

# **Language and Cultural Identity**

**4<sup>th</sup> lecture**

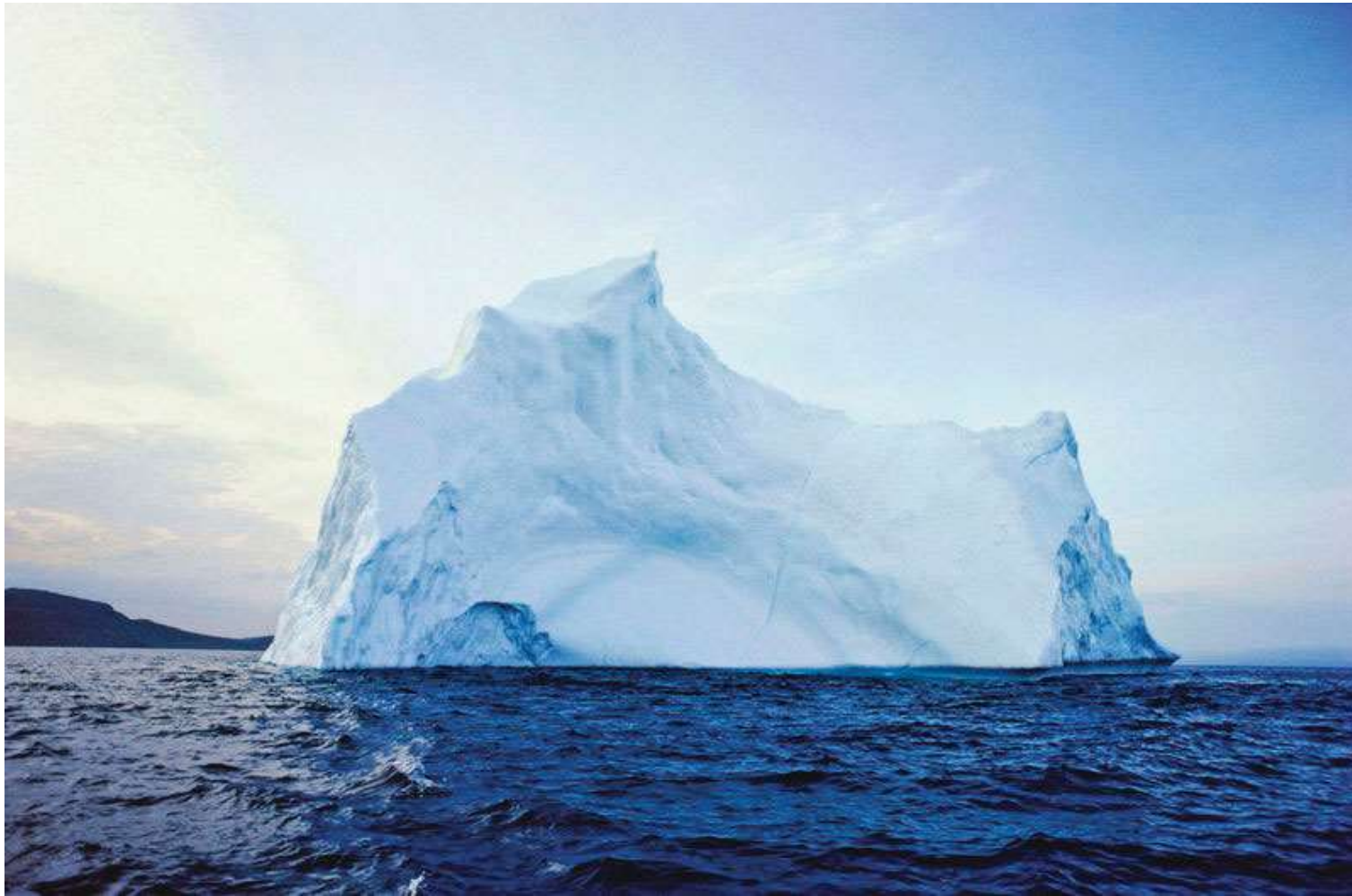
**Dr. Basima Othman**

# What is Culture?

Definitions of culture cover a wide range of perspectives. Culture may refer generally to food, religion, language, music, region or geography, ethnicity, clothes, and so on.

Culture is also the things we don't see, like our beliefs or views about gender.” Both are correct—culture represents the things we see, the tangible, as well as the intangible things.

# What is Culture?



# Culture as an Iceberg

The iceberg, a commonly used metaphor to describe culture, is a great example for illustrating the tangible and the intangible.

When talking about culture, most people focus on the “tip of the iceberg,” which is considered as making up 10% of the object. The rest of the iceberg, 90% of it, is below the waterline.

# Iceberg Model

French and Bell (1979) in their classic "Iceberg Model" identify and illustrate the visible and invisible elements of culture.

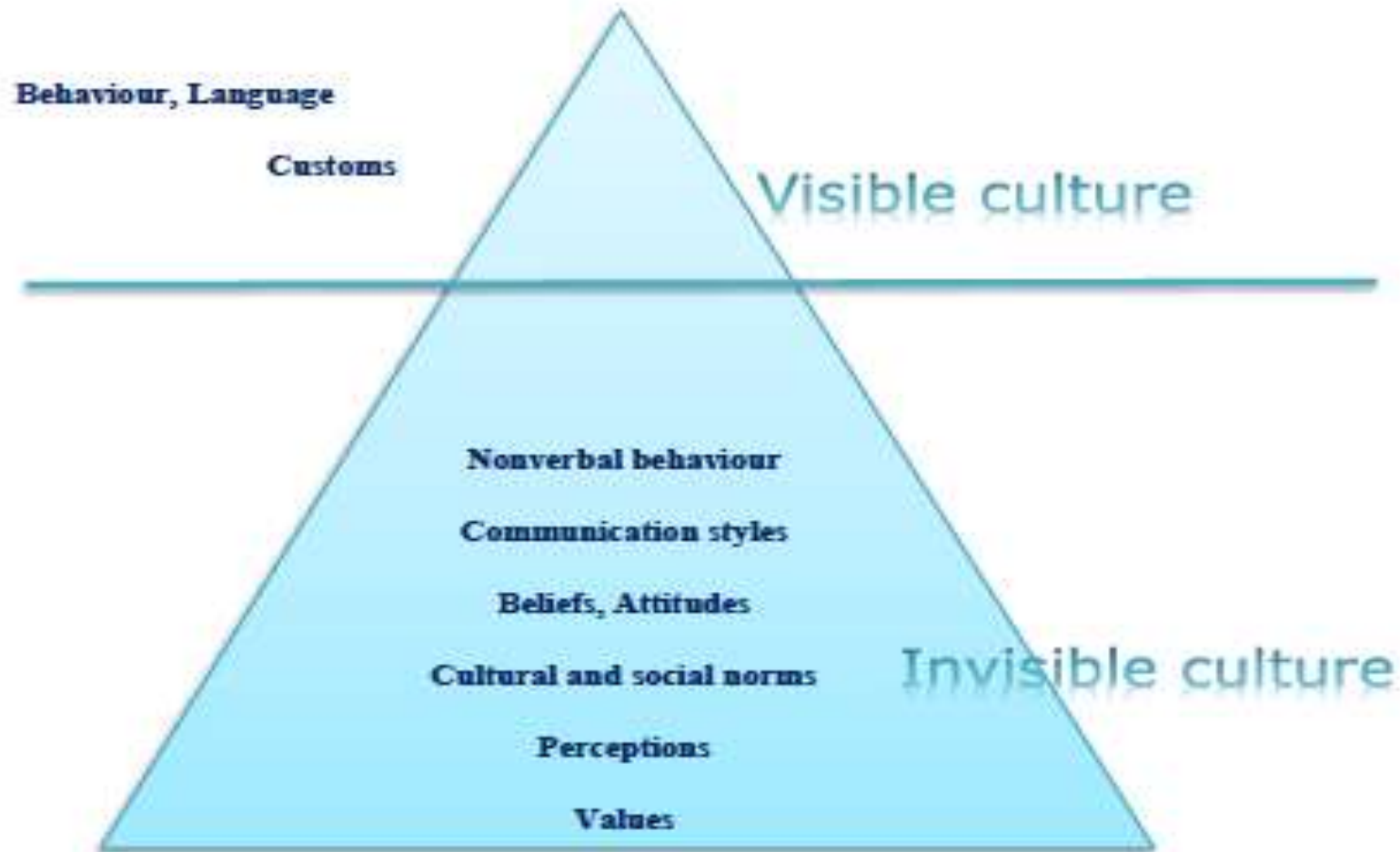
Iceberg has a visible tip, which represents the areas of culture we can see. Only a small portion of the culture is visible, consisting of behaviours, ways of life, laws and customs, institutions, techniques, rituals and language. The visible area represents the impact of culture in daily life.

# **The invisible part of the iceberg**

The more powerful and larger part of the iceberg and culture is beneath the surface and invisible. These are values and norms, religious beliefs, worldviews, motivations, attitudes and expectations. (Shi & Liu 2012; Rothlauf 2014, 26.)

Invisible elements of culture that are below the surface, are explanations and sources for the visible features of culture, and play a more important role when communicating with other cultures (Thomas & Peterson 2015).

# The cultural Iceberg Model



The cultural iceberg (adapted from Interkultura-konsult 2015).

# The cultural Iceberg Model





# The cultural Iceberg Model

Cultural behaviours are thus the visible signs of values and beliefs deep inside the culture that have formed in a society over time.

The only way to deal successfully with people from different cultures is knowing and understanding what is invisible and beneath the surface, and to shape one's own behaviour and expectations according to that knowledge (Solomon & Schell 2009, 36).

# **The elements of culture**

- 1. Culture is learned**
- 2. Culture is shared**
- 3. Culture is dynamic**
- 4. Culture is systemic**

# 1. Culture is Learned

Geert (1991) views culture as consisting of mental programs, calling it softwares of the mind, meaning each person “carries within him or herself patterns of thinking, feeling, and potential acting which were learned throughout their lifetime.

# Culture is Learned

Similarly, Peter (1990) argued that mental models lock individuals and groups into a specific perception about the world.

Like a computer, we are programmed to act or behave in certain ways. The conscious and unconscious learning we undergo, over time, turns into beliefs that we consider to be valid. We then teach each other that these beliefs are cultural norms, and they are then expressed in our daily lives as behaviors and actions.

## 2. Culture is Shared

### **Example:**

Ming is a recent college graduate with a degree in accounting. She has taken a job with a large accounting firm.

Although she gets along with members of her department and team, she tends to spend her free time with other colleagues who are of Asian descent, especially those who are in her generation. She feels that this group of coworkers understands her better and shares her values and ideas around work–life balance.

# Culture is Shared

This example describes culture as a shared learning experience.

Although you may think of yourself as an individual, you share beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, traditions, and assumptions with people who grew up or live in similar cultural backgrounds.

It is easier for you to relate to someone who has shared value systems and ways of doing things than someone who does not share the same values.

### **3. Culture is Dynamic**

Culture is dynamic and thus complex. Culture is fluid rather than static, which means that culture changes all the time, every day, in subtle and tangible ways.

Because humans communicate and express their cultural systems in a variety of ways, it can be hard to pinpoint exactly what cultural dynamics are at play.

# Culture is Dynamic

Consider, for example, a conversation about a person's attitude or feelings. In this type of conversation, Albert (1971). found that people pay attention to:

(a) the words, or what is being said

(b) the tone, or how the words are said

(c) the visual behind the words, often called the body language.



# Culture is Dynamic

All of these are aspects of culture that are interpreted differently depending on the cultural context.

Add multiple layers of culture to the conversation—such as time, power and authority, emotion, age, gender, religion, nationality, and even previous intercultural interactions—and communication at a cross-cultural level becomes complex and hard to manage.

## 4. Culture is Systemic

In systems theory, systems are interrelated, interconnected parts that create a whole.

There are patterns of behavior, deeply rooted structural systems, which are beneath the waterline.

What we see at the top of the iceberg are the behaviors; we do not see what contributes to those behaviors.

# Culture is Systemic

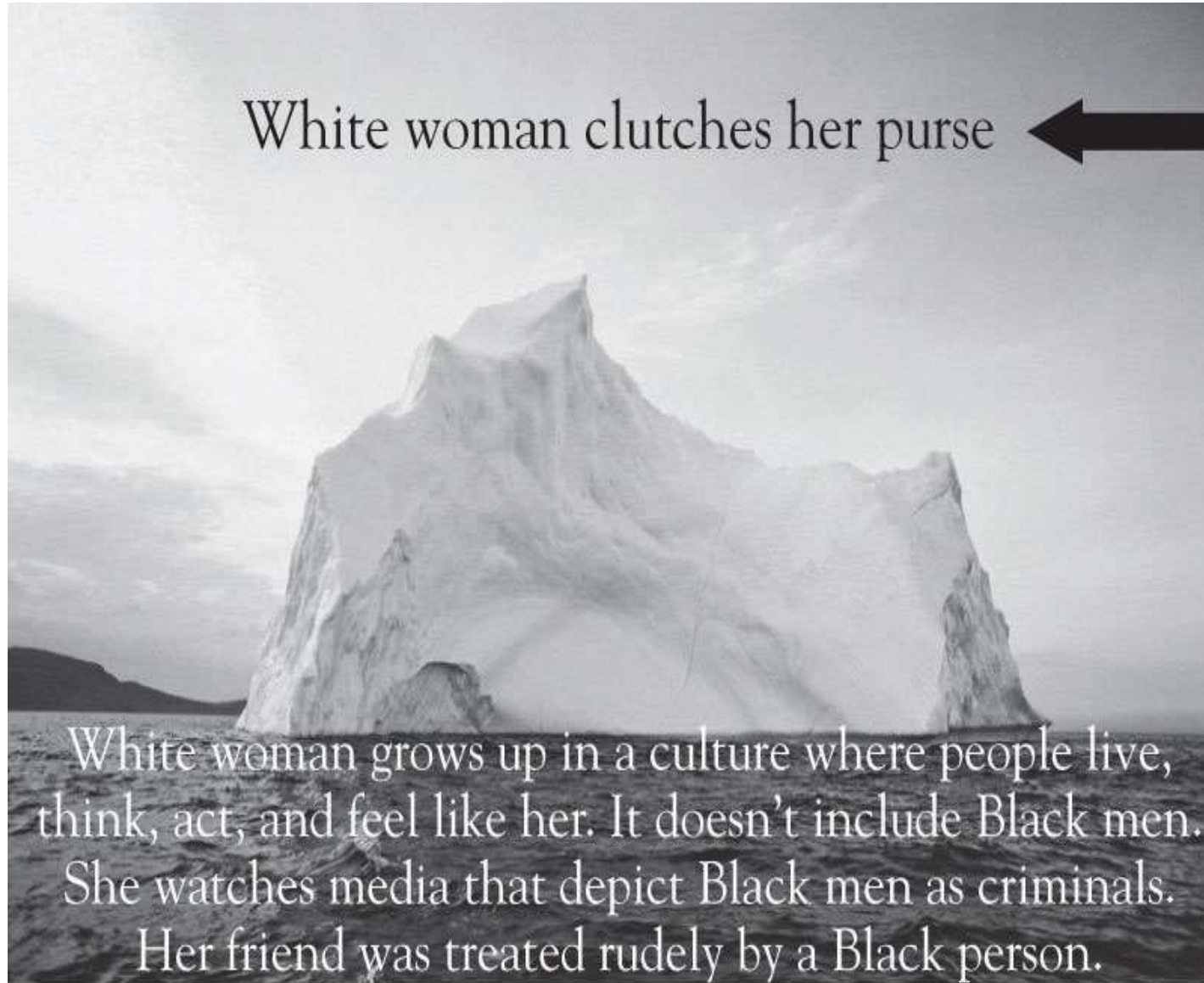
Consider, for example, a white woman walking down a quiet street. She quickly clutches her handbag closer to her body as she passes a black man. Then, when she spots a white man walking toward her, she loosens her hold on the purse.

To address the system, one must be able to address the underlining patterns. These patterns, because they are deeply embedded in the system, will take up significant effort, time, and resources. Changes to the system are slow and gradual; visible changes may not appear until months, or even years, later.

# An example of Systemic Culture

White woman clutches her purse

Systems “event”



White woman grows up in a culture where people live, think, act, and feel like her. It doesn't include Black men. She watches media that depict Black men as criminals. Her friend was treated rudely by a Black person.

Structural patterns  
that lead to the  
“event”

# Cultural Identity

- Who are you?
- What makes you who you are?
- How has your culture helped to make you who you are?



# What do we share?

|  |                    |  |
|--|--------------------|--|
|  | <b>NAME</b>        |  |
|  | <b>GENDER</b>      |  |
|  | <b>LANGUAGES</b>   |  |
|  | <b>NATIONALITY</b> |  |
|  | <b>PERSONALITY</b> |  |
|  | <b>WORK</b>        |  |
|  | <b>ACTIVITIES</b>  |  |
|  | <b>LIKES</b>       |  |
|  | <b>DISLIKES</b>    |  |

# What is cultural identity?

Cultural identity is the feeling of identity of a group or of an individual, as far as one is influenced by his/her belonging to a group or culture.

It is a person's self definition as a separate and distinct individual, including behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes.

It is the reflective self-conception or self-image that we each derive from our family, gender, cultural, ethnic, and individual socialization process.

# The Importance of Identity

A principal objective of one's teenage years is the formation of an identity, and "those who fail to achieve a secure identity are faced with identity confusion, a lack of clarity about who they are and what their role is in life."

Identity development plays a critical role in the individual's psychological well-being.



# The levels of identity

- Personal (what makes us unique)
- Relational (our relationships with others)
- Cultural (large-scale communities such as racism, nationality, ethnicity, gender, religious or political affiliation)

# Personal Identity

- age (young, old)
- social class (income, occupation, education, manner of speaking)
- worldview (sense of self, relation to nature, universe)

# Cultural (Social) Identities

- **Racial Identity**– a socially constructed idea that still persists in the United States
- **Ethnic Identity**– derived from a sense of shared heritage, history, traditions, values, area of origin, and sometimes language
- **Gender Identity**– how a particular culture differentiates masculine and feminine social roles
- **National Identity**– the nation/country one was born into ( or a sense of place)

# Racial Identity

Is commonly associated with external physical traits such as skin color, hair texture, facial appearance, and eye shape.



# Ethnic Identity

It is derived from a sense of shared heritage, history, traditions, values, similar behaviors, area of origin, and in some instances, language.

# Gender Identity

- How a particular culture differentiates masculine and feminine social roles.
- The meanings and interpretations we hold concerning our self-images and expected other images of 'femaleness' and 'maleness.' ‘
- skin color, language, weight, clothes, career

# Next

- **Levels of Culture**
- **Culture Shock**