THE DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY

FOR EXPERIENCING OTHERNESS

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INTRODUCTION

At the age of 37 years since it was first proposed in 1986, the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is in its prime. It is old enough to have been pushed around a bit, but still young enough to be able to push back. Actually, the DMIS may be the most modern intercultural theory around, with a theoretical base that is at the forefront of neuroscience and social applications of quantum mechanics. And as an intercultural model that is rooted in human perception rather than cultural comparison, the DMIS makes a particularly good theoretical bridge between global and domestic contexts of multicultural relationships.

This chapter aims to summarize the conceptual history of the DMIS, respond to some misapprehensions of the model, review the major approaches to research afforded by the model, and suggest some applications to a rapidly evolving social future. As such, this chapter is part of a series of updates to the original statement of the DMIS published in 1986 in a special issue edited by Judith Martin of the International Journal of Intercultural Relations (Bennett, 1986). While major updates have not changed the basic structure or underlying theoretical foundation of the model, they have sometimes altered or clarified terminology and they have always sought to position the model in evolving social and disciplinary contexts. Those updates include major articles published in Education for the Intercultural Experience edited by Michael Paige (Bennett, 1993), in Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication: Selected Readings (Bennet, 1998), in Towards Multiculturalism: A Reader in Multicultural Education edited by Jaime Wurzel (Bennett, 2004), in Intercultural and International Research Vol. 1 edited by Shijie Guan (Bennett, 2011), in the revised Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication: Paradigms, Principles, and Practices (Bennett, 2013), and most recently in the Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication edited by Young Y. Kim (Bennett, 2017). This chapter

addresses one of the major applications of DMIS to research methodology, the Intercultural Development Inventory™ (Hammer et al., 2003), some nonparametric measurements, and a new DMIS-based research tool, the Intercultural Viability Indicator™ (Bennett, 2021).

As discussed in detail below, the DMIS is based on perceptual constructivism, a concept meant to incorporate a number of perceptual development assumptions such as those made by Jean Piaget (1954) and George Kelly (1963). Perceptual constructivism posits a sequential layering of perceptual categorization and awareness that enables more complex experience of self and other in intercultural context. The first part of this chapter reviews the DMIS as a practical application of these principles to the perception and experience of "otherness," where that term refers to perceived differences between one's own culturally shared worldview and those of other groups. It clarifies the underlying conceptual structure through the model's stages, and it addresses misapprehensions such as the construal of DMIS in terms of "knowledge, attitudes, and skills." The second part of this chapter reviews the three major types of measurement of the DMIS: individual qualitative and quantitative assessment, collective quantitative and qualitative assessment, and comparative evaluation such as pre/post t-testing, normative comparisons, and rubric analyses. Finally, this chapter explores potential future uses of the DMIS as the field of intercultural studies shifts from a predominantly relativist paradigm to a predominantly constructivist paradigm, and particularly as the field moves from an overemphasis on international cultural differences to include more application to domestic diversity issues.

THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF THE DMIS

There are three major types of models of human development: descriptive, prescriptive, and theoretical. Descriptive models organize phenomena into some logical or observed sequence, such as stages of grieving (Kübler-Ross, 1969) or phases of culture shock (e.g., Oberg, 1960). Descriptive models often seem to be intuitively true, in the sense that they can easily be applied to lived experience in apparently meaningful ways. For instance, study abroad students easily describe their experience in Oberg's terms of honeymoon phase or adjustment phase, despite the fact that research does not support the existence of any fixed set of phases in dealing with other-culture experience (Ward et al., 2001). Prescriptive models organize phenomena according to some set of values, such as the stages of multicultural organization development from less inclusive to more inclusive,

with the value prescription that more inclusive is better (e.g., Jackson & Hardiman, 1994). Like descriptive models, prescriptive models often seem intuitively true (particularly if one shares the values), even though the actual process of value-driven change may not follow the developmental sequence. In contrast to descriptive and prescriptive models, theoretical models assume a sequential development that is explainable by a coherent underlying mechanism. Stages in the theoretical process of development are neither descriptions of how things seem to be, nor are they prescriptions of how things should be. Rather, they are testable expressions of some underlying coherent process – in this case, the development of human perception and cognition that enables certain kinds of experience. As a theoretical model, the DMIS posits a sequence of increasingly complex perception of otherness that enables increasingly sophisticated experience of otherness, ranging from the ethnocentric conditions of ignoring, rejecting, or assimilating otherness to the ethnorelative conditions of accepting, adapting to, or integrating otherness. While it is probably better in multicultural situations to be less ethnocentric and more ethnorelative, the model does not prescribe that ethnorelativism is intrinsically a superior condition.

The specific mechanism assumed to operate in the DMIS is perceptual development (Bennett, 1977, 2017, 2023). Perceptual development refers to Piaget's constructivist neuroscientific theory of how perceptual processes are sequentially layered to enable cognitive development and evolutionary adaptation (Piaget, 1954, 1972). Applied to DMIS theory, Piaget's basic idea has been augmented by several other constructivist approaches. One is the idea of personal constructs – an extension of Piaget's idea of "schemata" – that organize perceptual discriminations into distinct categories and that in turn enable particular experiences of phenomena (Kelly, 1963). Kelly stimulated the cognitive psychology notion that perception is an active process of constructing reality, not a passive recording of stimuli (Von Foerster, 1984) – a position well-developed in human communication theory as active meaning-making (Pearce, 2005) and in intercultural communication with the idea of cultural context as active organization of collective experience (Hall, 1959). Finally, perceptual development is inherently embodied, meaning that the construction of meaning is necessarily a dialectic between the feeling of ourselves in some context and the form that we give that feeling to others through our behavior (Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004)

Perceptual Experience of Otherness →

Denial	Defense	Minimization	Acceptance	Adaptation	Integration
Failing to perceive the existence or relevance of cultural difference	Perceiving specific cultural groups in polarized and evaluative ways	Focusing on shared human experience and universal values to reduce prejudice	Attributing equal human complexity to different cultural groups	Using mutual empathy to generate intersectional third culture spaces	Exercising intercultural consciousness and ethicality from liminal cultural space

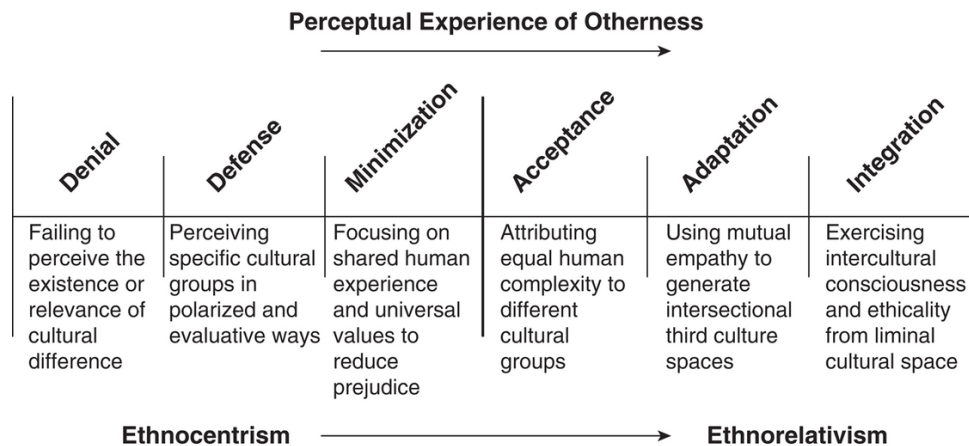**Ethnocentrism** ⟶ **Ethnorelativism**

Figure 1.1 The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) © Milton J. Bennett

As shown in Figure 1.1, the stages of the DMIS are not discrete conditions in which one is either in or out. Rather, they are labels for identifiable positions along a continuum from most ethnocentric to most ethnorelative. The stages theoretically correspond to the amount of "sensitivity" operating in the perception of otherness. In perceptual theory (Gregory, 1966), sensitivity refers to responsiveness to perceptual stimuli; in this case, sensitivity to the social stimuli of otherness. What distinguishes the positions is their correspondence to noticeable differences in the experience of otherness. Those differences may be subjectively noticeable to the perceivers themselves, and/or they may be objectively noticeable to external observers. For instance, in a study that employed observers minimally trained in the DMIS categories, the raters showed a high degree of consistency in how they categorized statements about otherness in interviews (Hammer et al., 2003). That consistency indicates that the objective differences in behavior that they were noticing correspond well with the stage demarcations of the model. Nevertheless, stages (or positions) along the continuum are probably best conceived of as normal distributions of probability, where one's sensitivity to otherness at a particular time is more likely to be classifiable according to one stage or another.

As indicated in Figure 1.1, at the beginning of the continuum in Denial (the left, according to Western convention), people's sensitivity is very low. They cannot perceive otherness at all or only in vague, undifferentiated terms; otherness does not represent a competent (effective) stimulus to the perceiver. The term "denial" is used here in the psychological sense of not being able to perceive something, such as an addict in denial who is truly unable to see their own addictive behavior (Rinn et al., 2002). The feeling of this perceptual condition may be given form in dismissive statements about otherness in general (e.g., "I have enough to worry about without thinking about climate refugees") or in behavior (like living in homogeneous gated communities) that supports isolation from others. A Denial experience of otherness easily supports treating others as invisible – a condition that many

people of socially marginalized groups find disconfirming of their humanity (e.g., Ellison, 1952).

Assuming that otherness is nevertheless relevant to a person's life (e.g., they are managing a diverse work team, or they are living in a community with refugees), they begin to notice those others in some simple ways that differentiate them from "us." They then organize those perceptions into rudimentary categories that support perceiving otherness in more defined ways. Following Piaget's notion that each stage represents a dialectical incorporation of the previous stage into a higher level of adaptation, this perceptual experience is newly considerate of otherness, but others remain less complex and usually inferior to members of one's own group. In Kelly's personal construct terms, the dichotomous category of us (people who are like me) and them (all people who are not like me) is too simple to support complex engagement. The feeling of Defense is typically given form in the superiority of "us" and in denigrative stereotypes about "them." Sometimes the poles are reversed where otherness is stereotypically romanticized in contrast to a critically flawed "us." This reversal of Defense sometimes occurs in long-term international sojourns, where it typically is referred to as "going native." It also occurs in multicultural contexts when members of a dominant group may become "false allies," stereotyping all non-dominant people as noble survivors of oppression or exemplary guardians of the environment while criticizing their own group in more complex terms.

For people who actually interact with threatening otherness (as opposed to those who are only exposed to it through often-exaggerated media treatments), Defense is an untenable position. This is particularly obvious in organizations where diverse employees need to coordinate meaning and action toward a work goal, but it is equally true in multicultural communities that need to coordinate social services. This adaptive pressure encourages people to complexify their perception of otherness for the purpose of interacting with others more successfully. Initially, that complexification involves a sympathetic assumption of similarity with relevant others, where differences perceived as alien are subsumed into familiar perceptual categories that previously were reserved for one's own group. For example, the perception of fearsome immigrants might be subsumed by the familiar "parent" category, so that the immigrants can be recategorized from "coming to take our jobs" to "trying to save their children." The process is termed Minimization in the DMIS (see Figure 1.1), since the goal is to minimize the threat of difference by redefining it as a form of similarity, thus allowing less contentious interaction.

In Piaget's terms, Minimization is just another step in complexifying perception for the general purpose of adaptation. And indeed, otherness is generally more complexly understood than it is in Defense, enabling more successful relations with others. The

feeling of this stage is likely to be given the behavioral form the Golden Rule, where treating others as you would like to be treated is based on the simplistic idea that others are essentially the same as you (Bennett, 1979). This tolerance of others in the name of common humanity, although often patronizing, is nevertheless an adaptive improvement over the denigrative behavior of Defense. Minimization represents a skewed focus on the "alike" side of the us/them dichotomous construct (see Kelly, 1963). Because it stresses inclusive similarity and fails to complexify significant differences, Minimization represents an unstable ethnocentric condition that can easily fall back into the unreconstructed denigration of Defense.

While Minimization reduces the threat of difference, it does not change the essential experience of ethnocentrism. That experience is of an incomparable reality that necessarily forms the only cultural context for all events. While people at this stage may perceive superficial cultural differences, they mostly cannot see themselves as having a cultural worldview that defines reality differently than other worldviews; they have yet to develop the level of awareness necessary to perceive their own perception. This would be the case even if the difference side of the construct at Minimization were more differentiated: someone might be very knowledgeable about one or more other cultures, but if they were operating at a Minimization level of awareness, they would still not be able to relate to those cultures in an ethnorelative way.

The move to the next state, Acceptance, represents the initial development of a perceptual meta-level. By acquiring a set of meta-categories, people become able to contrast aspects of their own cultural worldview with those of another worldview, thus experiencing for the first time the relativity of their own culture. Importantly, the meta-categories of Acceptance are "etic" (outside) not "emic" (inside) categories (Pike, 1966). An etic category is intentionally constructed by scientific observers to allow comparisons among cultures that could not occur using only inside (emic, or ethnographic) descriptions. For example, the etic category of "high-context/low-context" communication style was constructed by Hall (1959) to allow the comparison of cultures in terms of how much they encourage explicit specificity versus implicit suggestion in everyday interaction. The behavior described by an etic category is not inherent to the culture being described, i.e., people in cultures don't normally describe themselves as high-context or low-context, as they might describe themselves with the emic categories of particular religions or regional traditions. Rather, etic categories refer to the observation of a pattern of behavior that has been constructed by the observer for some purpose – in this case, for improving communication or engagement. It is this kind of perception that is acquired at Acceptance, not emic descriptions of different cultures that could exist at Minimization. The key to ethnorelativism is being able to perceive and thus experience your own culture in

relationship to other cultures, and that ability depends on having developed etic meta-categories at a culture-general level of awareness.

The feeling of Acceptance is given form with various expressions of cultural relativity, such as the ubiquitous statement "It's not bad or good, it's just different." Importantly, Acceptance does not represent an adequate basis for either one-way or mutual intercultural adaptation. The recently acquired etic observational categories of this stage are still too vague to produce the underlying feeling necessary for Adaptation. Nevertheless, this stage is more interculturally adaptive in Piaget's terms, because it allows the perception of others as both equally human and as (potentially) equally complex. Even if people lack knowledge of others' complex cognitive categories, their feeling that others are likely to be complex is sufficient to form the behavior of increased respect for diversity.

The shift to Adaptation represents the incorporation of meta-level contrastive etic categories into constructs that can guide specific behavior. Based on Kelly's (1963) original formulation of "construct," cognitive psychologists (e.g., Neisser, 1967) and constructivist sociologists (e.g., Berger & Luckman, 1967) have suggested that primary socialization provides people with a repertoire of constructs that allow the coordination of meaning and action in their culture. The constructs allow feelings of appropriateness by specifying particular relationships among relevant phenomena, and the feeling of those relationships is given form in behavior that is appropriate to that cultural context (Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004). This process underlying the generation of appropriate behavior usually operates out of awareness; yet, according to Kelly (1963), people can become conscious of constructs for therapeutic or other purposes, and that is what happens at Adaptation. Using the culture-general etic categories introduced at Acceptance, people can take the next step, which is to consciously generate behavior that is more appropriate to a cultural context other than their own. They do that by applying two forms of empathy (Bennett, 1979). The first is cognitive empathy, whereby they attempt to take a general cultural perspective other than their own. This might involve construing a situation from a more collectivist than individualistic orientation, or with a more direct than indirect communication style. The second is intuitive empathy, whereby people allow themselves to feel the appropriateness of different behavior based on their shifted construal of a situation. The shift begins at a culture-general level, but as it is applied in particular situations, it may become more culture-specific. The end result of such application is to become developmentally bicultural, wherein a person is able to intentionally base behavior on feelings of appropriateness in two (or more) cultural contexts.

The major indicator of Adaptation is not, however, this developmental biculturalism. Instead, the stage refers more fundamentally to the perceptual condition of being able to

construe otherness in a culturally flexible way. That level of perceptual sensitivity allows people to use meta-level etic observational categories to seek a third-culture space. Third-culture space refers to the relational space created by two or more people who are engaging in intercultural empathy (Bennett, 2013, p. 97). It is not a simple hybrid or compromise of the cultures involved, but rather a unique condition generated by the mutual attempts to participate in others' worldviews. Based on the assumption that we do not ordinarily attempt to understand otherness in this way, the attempt to do so demands an extraordinary exercise of consciousness – one in which people intentionally choose to re-orient their worldview in the direction of each other. Insofar as our worldviews are unique coordinating systems for the groups with which we are affiliated, this kind of mutual empathy allows a meta-coordination of worldviews that is both respectful of diversity and effective in coordinating action.

Because of the need for meta-level consciousness, the DMIS stage of Adaptation does not necessarily apply to people who have, by accident of birth or adoption into a bicultural family, become bicultural themselves. Such nondevelopmental biculturalism is a result of bi-socialization, and, unless people in this condition have done other work to develop general intercultural sensitivity, their specific biculturalism is not necessarily generalizable. In other words, accidentally bicultural people may be just as ethnocentric as anyone else toward cultures outside their primary socializations. In contrast, developmental biculturalism operates at a culture-general level, where most adaptive behavior in a multicultural society is called for. For instance, in multicultural work teams, it is the general ability to engage in mutual adaptation that is most useful to intercultural communication. In a mutual adaptation environment, everyone on the team can operate intentionally in third-culture spaces. The much-vaunted "creativity of diversity" likely flows from these spaces, which, given the difficulty of operating at Adaptation, explains why the potential benefits of diversity are only sporadically realized (Bennett, 2016; Thomas & Ely, 2002).

The move to Integration in the DMIS represents the culmination of self-reflexive intercultural sensitivity as defined in the model (see Figure 1.1). In other developmental terms coined by William Howell (1986), it is the achievement of the fourth level in the series unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence. The ethnocentric stages of the DMIS are all examples of unconscious incompetence vis-à-vis engaging otherness, since the perceptual categories for defining otherness in relationally effective ways are lacking. The first ethnorelative stage of Acceptance falls into conscious incompetence, because the etic observational categories bring unattended cultural differences into relief. Adaptation is the first developmental point where intercultural sensitivity can be implemented with conscious competence. When intercultural sensitivity becomes as automatic as primary or

secondary socialization constructs – in other words, when it is fully integrated into one's worldview – then one is able to engage otherness with unconscious competence.

The two areas in which perceptual development is most pronounced in Integration are identity maintenance and ethicality. Over the course of DMIS development, cultural identity has moved from a thing established by primary socialization to a process of affiliation with multiple contexts. In the final stage of Integration, identity becomes liminal (see Note 1). The term "liminal" refers to developmental in-betweenness – being at the edges or intersections of conditions or contexts. People at this stage tend to see themselves as moving among cultural contexts, so that they are never really settled into any one of them; they default to liminality when not actively adapting to a particular context. In earlier work on this topic, Muneo Yoshikawa called this condition "dynamic in-betweenness" (1987), which is a good description of the feeling of liminal identity. The unconscious competence of engaging otherness is the form of this feeling.

Perhaps the most difficult perceptual feat of Integration is construing multicultural events in ethical terms. Since values differ among cultures in such situations, and in the interest of being respectful of those differences, it is easy to become ethically paralyzed by cultural relativity. Yet societies and organizations constantly need to make decisions about which action is better than others. How can those decisions be made without the disrespect of imperialistically imposing one set of values on everyone? In ethnocentric stages, dominant groups indeed simply impose their values on others. In the earlier ethnorelative stages, awareness of cultural diversity without any concomitant ethical system tends to generate either paralysis or confusion around value clashes in decision-making. It is at Integration that people finally feel comfortable with the meta-coordination necessary to respect cultural value differences and also to act with ethical commitment (Bennett, 2017).

MISAPPREHENSIONS OF THE DMIS

A common misapprehension of the DMIS is that it is a prescriptive model. The model actually is theoretical neutral, but because it deals with a subject (engaging otherness) that is commonly treated as either a positive or a negative value, the following additional justification of the claim may be useful.

In many ways, the DMIS is one form of an expert model (Attri, 2018). While some descriptive expert models simply contrast novices and experts, the more theoretical forms of such models treat stages of expertise as expressions of an underlying developmental process. In the case of the DMIS, the underlying process is perceptual development, and

the expertise is an increasingly sophisticated capacity for experiencing otherness. Like other models of expertise development, theoretical models do not have any inherent value judgment attached to a particular expertise. For example, having expertise in bicycle riding and repair is certainly good for professional cyclists, but there is nothing generally "good" about being a cyclist. Similarly, there is nothing universally good about engaging otherness in multicultural contexts, although it certainly is a good expertise for someone who wants to manage or just get along in multicultural situations. We should not confuse inherent goodness with the desirability of something in some context. If we do conflate the two, then our efforts to facilitate development are indistinguishable from normative prescription (see Note 2).

Any linear developmental model must show a movement from less developed to more developed. It is fair to assume that more developed is necessarily better in some way, and the DMIS is no exception. However, "better" needs to be understood within the models range of convenience. That idea from Kelly's (1963) Theory of Personal Constructs is that any concept has a constructed connotative space of limited size associated with it. The DMIS occupies such a connotative context focused on perceiving cultural difference and engaging otherness. Being ethnorelative in one's perception is not necessarily better for things outside that space, such as bicycle riding, opera singing, or any of a myriad of other human activities. But within the range of convenience, ethnorelative perceptual competence is indeed assumed to be better for managing a multicultural workforce or teaching in a multicultural classroom or generally being a responsible citizen in a multicultural society.

Another misapprehension of the DMIS is that it is modeling some combination of knowledge, attitudes, or skills (KAS) regarding intercultural relations. While it is possible to describe intercultural experience in KAS terms (e.g., Bennett et al., 2023), KAS is not the basic experiential process being modeled. For instance, one could be knowledgeable about people from cultural groups other than their own but still be quite ethnocentric, such as having a romanticized positive attitude toward foreign people as a form of reversed Defense (they are the good guys, we are the bad guys), or being skilled in emulating behavior in another culture while still being denigrative of it. Instead, the underlying process of DMIS is that of experiencing otherness with increasing amounts of complexity, so that experiencing reality through another worldview approaches the complexity of the experience one has in one's own culture. The fact that this experience might be expressed in KAS terms is quite different than assuming that the model is describing a progression of those qualities.

The thorniest misapprehension of DMIS has been its confusion with "intercultural competence." Some scholars treat intercultural competence as a constellation of personal characteristics, while others treat it as a particular configuration of knowledge and skills, and yet others treat it as the set of criteria associated with observably successful interaction. The DMIS is not modeling competence in any of these terms. Rather, it is modeling a perceptual condition (intercultural sensitivity) that represents a greater or lesser capacity for engaging otherness. It is the appropriate engagement with otherness that allows competent intercultural behavior, not the other way around. Increased intercultural sensitivity can be enacted as increased intercultural competence.

A frequent question posed in DMIS workshops is "can you be at different DMIS stages regarding different cultures?" The question betrays several fundamental misunderstandings of the model, albeit some of them rather subtle. The obvious misunderstanding is that the model is not about culture, it is about perception. People with Adaptation-level perceptual sensitivity have a greater capacity to shift perspective and generate alternative behavior in different cultural contexts; but their ability to exercise that capacity depends on other factors such as knowledge and motivation. They may be more knowledgeable about a particular different culture and/or more motivated to adapt to it, but that does not mean that they are in Adaptation vis-à-vis that culture and not another. According to DMIS theory, the capacity for adaptation, once acquired, is potentially exercisable in any cultural context. The other side of this coin is that, without ethnorelative perceptual skills, no amount of knowledge or motivation can generate interculturally competent behavior. People may be re-socialized into different cultures, after which they may be culturally competent in that different culture, but, as mentioned earlier, that nondevelopmental biculturalism does not in itself foster the generalizable, meta-perceptual skills associated with intercultural sensitivity.

On a more profound level, the question of being at different stages relates to the definition of "culture" itself. In constructivist terms, cultural contexts do not have any a priori existence; they are perceptual constructs. So, even though there usually is some kind of group consensus about the boundaries of a cultural context, there still are social phenomena that people might define as culture or not. Identity groups formed around gender or sexual orientation may be examples of this kind of ambiguous perception. For instance, while gay culture associated with sexual orientation is widely acknowledged in many societies, those same societies may lack consensus on the existence of gender identification contexts such as transsexual. Because of the aforementioned "range of convenience," the DMIS does not claim to describe how people perceive otherness outside of cultural terms. So, it is entirely possible that a person perceives national or ethnic cultural otherness primarily in terms of Acceptance or Adaptation but perceives gender

identity in purely biological terms, having failed to construe it as a cultural context. If this hypothetical person thinks nonbinary gender identification is unnatural or blasphemous, they may exhibit behavior that appears inconsistent with their ethnorelativism in more established cultural contexts.

MEASUREMENT OF THE DMIS

There are two major issues that have emerged in measuring the DMIS. The first and most significant is that of paradigmatic confusion. In general, paradigmatic confusion refers to the use of conflicting epistemological paradigms in a theoretical or research application (Bennett, 2005, 2013). In the case of intercultural communication theory, the conflict is usually between relativism and constructivism, where the former assumes that an underlying reality has an objective existence that can nevertheless only be viewed through subjective perspectives, while the latter assumes that reality does not have an independent existence and all we experience is an emergent condition of interacting observations (see Note 3). The idea of "culture" is usually embedded in a relativist paradigm, with the assumption that different human cultures organize a single underlying reality with different worldviews, and that we are largely limited by those worldviews in our ability to understand cultural otherness. However, insofar as "intercultural communication" is presented in a constructivist paradigm with the assumption that people can reconstruct their worldview to enable an empathic experience of a differently constructed social reality, then there may be paradigmatic confusion between how we think about "culture" and how we think about "intercultural" – a confusion that generates theoretical incoherence and has, arguably, impeded the progress of intercultural communication as a field.

The paradigmatic conflict in intercultural research is often between positivism and constructivism. It works like this: claims are made for the results of intercultural training such as increased perspective-taking, empathy, and other intentional acts of conscious adaptation. These abilities, like most behavior taken as indicative of intercultural competence, are only theoretically describable within a constructivist paradigm wherein realities are interactional phenomena (see Bennett, 2024 for more detailed discussion). However, when it comes to measuring the effectiveness of the training, instruments are used that are built on the positivist assumption of a single underlying reality – usually one consisting of human properties such as the "big five" personality traits or derivatives of them such as "openness to experience." By measuring the existence and/or strength of

those properties, positivist measurements claim to demonstrate that some set of qualities has caused interculturally competent behavior. The paradigmatic confusion is that the positivist assumptions underlying the measurements are inconsistent with those of the constructivist outcomes that they are ostensibly measuring; in other words, the methodology is claiming to assess something that does not exist in the paradigm of the measurement.

To avoid this confusion, most measurements of the DMIS have eschewed positivist measurement and attempted to use more constructivist methodology that is consistent with the model's epistemological assumption. Constructivist methodology typically includes qualitative verbal and textual content analysis, and many formal and informal DMIS studies are based on those methods. Qualitative data can also be collected in quantitative form and analyzed with nonparametric statistics, which allows for determining statistically significant change without imposing too many positivist assumptions. One recent example of a nonparametric quantitative method is the Rubric Assessment of Intercultural Nursing Educator Development (RAINED), a DMIS-based self-assessment designed for an online nursing program in Europe (Bennett et al., 2023). The instrument organizes indicators of DMIS-based forms of relating to otherness in various medical settings into four levels, corresponding to Denial/Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation/Integration, and, as with other rubric self-assessments, respondents are simply asked to place themselves at a level before and after a training program. Although some respondents place themselves in the top category in all cases, there are enough reported differences to generate statistically significant measurements of change pre/post an intercultural training program, even with a small population.

An instructive case in the dangers of using more positivist parametric statistics for constructivist purposes is represented by the Intercultural Development Inventory™ (Hammer et al., 2003), a partial measurement of DMIS intercultural sensitivity. Items on the instrument were derived from content analysis of interviews regarding the experience of cultural difference, and no assumption of internal properties was made in constructing the 50-item inventory or in weighting the scales associated with different stages. In other words, the idea of intercultural sensitivity as a kind of perceptual experience of cultural difference was preserved in the inventory itself. But then a fateful decision was made to transform scores into a normal distribution around Minimization, allowing individuals to be positioned on the DMIS continuum toward Denial or toward Adaptation (The IDI™ does not attempt to measure Integration). This kind of distribution is similar to the measurement of IQ, and it makes a similar positivist assumption of the existence of an internal quality (see Note 4). In the case of the IDI measurement, rather than the internal condition being "intelligence," it is "intercultural sensitivity" that one can have more or less of, compared to

the normative position. In this positivist way, intercultural sensitivity is reified as being an internal property rather than remaining as a description of a perceptual relationship with otherness, and paradigmatic confusion is unnecessarily introduced into the measurement of DMIS.

The second major problematic issue with measuring the DMIS is that of level or unit of analysis. In measuring intercultural phenomena in general, levels of analysis generally include individual, group, and organization or society levels. The DMIS is set up at an individual level of analysis – it describes how individuals organize their perception of otherness. Even though self and other are defined in terms of a group-level cultural worldview, it is the individual perception and experience of those worldviews that is the focus of the development of intercultural sensitivity. Measurements like the RAINED or the IDI described above work well to describe or assess individuals' experience of otherness. But these and other individual-level measurements do not work well at the group or organizational level of analysis. That is because the only way to characterize a group with individual-level measurement is to average the individual scores. Even with the addition of median, mode, or standard deviation, the extrapolation of individual measurement to group characterization is problematic; groups are often more or less than the sum of their individual parts. In other words, individual measurements cannot account for positive or negative synergy.

An attempt to bring DMIS measurement to group and organizational levels of analysis is the Intercultural Viability Indicator™ (Bennett, 2021). The IVI uses individual self-report like the IDI and the RAINED, but it asks for both self-perception and perception of groups according to DMIS indicators. The self-assessment is similar in style to that used by the IDI, and the group assessment is the individual's perception of group behavior according to DMIS indicators similar to those used in rubric assessments of groups and organizations. An example is, "In face-to-face meetings of multicultural groups, the group tends to: (1) use the same traditional form of meetings used with other groups (Denial); (2) be prepared to deal with special problems like linguistic misunderstanding (Defense); (3) give precedence to minority members (Defense/Reversal); (4) put special effort into team-building (Minimization); (5) acknowledge the value of diversity in the group (Acceptance); (6) change the procedures of the meeting to allow variation in cultural style (Adaptation); (7) routinely consider cultural variation in making business and policy decisions (Integration)." The IVI does not consider either the individual's self-assessment or the individual's group assessment as the unit of analysis; rather, it uses an algorithm to put those two assessments into interaction, allowing it to consider the relationship of individual and group perception as the unit of analysis. In this way, the IVI attempts to use quantum

epistemology to generate a constructivist measurement of the constructivist concept of intercultural sensitivity in organizations.

Findings from the IVI generate a measure of Intercultural Viability™ for specific work contexts and for whole organizations. "Viability" is defined as the organization's collective ability to adapt to future unpredictable social conditions, including unknown effects of increasing multiculturalism. The methodology assumes that collective adaptive ability does not reside in individuals nor in organizational structure; rather, adaptability is an emergent condition of the relationship between individual competence and organizational support. The dialectical condition of competence and support generates higher or lower levels of synergy, which in turn allows the organization to be viable within some range of convenience.

THE FUTURE OF THE DMIS

The DMIS is based on constructivist principles, which essentially are social forms of the relational principles underlying quantum mechanics. Insofar as a quantum paradigm continues to gain precedence in physics, as it appears to be doing, and insofar as paradigms continue to migrate from physical science to social science, as they apparently have done previously, then we should expect to see increasing attention to relational issues in social science. Examples of this movement already occurring are the new field of "relational economics" (Wieland, 2020) and various movements toward "triple bottom line" in business (Miller, 2020). Communication theory was an early entrant into this movement, when in the mid-20th century, it reframed the linear model of Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver into a circular process of feedforward and feedback and then into increasingly complex models of interactive and transactive coordination of meaning (Bennett, 2023). Intercultural communication, in general, and the DMIS, in particular, is based on relational communication theory. While the field of intercultural communication has often strayed from its constructivist roots into relativist cultural comparison, the DMIS has maintained constructivist principles. This places the model in a good position to remain viable as social science becomes increasingly relational.

It is likely that all societies will become more multicultural in the near future. Economic, political, and environmental factors are all pushing toward more human migration, and nativist resistance to immigration in some societies is unlikely to stop the larger movement. The main question for the future will be how such multicultural societies can remain viable in the face of intractable diversity. Traditionally, societies have counted on shared beliefs and values (codified in a common language) to guide the coordination of meaning and

action necessary for social viability. This is the process classically described by Berger and Luckman (1967) as the dialectic of objective institutions and subject worldview, where individuals who are socialized through collective institutions into roughly similar worldviews then enact those worldviews through role behavior that supports the existence of the institutions, etc. The response heretofore to immigration has been to assimilate prospective new citizens into that shared worldview, if not in the first generation, at least in the second or third generations.

In the current global climate of preserving heritage identities and defining new identities around generation, gender, and social media interests, acquiescence to assimilation and re-socialization cannot be assumed. While imposed melting pots may become more prevalent in the future, they are an old answer to a new problem. The new problem is, "how can we coordinate meaning and action for social viability while preserving cultural diversity?" Constructivist intercultural communication has long offered an answer to that question, at least in smaller groups such as multicultural teams or global corporations. That answers in meta-coordination – the result of mutual adaptation in third-cultural spaces.

Meta-coordination is the "secret sauce" that has enabled some global corporations to thrive, while others struggle to survive or fail completely in cross-border operations. Meta-coordination is a skill some leaders use to make diverse groups more creative than single-culture groups (Adler, 2001); group leaders who lack this ability often find that their multicultural groups actually underperform the monocultural groups. And meta-coordination is the skill that some enlightened political leaders have used to fashion functional multicultural societies that are not only viable, but which offer a model for increasing the potential of human technology and consciousness (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1997, 2015). As societies and organizations become more intensely multicultural, it is likely that meta-coordinating skills will move from being the relatively rare secret of success in some organizations to a necessity for survival in nearly all organizations.

The DMIS is a blueprint for developing meta-coordination skills. First, it specifies how to overcome xenophobia by developing enough perceptual complexity to see other people as fellow human beings. Since Minimization is still ethnocentric (all people are human – like me!), the DMIS posits the development of self-reflexive consciousness in Acceptance that allows us to see ourselves in cultural context. That form of self-consciousness is the initial key to ethnorelativism. Once we can operate at a meta-level to our own culture, we are able to relate to other cultures at that meta-level, intentionally using observational categories to contrast our experience with that of others.

The first act of meta-coordination occurs at Adaptation. When two culturally diverse people intentionally try to adapt to each other, they generate a third-cultural space in which their particular relationship occurs. That space could also be called a meta-coordinating space, because what is happening there is the creation of points of connection (coordination) between two different worldview systems for the purpose of guiding some kind of appropriate behavior (e.g., creative task completion, relational bonding, political action, etc.). People who operate at Adaptation are adept at shifting into this third space for the purpose of coordinating with diverse others.

As organizations and societies become more intensely multicultural, we will be spending more and more time in third-culture spaces engaging in meta-coordination of tasks and relationships. The behavior will increasingly become automatic and demand less conscious attention; we will become unconsciously competent in meta-coordination – in DMIS terms, Integrated. The automation of this type of meta-consciousness will mean that it begins to pervade arenas of life that are not overtly multicultural.

One such arena is ethicality – assessing the goodness of some action or way of being. Ethicality is not "ethics" in the sense of a code of conduct. Rather, it is the everyday assessments that we make about the goodness of one course of action as opposed to another. Without ethicality, we would be paralyzed (see Note 5). Even as current levels of multiculturalism demand more attention to intercultural ethicality, there is relatively little exploration of how it could be part of social change. While many of us are comfortable in at least relativist acceptance of cultural diversity and perhaps even constructivist acts of intercultural adaptation, we often revert to completely positivist grounds for assessing goodness. We invoke moral principles laid down in texts from thousands of years and miles away, or we continue to pay allegiance to constitutional principles constructed for societies without electronics. We believe fervently in universal human rights as defined by the United Nations, or we equally fervently reject those rights in favor of natural predator and prey behavior. But in all cases, we tend to reject the idea that assessments of goodness should be consciously and constantly created according to circumstance. We are uncomfortable with the idea of taking complete responsibility for ethical judgments; perhaps we are afraid that, if there is not absolute platform from which to judge, we will lapse into "anything goes."

Our inability to exercise agency (consciously chosen commitment) in ethical matters is a major impediment to meta-coordination. Meta-coordination must at some point be based on conscious choice of actions that both allow coordinated action and preserve cultural diversity. Those choices are the crux of intercultural ethicality and the key to viable existence interculturally diverse societies.

NOTES

1. In the original IJIR DMIS article (Bennett, 1986) and in several subsequent publications, I described the cultural in-betweenness of integration with the term "cultural marginality" coined by the sociologist Robert E. Park (1937) and popularized by Everett Stonequist (1961) in his book The Marginal Man. I added the distinction of "encapsulated" and "constructive" forms of marginality to differentiate being stuck between cultures and the more dynamic condition of being about to easily move in and out of different culture worldviews intended by DMIS Integration. However, it became clear after some years that many people who felt alienated from their own or a desirable culture considered themselves "marginal," and that their perceptual condition was usually nothing like Integration. I believe that the term "liminal," which means "occupying spaces on both sides of a boundary," is far more precise and less fraught with negative connotations than the term "marginal."

2. The tension between global and domestic approaches to intercultural relations may be largely due to the difference between more descriptive/theoretical models informing global intercultural learning and more prescriptive models informing domestic multicultural relations. Improving global intercultural relations may therefore appear to be more of a developmental task that lacks ethical commitment, while improving domestic multicultural relations may appear to be more of a moral injunction that lacks theoretical justification. Both areas would benefit from a better balance of the two concerns.

3. The idea of "interacting observations" is central to the epistemology of quantum mechanics, the current predominant paradigm in physics (Roveli, 2021). Within the quantum (constructivist) paradigm, objects do not have properties that cause things to happen; rather, objects are nodes in a web of dynamic relationships, and properties are the unique manifestations of particular interactions – interactions that can be thought of as "observations" (Rovelli, 2021, pp. 77–88).

4. Steven J. Gould (2012) has written an engaging history of how the measurement of IQ evolved from a pragmatic technique for directing students toward certain kinds of education to an assumption of an internal property of "intelligence" with which people could be rank ordered as having more or less of it. That reification parallels many positivist treatments of the assessment of intercultural competence (Bennett, 2020), including some uses of the IDI™ measurement of intercultural sensitivity.

5. In their work on this subject, William Perry and Lee Knefelkamp (Perry, 1999) define a continuum of ethical development that initially moves from Dualism, where moral authority is unquestioned, to Multiplicity, where moral conviction is lost but ethical commitment has not yet developed. That stage is characterized by the paralysis of ethical action – "whatever." Further development more or less parallels that of the DMIS ethnorelativism: Contextual Relativism demands taking the perspective of others, and Commitment in Relativism reestablishes the capacity for ethicality based on informed choice rather than blind obedience.

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