Can Breed Stupidity" (Cook, 2003). While three words—"racism," "breed," and "stupidity"—seemed to sensationalize the scientific study that was the basis of the article, the findings were interesting. Researchers at Dartmouth College (Richeson et al., 2003) studied how racial bias, and interaction with African Americans, affected European Americans' ability to perform basic tests. According to the findings of the study, "the more biased people are, the more their brain power is taxed by contact with someone of another race" (Cook, 2003, p. A4). This was because interracial contact caused racially biased European Americans to struggle not to say or do anything offensive. Researchers found that the effect was so strong that even a 5-minute conversation with an African American person left some European Americans unable to perform well on a basic cognitive test. Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that when racially biased European Americans were involved in interracial interactions— even briefly—it taxed the part of their brain in charge of executive control. The result is a temporary inability to perform well on other tasks.

- What do you make of these research findings?

- Do you agree that this happens, and if so, to what effect?

WHY STUDY INTERRACIAL COMMUNICATION?

For the past couple decades, several basic arguments have emerged to justify attention to cultural diversity when studying various aspects of human communication. Most of these have related more directly to intercultural communication than interracial communication (e.g., Martin & Nakayama, 1997). Although some of these arguments appear equally applicable to interracial communication, others do not seem to fit the unique dynamics of race relations. Therefore, within the context of these general arguments and more specific ones related to the cultural diversity in the United States (e.g., Chism & Border, 1992), we offer four reasons why the study of interracial communication is important.

First, race continues to be one of the most important issues in the United States. From its inception, U.S. culture has reflected its multiracial population (even though political, legal, and social practices have valued certain racial groups over others). Because of the contradiction of the realities of racism and democracy (e.g., equal opportunity), the United States has often downplayed the issue of race and racism. We believe that to fulfill the democratic principles on which it is based, the United States must work through the issues related to racial differences. Racial and ethnic diversity is a primary strength of the United States. However, it can also be the country's biggest weakness if we are unwilling to talk honestly and openly. Although calls for advocating a "color-blind society"—one in which racial and ethnic differences are downplayed or ignored—are admirable, they are largely premature

for a society that still has unresolved issues with race (Ono, 2011). Unfortunately, segregation between European Americans and people of color has reached shockingly high levels. According to Maly (2005), the average European American in the United States lives in a neighborhood that is more than 80 % White, while the average African American lives in one that is vastly African American. Asian Americans and Latino/as are less segregated from European Americans; however, they now live in more segregated settings than they did just two decades ago. Such massive racial and ethnic segregation prohibits the type of sustained, meaningful interaction that is crucial to develop interracial communication skills.

Box 1.4
Defining Important Concepts

Because of your interest in the topic, we assume you are familiar with many of the basic ideas **central** to understanding the interracial communication processes. But we acknowledge the importance of not assuming that everyone is operating from the same definition for certain terms. Therefore, we have defined some basic concepts related to interracial communication as a way to provide a common foundation. Throughout the text, we have included definitions whenever we introduce concepts that you may not be familiar with (e.g., discussions of privilege in Chapter 4). As you read each description, think about how it compares to your personal definition. Is it comparable or drastically different? We recognize that differences may occur, but we want to make sure you understood how we are conceptualizing these terms. These definitions draw from a great body of interdisciplinary work (e.g., Allport, 1958; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Jones, 1972; Rothenberg, 1992), but not necessarily any one in particular.

Culture: Learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviors common to a particular group of people. Culture forges a group's identity and assists in its survival. Race is culture, but a person's culture is more than her or his race.

Race: A largely social—yet powerful—construction of human difference that has been used to classify human beings into separate value-based categories. Chapter 2 describes the four groups that make up a dominant racial hierarchy.

Ethnicity: A cultural marker that indicates shared traditions, heritage, and ancestral origins. Ethnicity is defined psychologically and historically. Ethnicity is different from race. For instance, your race may be Asian American, and your ethnic makeup might be Korean.

Ethnocentrism: Belief in the normalcy or rightness of one's culture and consciously or unconsciously evaluating other aspects of other cultures by using your own as a standard. We all operate from within certain levels of ethnocentrism.

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Microculture: Term used to describe groups (in our case racial/ethnic groups) that are culturally different from those of the majority group (macroculture). We generally use this term to refer to African, Asian, Latino/a, and Native American cultures instead of **minorities.**

Racial prejudice: Inaccurate and/or negative beliefs that espouse or support the superiority of one racial group.

Racial discrimination: Acting on your racial prejudice when communicating with others. All people can have racial prejudice and practice racial discrimination.

Racism: Racial prejudice + societal power = racism. In other words, racism is the systematic subordination of certain racial groups by those groups in power. In the United States, European Americans traditionally have maintained societal power and therefore can practice racism. Because of their relative lack of institutional power, people of color can practice racial discrimination but not racism.

Stereotypes: Overgeneralizations of group characteristics or behaviors that are applied universally to individuals of those groups. **Metastereotypes** are the perceptions that an individual has concerning how others perceive them.

Second, changing shifts in the racial and ethnic composition of the United States will increase the need for effective interracial communication. As you can see in Table 1.1, the U.S. population continues to grow and become more and more diverse. According to estimates, 60% of the population growth is the result of the number of births outweighing the number of deaths; the remaining 40% is tied to immigration (Ohlemacher, 2006b). From 2000 to 2010, the U.S. population grew by more than 1 million people. The largest population shift geographically is occurring as the population center edges away from the Midwest and toward the West and South (Yen, 2011). In fact, the West claims the four

Table 1.1   U.S. Racial Diversity and Population Milestones

Race	1915 100 Million	1967 200 million	2010 300 million
Whites	88.0%	76.6%	63.7%
Blacks	10.7%	13.8%	12.6%
Hispanics	n/a	6.5%	16.4%
Other	0.3%	3.2%	7.3%

Demographers predict that the United States will become a majority-minority country by the middle of the 21st century, a reality that is already being experienced in many elementary schools.

Source: Eyecandy Images/Thinkstock.

fastest-growing states—Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and Idaho. Two states, California and Texas, make up more than one-fourth of total U.S. population growth since 2000. Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina combine for another one-fifth of population gains. At the heart of population growth is the increasing number of Latin@s across the United States (Banks, 2009).

Historic and current population shifts regarding racial demographics have transformed the nation's schools, workforce, and electorate. The social and economic ramifications regarding racial relations are also apparent. Population projects have estimated that in 2043, European Americans will no longer be a majority in the United States (Yen, 2012). The Hispanic and Asian populations will both triple, the African American population will almost double, and the European American population will remain consistent (Frey, 2004b). Given current migration within the United States (Frey, 2004b), being an effective interracial communicator will soon be necessary for all U.S. citizens (Halualani, Chitgopekar, Morrison, & Dodge, 2004).

Third, the past, present, and future of all racial and ethnic groups are interconnected. In tangible and not so tangible ways, our successes (and failures) are inextricably linked.

To paraphrase an African proverb, "I am because we are, and we are because I am." Long gone is the general belief that the country is a big melting pot where citizens shed their racial, ethnic, and cultural pasts and become (simply) "Americans." Instead, metaphors of a big salad or bowl of gumbo are offered. Within this vision of the United States, cultural groups maintain their racial and ethnic identities and, in doing so, contribute unique aspects of their culture to the larger society. Learning about different racial and ethnic groups is simultaneously exciting, intimidating, interesting, anxiety provoking, and transformative. It can also trigger a healthy self-examination of the values, norms, and practices associated with our own racial/ethnic groups. Remember, without this process we cannot take advantage of all the benefits that come with being a racially diverse society. To paraphrase Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we can either learn to work together collaboratively or perish individually.

Fourth, and finally, productive race relations are only feasible through effective communication practices. Look to past examples of successful interracial collaboration. We would surmise that at the base of each example lie varying aspects of a productive, positive communication process. This book seeks to highlight the central role that effective communication plays in the future of race relations. We recognize that race relations are an important aspect of study for all nations, not simply the United States. Although some similarities obviously exist, each country has a relatively unique history regarding race. We have chosen to focus on the importance of interracial communication within the United States because that is what we know and where we believe we can have the greatest impact. However, we do include an entire chapter (see Chapter 7) and references to racial and ethnic groups in different countries throughout the book.

In short, this book represents a scholarly, social, and personal mission to contribute to interracial understanding. We are not simply reporting on abstract ideas related to communication. We are, in essence, talking about our lived experiences and those of our family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Communication theory and research has much to offer regarding the everyday interactions of racially/ethnically diverse people. Our explicit goal is to advocate for using this body of knowledge to improve race relations in the United States. In other words, we want to practice what we preach and give others a resource so they can do the same.

One last comment about the importance of bringing the issue of race to the forefront of human communication: Given the history of race relations in the United States (see Chapter 2), most people appear more willing to discuss "culture" than "race." Simply put, race continues to be a taboo topic for many, which means that studying intercultural communication is safer than studying interracial communication. And it is this very point that makes centralizing the issue of race so important for us all. Race cannot be separated from interpersonal or intercultural communication processes. Scholars who study race as part of research in these areas have provided some valuable insights. Nevertheless, we argue that research that does not centralize issues of race cannot get at the unique ways that race affects (to some extent) all communication in the United States. Starting here, and continuing throughout the entire book, we hope to increase your awareness about the various ways that race influences how individuals communicate.

BOX 1.5   AUTHOR REFLECTIONS
My Racial Location

One of the important keys to promoting effective interracial communication is the recognition that each of us experiences life from a particular racial location. Because we have asked you to identify your racial location, it is only fair that we also publicly acknowledge our own. This is important because it helps identify us, the authors of this book, as human beings with a particular set of life experiences. Clearly, our racial locations inform our understanding of interracial communication. Therefore, throughout the book, we share our personal experiences through a series of personal reflections. This first reflection serves as an introduction to how I give consciousness to my racial standpoint.

A central component of my racial standpoint revolves around the fact that I don't fit neatly into any one racial category. My grandfather came to the United States from the Philippines in the early 1900s; the Spanish lineage is clear given our family names (Orbe, Ortega). Some of my mother's relatives reportedly came over on the *Mayflower*. Like many European Americans, her lineage is a mixture of many different European cultures (Swiss, French, English). So my racial standpoint is informed by the fact that I am biracial and multiethnic. However, it is not that simple. Other factors complicate the particular perspective I bring to discussions of interracial communication.

I am a forty-something man who was raised in a diverse low-income housing project (predominantly African American with a significant number of Puerto Ricans) in the Northeast. In this regard, other cultural factors—age, region, socioeconomic status—also inform my racial standpoint. Except what I've seen reproduced through the media, I don't have any specific memory of the civil rights movement. I've always attended predominantly African American churches (both Baptist, nondenominational ones) and always felt a part of different African American communities. For instance, in college, I pledged a predominantly Black Greek affiliate organization; these brothers remain my closest friends. My wife also comes from a multiracial lineage (African, European and Native American); however, she identifies most closely with her Blackness. We have three young adults who were raised to embrace strongly all aspects of their racial and ethnic heritage. Over time, they developed their own unique racial locations.

Through these descriptions it should be apparent that my racial location (like yours) is closely tied to age, gender, spirituality, family, sexual orientation, and region. So what's your story? How are our racial perspectives similar yet different? As we explained earlier, acknowledging and coming to understand self and other racial locations are important steps toward effective interracial communication.

—MPO

ACKNOWLEDGING RACIAL LOCATIONS

An important starting point for effective interracial communication is to acknowledge that individuals have similar and different vantage points from which they see the world. These vantage points, or standpoints, are the result of a person's field of experience as defined by

social group membership (Collins, 1990). Standpoint theories are based on one simple idea: The world looks different depending on your social standing (Allen, 1998). Standpoint theories have largely been used by scholars to understand how women and men come to see the world differently (Harding, 1987, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987; Wood, 1992). Given the assumption that societal groups with varying access to institutional power bases have different standpoints, standpoint theories appear to offer a productive framework to link existing interracial communication theory and research to everyday life applications. In fact, the value of using standpoint theories as a framework for studying race relations has not gone unnoticed by scholars (Orbe, 1998b; Wood, 2005).

A key idea of standpoint theories is that social locations—including those based on gender, race, class, and so forth—shape people's lives (Wood, 2005). This idea is grounded in the analyses of the master-slave relationship that realized that each occupied a distinct standpoint regarding their lives (Harding, 1991). Within this text, we focus on the social location primarily defined through racial and ethnic group membership. In simple terms, this concept helps people understand that a person's racial/ethnic identity influences how that person experiences, perceives, and comes to understand the world around him or her. Everyone has a **racial location**, defined primarily in terms of the racial and ethnic groups to which that person belongs. However, according to standpoint theory, there is an important distinction between occupying a racial location and having a racial standpoint (O'Brien Hallstein, 2000). A racial standpoint is achieved—earned through critical reflections on power relations and through the creation of a political stance that exists in opposition to dominant cultural systems (Wood, 2005, p. 61). Being a person of color does not necessarily mean that you have a racial standpoint. In other words, racial standpoint can, but does not necessarily, develop from being a person of color. Racial standpoints are not achieved individually; they can only be accomplished through working with other people of color (O'Brien Hallstein, 2000). **Racial standpoint**, then, refers to more than social location or experience; it encompasses a critical, oppositional understanding of how one's life is shaped by larger social and political forces. By definition, European Americans cannot achieve a racial standpoint; however, they can develop multiple standpoints shaped by membership in traditionally marginalized groups defined by sex, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Wood, 2005).

Standpoint theory is based on the premise that our perceptions of the world around us are largely influenced by social group membership. In other words, our set of life experiences shape—and are shaped by—our memberships with different cultural groups like those based on sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on. According to standpoint theorists (Collins, 1986; Haraway, 1988; Hartsock, 1983), life is not experienced the same for all members of any given culture. In explicit and implicit ways, our racial locations affect how we communicate as well as how we perceive the communication of others. Acknowledging the locations of different social groups, then, is an important step in effective communication. Part of this involves recognizing that different U.S. racial and ethnic group members perceive the world differently based on their experiences living in a largely segregated society. Simply put, racial and ethnic groups share common worldviews based on shared cultural histories and present-day life conditions. The largest difference in racial standpoints, it is reasoned, is between those racial and ethnic groups that have the most and least societal power (Collins, 1990). In the United States, this means Native Americans,

African Americans, and Latino/a Americans have more similar racial locations. European Americans, in comparison, have had greater access to societal power, which has resulted in dominant group status. Based on the arguments of standpoint theorists (Swigonski, 1994), European Americans and U.S. Americans of color have different—even possibly oppositional—understandings of the world. In other words, they see life drastically differently based on the social standing of their racial/ethnic group membership (e.g., the O. J. Simpson trial, the Hurricane Katrina evacuation efforts, or death of Trayvon Martin). Understanding how racial locations create different worldviews, in this regard, assists in beginning the process toward more effective interracial understanding.

In the past, some scholars have criticized standpoint theories because they focused on the common standpoint of a particular social group while minimizing the diversity within that particular group. For instance, traditionally, standpoint theorists have written extensively about the social positioning of women with little attention to how race/ethnicity further complicates group membership (Bell, Orbe, Drummond, & Camara, 2000; Collins, 1998). The challenge for us is to use standpoint theories in ways that encourage identifying the commonalities among a particular racial/ethnic group while simultaneously acknowledging internal differences (Wood, 2005). Balancing these two—seeing a person as an individual and seeing him or her as a member of a particular racial/ethnic group—is difficult but necessary to achieve effective interracial communication (see intercultural dialectics in Chapter 12). This point is extremely important because it helps us avoid mass generalizations that stereotype all racial and ethnic group members as the same. As such, standpoint theories remind us to see the great diversity within racial and ethnic groups based on individual and other cultural elements like age, education, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Wood, 2005).

According to most standpoint theorists (e.g., Harding, 1991), the marginalized position of U.S. racial/ethnic minorities forces the development of a "double vision" in terms of seeing both sides of interracial communication. Because of this, they can come to understand multiple racial standpoints. How and why do they do this? According to Collins (1986) and others (e.g., Orbe, 1998c), people of color are relative outsiders within the power structures of the United States. In addition to their own racial location, they must develop the ability to see the world from European American locations to function in dominant societal structures (e.g., a predominantly White college or university). Learning the ropes from an outsider's position, some argue, creates a better grasp of that racial location than even insiders can obtain (Frankenberg, 1993). Although this has typically been required for the "mainstream" success of people of color, it can also be true for European Americans who are motivated to understand the perceptions of different racial/ethnic groups. However, standpoint theorists remind us that given the existing power and privilege structures, the levels of reciprocal understanding are hardly equal (Wood, 1997b).

Through this brief overview of standpoint theories, you can see why identifying your racial location is an important ingredient for effective interracial communication. Such a move is invaluable because it helps you acknowledge a specific life perspective and recognize its influence on how you perceive the world. In addition, it promotes an understanding that different racial locations potentially generate contrasting perceptions of reality. Nevertheless, remember that standpoint theories also require a conscious effort to pay attention to the various locations within any one particular racial or ethnic group. In other

words, this approach to interracial communication hinges on your abilities to understand the possible commonalties of people who share a common racial group while simultaneously recognizing intragroup differences. Focusing on how racial identity is just one aspect of our multicultural selves, Chapter 5 discusses the cultural diversity *within* different racial and ethnic groups.

BOX 1.6   AUTHOR REFLECTIONS
Searching for My Racial/Ethnic Identity

In the first section of this textbook, we discussed the importance of history and multiple identities in understanding interracial/interethnic communication. As my coauthor has indicated in his personal reflection, it is important for you, the reader, to understand our racial/cultural standpoints. Here, I will share with you my journey for self-understanding.

By all appearances, I am African American; however, my family history will tell you otherwise. I am in my thirties and for many years have wondered about the details of my heritage. My father (who passed away in 1996) was in the Navy. When I was 2½ years old, we were stationed in Rota, Spain, for 4½ years and were immersed in Spanish culture. During the day, both my father and mother worked, and my older brother and sister were in school. Our maid, Milagros (no, we were not rich), kept me during the day, and she taught me how to speak Spanish fluently and all about the rituals of the Spanish people. I felt as if I were a part of the culture.

After living in Spain, we moved from Pensacola, Florida, to Atlanta, Georgia, to be closer to my parents' families. As we moved across the world, it was my age, family status, and interpersonal interactions that shaped who I was. It was not until I was around family and peers with southern dialects, different life experiences, and few interracial/interethnic interactions that I became aware of my racial standpoint. I was accused of "not being Black enough" because I spoke "proper" English. One vivid memory involves being left out of the "best friend game" by my Jewish friend and a Pentecostal European American friend. They both decided that they were each other's friend because they knew each other longer than they knew me. I was the odd person out: Everyone had a best friend except me. I knew immediately that the reason I was not chosen was possibly because of my race/ethnicity.

My quest for learning about my family's history and realization of how we are socialized to view racial/ethnic groups has challenged me to explore the significance of racial/ethnic identity in a society that values a racial hierarchy. Although we do not have a family tree that shows us where we came from, I do find some peace in knowing a few pieces of the puzzle have been completed. I am aware that both my grandmothers are of Native American and European descent. However, there is a big puzzle piece that does not complete the picture of who my family and I are. For this very reason, I am committed to becoming continually aware of the importance of our multiple identities in an increasingly diverse society. I want to have knowledge of my rich ethnic heritage to pass on to my future children.

—TMH

SETTING THE STAGE FOR OPTIMAL DISCUSSIONS OF RACE

In many interracial contexts—social, professional, family—the issue of race and racism continues to be a taboo topic. Lack of opportunity and high levels of anxiety and uncertainty decrease the likelihood that honest discussions on racial issues will take place. Ironically, such discussions are typically the primary way that anxiety and uncertainty are reduced. Thus, a vicious cycle is created. People generally do not have sufficient opportunities to discuss issues related to race outside their largely intraracial network. Different racial and ethnic groups live among each other in the same residential districts more than ever, yet ironically, have limited quality interaction with one another (Halualani et al., 2004). According to this line of research, most interracial contact occurs in two specific locations: on-campus in class and off-campus at work. As you might expect, we believe that the classroom holds the greatest potential for producing high-quality, productive discussions on race.

Unfortunately, in the past, "the issue of race on college campuses has been one of the most profound and controversial topics in higher education" (Muthuswamy, Levine, & Gazel, 2006, p. 105). Attempts at political correctness often have led to self-censorship where some individuals choose to be silent rather than potentially offensive; others learn the appropriate language to mask their racist beliefs (Jackson, 2008). Because of this, many colleges and universities have enacted strategies to create multicultural campuses; these include proactive initiatives, multicultural programming, and race relations dialogue in and outside of class. Gurin (1999) reports that classroom diversity, combined with opportunities for informal interactions, resulted in positive learning outcomes, such as academic engagement, active thinking, and greater appreciation for differences. Racial and ethnic diversity alone, according to McAllister and Irvine (2000), is not enough—formal and informal opportunities for interaction are necessary. Many campuses may have numerical diversity but lack any sort of interactional diversity. On most campuses, these opportunities must be cultivated by university faculty and staff, given that cultural segregation on campuses is common (Yates, 2000).

Based on the work of different scholars (e.g., Freire, 1970/2000; Yankelovich, 1999), it is important to distinguish between different types of interracial interactions. We can define **talk**, for instance, as unidirectional messages sent with little attention to, or opportunity for, feedback. Talk is one-way communication that often takes the form of a lecture. **Discussion**, in comparison, involves multidirectional messages exchanged between two or more people. If talk involves talking at someone, discussion typically involves people talking with others. The goal for this type of interaction is often to persuade the other person to see things in a particular way; therefore discussions typically take the form of debates (Yankelovich, 1999). Discussion becomes **communication** when the series of messages that are exchanged ultimately result in creating shared meaning and mutual understanding. Too often, we assume that we have shared meaning when we communicate with others but fail to recognize that in reality individuals bring different sets of assumptions, perceptions, and understandings that lead to miscommunication. Because of this, some communication scholars (e.g., Wiio, 1978) believe that communication failures are the norm, especially when you involve people from diverse backgrounds. Yet, in this book, we focus on the great potential in the last form of interracial

interaction, **dialogue**. Multiple conceptualizations of dialogue exist (Anderson, Cissna, & Arnett, 1994; Bakhtin, 1984; Buber, 1958, 1965; Isaacs, 1999), but most reflect a common focus on its transformative nature (e.g., Freire, 1970/2000). By and large, dialogue is defined as an exchange in which people who have different beliefs and perspectives develop mutual understanding that transforms how they see themselves and others. As you probably imagine, cultivating an environment where dialogue can emerge is quite difficult. Yet the benefits of this peak form of communication are substantial—and worth all the efforts, energy, and time.

FOSTERING INTERRACIAL DIALOGUE

We believe, as does Johannesen (1971), that dialogue is best viewed as an attitude or orientation. Compare this approach to dialogue with popular myths that describe dialogue as simple, relatively effortless, and easy to maintain. Within this more common perspective, dialogue is seen as a strategy or technique—consciously achieved with little or no preparation. But our use of the concept of dialogue is different from "honest expression," "frank conversation," or "good communication." To foster an environment where dialogue can emerge, community members must work hard to promote a supportive (caring) climate in which genuineness, empathic understanding, unconditional positive regard, and mutual equality are maintained (Johannesen, 1971). Setting the stage for dialogue also includes addressing existing power differentials from which speech is enacted and utilizing tactics to empower those persons who enter a specific situational context with less social, organizational, and/or personal power than others (Cooks & Hale, 1992).

According to Tanno (1998), six elements are crucial to the promotion of dialogue. The first involves recognition that our past, present, and future are inextricably tied together (*connection*). As a way to prepare for dialogue, community members must come to understand how their shared history (sometimes at odds, sometimes together) informs, to a certain extent, current interactions. Connection also involves simultaneously recognizing both similarities and differences.

The second element is a *commitment* over time. "Dialogue does not, or should not, have a discernible beginning and end" (Tanno, 2004, p. 2). One of the defining characteristics of dialogue is that it represents a process, one in which all parties are actively involved and committed. In other words, dialogue can *only* emerge through commitment and time.

The second key element to dialogue is a developed *realness/closeness*, regarding both physical and psychological distance. Genuineness, honesty, and candor—even that which initially may be potentially offensive—all are central to the emergence of dialogue (Johannesen, 1971). A central element of dialogue is the desire, ability, and commitment to "keep it real" even when such an endeavor may initiate tension or hostility.

As it relates to freedom of expression, a fourth element of dialogue is the *creation/maintenance* of space where everyone's *voice* is valued. This includes the recognition and an appreciation that each person may speak for a variety of voices (professional, personal, cultural).

The fifth element of dialogue includes an *engagement of mind, heart, and soul*. The mind may be where logic and reasoning are located; however, the heart and soul is where emotion,

commitment, accountability, and responsibility reside (Tanno, 1998). Attempts to isolate some aspects (fact, logic, reason) with no or little consideration of others (emotions, experiences, intuitions) does not contribute to a healthy communication environment. Instead, it creates a traditional, hostile climate where certain voices are privileged over others.

The final element that is crucial in setting the stage for dialogue is *self-reflection*. According to Tanno (1998), all the other elements previously described depend on each person's resolution to engage in self-reflection that is critical, constructive, and continuous. Such a process of self-examination can be initially difficult, and ultimately painful, especially when dealing with such issues as cultural oppression, societal power, and privilege. However, the process by which persons situate themselves—professionally, culturally, and personally—within the context of a healthy communication environment is crucial to establishing a readiness for dialogue. Through self-reflection, an understanding can emerge where individuals begin to recognize the relevance of their lived experience in perceptions of self and others. In this regard, "objective" positions stemming from a "neutral standpoint" are acknowledged as problematic. So, as we work to discuss the saliency of interracial communication, we must continue to engage in self-reflexivity. Through this process, we are encouraged to recognize that neutralization (apathy) only perpetuates the problem of racism.

Interracial discussions, in and outside the classroom, that are attempted without a supportive communicative climate can actually do more harm than good. Thus, we encourage cultivating a sense of community in the interracial communication classroom. These efforts are crucial to move beyond superficial discussions and toward interracial dialogue. Strategic efforts must be made that challenge our socially conditioned behaviors. Instead of accepting racism, oppression, and discrimination as an inherent part of our social reality, we must become a collective body committed to changing the way we think, talk, and feel about race as we enter the 21st century.

Accordingly, we turn next to the importance of classroom climate in promoting interracial dialogue. Race can be an emotional and personal topic for both students and instructors. This is especially true for European American (White) students who "feel that they cannot honestly discuss racially charged issues without fear of the ultimate social shame—being labeled as racist" (Miller & Harris, 2005, p. 238). A positive, productive classroom climate is, therefore, essential to maximizing discussions related to race, racism, and interracial communication. Consider the reflections of Navita Cummings James (1997), a University of South Florida professor who has extensive teaching experiences in the areas of race, racism, and communication:

> Perhaps the most critical step for me is creating a classroom climate where students can learn from each other, develop their critical thinking skills by agreeing and disagreeing with each other, with assigned readings, and even the professor; where students can live with each other's anger, pain, and other emotions and not personally be threatened by it; where they can "let down" their own defenses and begin to explore and better understand other people's lived experiences . . . and where at least some can move away from the stereotypical "us against them" mentality and begin to see potential allies across the racial divide. (p. 200)

Box 1.7   Research Highlight
Racial Discrimination Perceptions in College

Hurtado and Ruiz (2012) report the results of a national Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshmen Survey. According to the results of the survey, 25% of all entering freshmen at 4-year colleges and universities currently believe that racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in the United States (Pryor, DeAngelo, Palucki Blake, Hurtado, & Tran, 2011). This perception exists amidst a number of highly publicized race-related incidents reported across college campuses including verbally aggressive comments, symbolic lynching of African Americans through the appearances of nooses, and other forms of individualized harassment. According to their study, 20% of Latin@ and African American students report feeling excluding on their campuses. Are you surprised by these statistics? Do you think a survey on your campus would have similar results? Why, or why not?

Based on our own teaching philosophies and past experiences teaching about race and racism in our classes, we agree wholeheartedly with these sentiments (see also Duncan, 2002).

Building Community in the Classroom

Under ordinary circumstances, there is no such thing as "instant community" (Peck, 1992). We tend to use the label **community** to describe any number of settings (e.g., neighborhoods, colleges, churches). In most instances, these characterizations involve a false use of the word (Orbe & Knox, 1994). A single working definition of community is difficult to pinpoint (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992). Nevertheless, Peck's (1987) writings on what he calls "true community" appear to offer the most productive approach, especially regarding the interracial communication classroom. He restricts the use of community to a "group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other" (Peck, 1987, p. 50). Those who are part of a true community have relationships that go deeper than typical interactions that only involve "masks of composure." They also involve a significant level of commitment to "rejoice together" and "to delight in each other, make others' conditions our own" (Peck, 1987, p. 50).

Building a sense of community in any classroom is ideal. It appears essential for courses that involve topics related to issues of culture, race, and oppression (Orbe, 1995). Sometimes it can seem like an impossible task, especially given the time and commitment it takes. Because race continues to be a volatile issue in the United States, studying interracial communication typically involves some tension. The most productive instances of interracial communication, at least initially, work to sustain rather than resolve this tension (Wood, 1993). This involves probing the awkwardness that sometimes comes with learning new perspectives, especially those that appear to conflict with a person's existing views. It also includes dealing with a range of emotions—anger, fear, pride, guilt, joy, shame—associated with understanding your own racial location. Negotiating the tensions that accompany such strong emotions can encourage classroom participants (including both instructors

and students) to recognize racial/ethnic differences while also seeing the commonalities among different cultural groups. Julia T. Wood (1993) explains how her philosophy supports this approach:

> Realizing that humans are both alike and different—simultaneously diverse and common—allows us to honor and learn from the complexity of human life. . . . I hope to create a productive discomfort that provokes more holistic, inclusive, and ultimately accurate understandings of human communication and human nature. (p. 378)

Cultivating a sense of community in the classroom is facilitated by the instructor but is the responsibility of each member of the class (Orbe, 1995). A major aspect of building classroom community involves establishing relationships. According to Palmer (1993), "real learning does not happen until students are brought into relationship with the teacher, with each other, and with the subject" (p. 5). So how do we go about cultivating a sense of community in interracial communication classes? Peck (1987, 1992) identifies six characteristics of "true community": (1) inclusiveness, (2) commitment, (3) consensus, (4) contemplation, (5) vulnerability, and (6) graceful fighting. As you will see, each of these elements of community contributes to maximizing the potential for interracial communication interactions.

Inclusiveness refers to a general acceptance and appreciation of differences, not as necessarily positive or negative but just as different (Crawley, 1995). First and foremost, "community is and must be inclusive" (Peck, 1992, p. 436). Maintaining ingroup/outgroup status within the interracial communication classroom is counterproductive to cultivating a sense of community (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992). Community members must establish and maintain a sense of inclusiveness.

Commitment involves a strong willingness to coexist and work through any barriers that hinder community development (Peck, 1992). Part of your commitment to community is a faithfulness to work through both the positive and negative experiences associated with the tensions of racial interactions. In other words, being committed to community involves "hang[ing] in there when the going gets rough" (Peck, 1987, p. 62). Typically, it is exactly this sense of commitment that allows people to absorb any differences in racialized standpoints as a healthy means of community development and preservation (Peck, 1987).

Consensus is another important aspect of community. Interracial communities, in the true sense of the word, work through differences in opinions and seek a general agreement or accord among their members. Racial and ethnic differences are not "ignored, denied, hidden, or changed; instead they are celebrated as gifts" (Peck, 1987, p. 62). In every situation, developing a consensus requires acknowledging and processing cultural differences. In the interracial communication classroom, reaching a consensus does not imply forced adherence to majority beliefs. Instead, it involves collaborative efforts to obtain a win–win situation or possibly "agreeing to disagree."

Contemplation is crucial to this process. Individuals are consciously aware of their particular racial location as well as their collective standing as a community. This awareness involves an increased realization of self, others, and how these two interact with the larger

Creating an inclusive classroom committed to respect, dignity, and a genuine desire to learn from others is a crucial part of setting the stage for dialogic moments.

Source: Eyecandy Images/Thinkstock.

external surroundings. Becoming more aware of your multicultural selves is an important component of this process, and Chapters 4 and 5 are designed to facilitate greater self-discovery in this area. Note that the "spirit of community" is not something forever obtained; instead, it is repeatedly lost (Peck, 1992, p. 439). Constant reflection of the process toward community is necessary.

For community to develop, individuals must also be willing to discard their "masks of composure" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992, p. 262) and expose their inner selves to others (Peck, 1987). In other words, a certain degree of **vulnerability** must be assumed. For interracial communication instructors, this means creating a relatively safe place where students are accepted for who they are (Orbe & Knox, 1994). It also involves assuming the risks associated with sharing personal stories related to culture, race/ethnicity, and social oppressions. Vulnerability is contagious (Peck, 1992). Students are more willing to take risks and make themselves vulnerable when they perceive the instructor as personally engaged in the process of building community.

The final characteristic of community, according to Peck (1987, 1992), is **graceful fighting**. As described earlier, tension in the interracial communication classroom is to be expected. Conflict is a natural process inherent to any intergroup setting and should not be avoided, minimized, or disregarded (Hocker & Wilmont, 1995). The notion that "if we can

resolve our conflicts then someday we will be able to live together in community" (Peck, 1987, p. 72) is an illusion. A community is built *through* the negotiation (not avoidance) of conflict. But how do we participate in graceful fighting? The next section explores this important question.

Ground Rules for Classroom Discussions

We do not particularly like the term graceful fighting to describe the type of communication that we want to promote during interracial interactions. The word *fighting* has such a negative connotation because it triggers images of nasty disagreements, physical confrontations, or screaming matches. Nevertheless, we do believe that our ideas of a positive, productive interracial communication classroom climate are consistent with Peck's writings on graceful fighting. In short, we see it as referring to an expectation that agreements and disagreements are to be articulated, negotiated, and possibly resolved productively. One point needs to be raised before outlining the process of creating ground rules for discussion: some general differences in how different racial/ethnic groups engage in conflict.

A number of general ground rules exist that commonly are adopted to guide effective group discussions. Chances are, based on your experiences with working with different types of groups, you could generate an elaborate list of conversational guidelines. Be open-minded. Be an active listener. Use "I" statements when articulating thoughts, emotions, and ideas. Act responsibly and explain why certain things people say are offensive to you. Assume that people are inherently good and always do the best they can with what information they have. Over the years, we have come across a number of lists of ground rules, many of which overlap significantly. Regarding discussion specifically involving issues of race and racism, we offer selected ground rules offered by N. C. James (1997, pp. 197–198). As you read each of the following items, think about how it contributes to a productive communication climate. We hope you will see the importance of each ground rule in overcoming some of the potential barriers associated with interracial communication.

1. Remember that reasonable people can and do disagree.

2. Each person deserves respect and deserves to be heard.

3. Tolerance and patience are required of all.

4. Respect the courage of some who share things we may find highly objectionable. We may learn the most from their comments.

5. Understand the rules for civil discourse may need to be negotiated on individual, group, and class levels (e.g., gender-linked and race-linked styles of communication may need to be considered explicitly).

6. Acknowledge that all racial/ethnic groups have accomplishments their members can be proud of and misdeeds they should not be proud of (i.e., no racial/ethnic group walks in absolute historical perfection or wickedness).

7. Each person should understand the privileges that he or she has in the United States based on skin color (e.g., Whites and lighter skinned people of color) and other social assets such as social class, gender, level of education, and so on.

8. "Equality" between and among discussants should be the relational norm.

Do you agree with each of these ground rules? Why or why not? Consistent with the characteristics of cultivating a sense of community, it is important to recognize that a consensus of all participants must be gained regarding classroom discussion ground rules. If just one person does not agree with a ground rule, it should not be adopted. Of course, some members may provide convincing arguments that persuade others to adopt certain guidelines. This, however, should not translate into peer pressure or intimidation. Again, after some extended discussion on each ground rule, a consensus needs to be reached or the ground rule is not adopted by the classroom community. Because the dynamics of each community are different, ground rules are likely to be different from group to group. We must also take into consideration the specific situational context (dyadic, small group, open discussion) and communication channel used by the group. For instance, think about the interracial communication occurring on the Internet. Individuals sitting at computer terminals all over the world are interacting via chat rooms and other means without ever seeing the other people and hearing their voices. Given this type of cyberspace interaction, do you think the ground rules for discussions would be the same? Or would they be different because of the absence of face-to-face interaction? One of the Opportunities for Extended Learning at the end of this chapter allows you to explore this idea further.

Another factor that should be recognized when creating ground rules for class discussions is the readiness levels of the participants of the group (including the instructor). In this regard, it is important not to simply adopt the various ground rules that we have generated here. Each community must create a set of communication norms that meet the expectations and competencies for their particular members. In some instances, different groups will be willing and able to incorporate additional guidelines that reflect their deeper understanding of race, racism, and race relations in the United States. For instance, some interracial communication classes may decide to adopt one or more of the following guidelines:

1. Communicate with the assumption that racism, and other forms of oppression, exist in the United States.

2. Agree not to blame ourselves or others for misinformation that we have learned in the past; instead, assume a responsibility for not repeating it once we have learned otherwise.

3. Avoid making sweeping generalizations of individuals based solely on their racial/ethnic group membership (e.g., I can't understand why Asian Americans always . . .).

4. Acknowledge the powerful role of the media on the socialization of each community member.

5. Resist placing the extra burden of "racial spokesperson" or "expert" on anyone.

6. Respect, patience, and an appreciation of diverse perspectives are required (Note: Can you see how this guideline is at a different level than number 3 in the more basic list?).

Each of these six examples represents another guideline that your classroom community may want to adopt as they engage in meaningful interracial communication. What other ground rules, relatively unique to your situation, might you also adopt? Once a consensus has been reached on a workable set of guidelines, post them in the class so members have access to them. Over the course of the life of the community, review, reemphasize, challenge, and/or revise your ground rules. As the relational immediacy of the students and instructors increases, so might the need for additional guidelines for classroom discussions. Other rules may no longer seem relevant. The key is to create and maintain a set of communication ground rules that serve to guide your discussions on race and racism.

CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 was designed to introduce you to the study of interracial communication in the United States and outline the importance of cultivating a sense of community to maximize the potential for productive dialogue on topics related to race. Interwoven throughout this chapter are several important assumptions that are central to effective interracial understanding. We summarize them here to facilitate your navigation of future chapters.

The first assumption deals with the history of race. Although race is largely a socially constructed concept, it must be studied because it is such an important external cue in communication interactions. Race matters in the United States. Ethnic differences may be a more credible marker (scientifically), but people see and react to race differences. Second, relying on racial and ethnic stereotypes when communicating with individual group members is counterproductive. Seeing others as individuals, while maintaining an awareness of general cultural norms, promotes effective interracial communication. The third assumption has to do with honest self-reflection regarding the social positioning that your particular racial/ethnic group occupies. Acknowledging, and coming to understand, self and other racial locations is crucial to effective interracial communication. Fourth, research and theory within the field of communication has significant contributions to make regarding advocating for productive communication within and across different racial and ethnic groups. And while we do not assume that communication is a cure-all, it does appear to be the primary means to advance race relations in the United States.

KEY TERMS

interpersonal communication (p. 6)
intraracial communication (p. 6)
international communication (p. 6)

intercultural communication (p. 6)
interethnic communication (p. 6)
transracial communication (p. 7)

culture (p. 9)

race (p. 9)

ethnicity (p. 9)

ethnocentrism (p. 9)

microculture (p. 10)

minorities (p. 10)

racial prejudice (p. 10)

racial discrimination (p. 10)

racism (p. 10)

stereotypes (p. 10)

metastereotypes (p. 10)

racial location (p. 14)

racial standpoint (p. 14)

talk (p. 17)

discussion (p. 17)

communication (p. 17)

dialogue (p. 18)

community (p. 20)

inclusiveness (p. 21)

commitment (p. 21)

consensus (p. 21)

contemplation (p. 21)

vulnerability (p. 22)

graceful fighting (p. 22)

RECOMMENDED CONTEMPORARY READINGS

Brown, C. B. (2011). Barack Obama as the great man: Communicative constructions of racial transcendence in White-male elite discourses. *Communication Monographs, 78*(4), 535–556.

Joseph, R. L. (2011). Imagining Obama: Reading overtly and inferentially racist images of our 44th president, 2007–2008. *Communication Studies, 62*(4), 389–405.

LaFever, M. (2011). Empowering Native Americans: Communication, planning, and dialogue for eco-tourism in Gallup, New Mexico. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 4*(2), 127–145.

Orbe, M., & Camara, S. K. (2010). Defining discrimination across cultural groups: Exploring the [un-]coordinated management of meaning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*, 283–293.

Squires, C. (2010). Running through the trenches: Or, an introduction to the undead culture wars and dead serious identity politics. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 34*(3), 211–214.

Valentino, N. A., & Brader, T. (2011). The sword's other edge: Perceptions of discrimination and racial policy opinion after Obama. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 75*(2), 201–226.

Zhang, Y., & Tan, A. (2011). Impact of mass media during the 2008 U.S. presidential election: A cross-cultural study of stereotype change in China and the United States. *Communication Studies, 62*(4), 353–371.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXTENDED LEARNING

1. Some communication scholars do not necessarily agree with our definition of interracial communication. For instance, Marsha Houston (2002) contends that the history of race (and racism) is integral to U.S. history. As such, she states that race is always a salient issue—either explicitly or implicitly—when people from different racial and ethnic groups interact. Break into small groups and discuss the issue raised by Dr. Houston; what are your thoughts about the saliency of race in everyday interactions?

2. As the first family of the United States, the Obama's process for choosing a family dog was national news. As President Obama described his preference for the family pet, he playfully referred to himself as a "mutt." According to Squires (2010), his use of "mutt"—especially in describing "pure breed" alternatives—is interesting given his self-description as African American despite his widely recognized biracial ancestry. Break into small groups and discuss the following questions: What do you make of President Obama's decision to describe himself as African American and not biracial? What do you think it says about race relations in the

United States? Do you think that the general public sees President Obama as a president, an African American president, a biracial president, or a president who happens to be African American?

3. In an attempt to understand your particular racial location, create a list of statements in response to the question: What does it mean to be _____ [insert racial/ethnic group] in the United States? Once you have compiled your list, share it with others within and outside your racial/ethnic group. What similarities and differences exist? Learning about others' racial locations is an excellent way to generate an increased level of understanding of your own racial location.

4. Find out more about the racial and ethnic composition of your local community by visiting American FactFinder at http://factfinder.census.gov. At this website sponsored by the U.S. Census Bureau, you can get current demographic information about particular communities (by zip code or city) and states, as well as the entire United States.

5. As indicated within the chapter, guidelines for classroom discussions should reflect the specific dynamics of a particular group. Think about what guidelines might be necessary for computer chat rooms or classes conducted via the Internet. How might these be similar to, yet different from, more traditional classrooms?

6. One strategy for facilitating discussions relate to race, racism, and communication is to generate a list of propositions and see if the class can reach a consensus regarding their agreement or disagreement (James, 1997). First, break the class into groups. Then give each group one of the following statements (or create your own), and instruct them to reach a consensus if at all possible.

   a. In the contemporary United States, people of color cannot be racist.

   b. Racism can be unconscious and unintentional.

   c. Many European American men in the United States are currently the victims of reverse discrimination.

   d. All European Americans, because of the privilege in the United States, are inherently racist.

   e. Asian Americans can be racist against other people of color, such as African and Latino/a Americans.