

## **Inclusive Symbolic Frames and Codes Shaping Cultural Identity and Values**

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*Abstract:* Cultural identity frames, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and others within a cultural context. The moral implications associated with symbolic codes in relation to cultural identity frames include the potential for misinterpretation, stereotyping, and marginalization. Moreover, the symbolic moral codes emphasize the importance of recognizing the dynamic nature of cultural identities and the need for inclusive representations in symbolic codes to foster understanding and respect across diverse cultural groups. The study concludes by discussing potential solutions to these challenges, such as promoting cultural sensitivity, engaging in dialogue, and embracing diverse perspectives to create more inclusive symbolic codes that accurately reflect the complexity of cultural identities. Ultimately, navigating symbolic codes in cultural identity frames requires a nuanced understanding of cultural dynamics and a commitment to respecting other cultural beliefs.

*Keywords:* symbolic, moral codes, culture, frames, identity, marginalization

### *Introduction*

The symbolic codes are cultural identity frames that play significant roles in shaping how individuals perceive

themselves and others within a society. They have a cultural causal role in shaping action, through which people experience and express meaning.<sup>1</sup> Cultural identity frames are often open to interpretation, leading to the organization and shaping of people's interpretations of things and symbols, or representations, which serve to render the world self-evident symbols. There is variability in how different individuals or groups perceive them.<sup>2</sup> The moral implication of symbolic codes and identity frames is that what one group might consider a positive symbol of identity, another group might view as offensive or derogatory, leading to identity negotiation. In order to negotiate mindfully with people from diverse cultures, interactive identities play out in verbal and nonverbal symbolic forms for identity framing perspective.<sup>3</sup> This can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and challenges in communication. Communication difficulties stemming from cultural and communication differences exist.<sup>4</sup> It is often intertwined with power dynamics within a society. Although certain symbols or frames may be historically associated with dominant groups, while others may be linked to marginalized or oppressed communities. It can be made visible in our cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Swidler, "Culture in action: Symbols and strategies," *American sociological review* (1986): 273-86.

<sup>2</sup> Uri Gal and Nicholas Berente, "A social representations perspective on information systems implementation: Rethinking the concept of "frames"," *Information technology & people* 21.2 (2008): 133-54.

<sup>3</sup> Stella Ting-Toomey, "Identity negotiation theory: Crossing cultural boundaries," *Theorizing about intercultural communication* 387 (2005).

<sup>4</sup> Perihan Korkut, Mustafa Dolmaci, and Burcu Karaca, "A study on communication breakdowns: Sources of misunderstanding in a cross-cultural setting," *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research* 18.78 (2018): 139-58.

expressions, including language, symbols, and media of racial framing, and cultural racism more broadly, as it blames oppressed racial groups.<sup>5</sup> This could lead to oppressive policies that result from racist nativist framing that constructs particular rights as benefits that undocumented communities should not be allowed to access.<sup>6</sup> The ethical implications of power imbalances can perpetuate inequalities and hinder efforts towards social justice and equality. They can also reinforce stereotypes and prejudice when they are used to generalize or categorize individuals based on superficial characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, or religion.<sup>7</sup> Discrimination and marginalization of certain groups within society, limiting their opportunities and perpetuating social divisions, are moral issues related to cultural appropriation. This occurs when elements of a marginalized culture are adopted or exploited by members of a dominant culture without understanding or respecting their significance. It is important to recognize and respect these hybrid identities and promote inclusivity and diversity in order to prevent further marginalization and discrimination. By embracing diversity and promoting cultural exchange, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society for all. While this can promote cultural exchange and understanding, it can also create challenges in maintaining

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<sup>5</sup> Eli K. Michaels, et al., "The water surrounding the iceberg: cultural racism and health inequities," *The Milbank Quarterly* 101.3 (2023): 768-814.

<sup>6</sup> Lindsay Perez Huber, "Challenging racist nativist framing: Acknowledging the community cultural wealth of undocumented Chicana college students to reframe the immigration debate," *Harvard Educational Review* 79.4 (2009): 704-30.

<sup>7</sup> Veronica Paz Arauco, et al., "Strengthening social justice to address intersecting inequalities post-2015," *London, Overseas Development Institute*, 2014, [www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9213](http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9213).

and preserving cultural heritage and identity in the face of homogenizing forces, expressed through language, which can pose challenges for individuals or groups who are not fluent in the dominant language of a society.<sup>8</sup> This can lead to exclusion and marginalization, as well as difficulties in accessing resources and opportunities. Despite these moral implications, symbolic codes and cultural identity frames can also be sources of resistance and empowerment for marginalized communities.<sup>9</sup> Through reclaiming and reinterpreting symbols and frames that have been used to oppress them, these communities can assert their agency and challenge dominant narratives, contributing to processes of social change and transformation.

### *Conceptual clarifications*

Symbolic codes refer to the use of symbols, signs, and images to convey meaning beyond their literal interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Symbolic codes involve the use of signs, symbols, and language to convey meaning, while cultural identity frames encompass the ways in which individuals perceive themselves within the context of their cultural backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> Symbols can have various meanings in a culture. Colors, objects, animals, and other symbols may hold different significance in different cultures. For example, the bald eagle represents strength, power, and freedom in the United

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<sup>8</sup> Gouri Shanker Meena, "Digital Media and Cultural Identity in India: A Globalization Perspective."

<sup>9</sup> Ashraf Ibrahim Zidan, "Cultural Appropriation in Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*," *Journal of the Faculty of Arts Port Said University*, no. 25 (2023).

<sup>10</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Symbolism and interpretation* (Cornell University Press, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Anat Rafaeli and Monica Worline, "Symbols in organizational culture," *Handbook of organizational culture and climate* 7 (2000): 1-84.

States, while the dragon symbolizes strength and wisdom in many Asian cultures.<sup>12</sup> These symbols often carry cultural significance and can evoke specific emotions or ideas. For instance, a red rose might symbolize love and passion in Western culture, while a white dove often represents peace and purity. In media, symbolic codes are used to convey themes, motifs, and messages to the audience. These can include colors, objects, gestures, and even characters. For instance, in literature, the use of a lighthouse might symbolize guidance or enlightenment. In film, a recurring motif of birds flying might represent freedom or escape.

### *Philosophies of symbolic codes and cultural frames*

Philosophical views on symbolic codes and cultural identity frames delve into the intersection of language, symbols, and identity formations. One major philosophical perspective on symbolic codes and cultural identity frames is rooted in semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and their interpretation. Philosophers like Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce explored how signs acquire meaning through their relationships with other signs and within specific cultural contexts, giving a mentalist account of meaning.<sup>13</sup> From this viewpoint, symbolic codes are understood as tools for constructing and negotiating cultural identities. Another perspective draws from hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. Philosophers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer emphasize the role of language and interpretation

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<sup>12</sup> Adrienne Phillips, "Cultural Symbol | Definition, Uses & Examples," *Study.com*, 2023, <https://study.com/learn/lesson/cultural-symbols-importance-examples.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Gerard Deledalle, *Charles S. Peirce's Philosophy of Signs. Essays in Comparative Semiotics* (Indiana University Press, 1867).

in shaping our understanding of ourselves and others. In this view, cultural identity frames emerge through ongoing processes of interpretation and dialogue, where individuals negotiate meaning and significance within their cultural contexts. Postmodern philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault further complicate the relationship between symbolic codes and cultural identity frames by highlighting the instability and plurality of meaning. They argue that symbols are not fixed but are subject to multiple interpretations and power dynamics.<sup>14</sup> Cultural identity, therefore, becomes a site of contestation and negotiation rather than a stable essence. In this sense, culture is sites of internal contestation, and the notion of true essence becomes meaningful to us when we are able to negotiate.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, critical theorists like Stuart Hall examine how symbolic codes and cultural identity frames are shaped by broader social structures and power relations.<sup>16</sup> They emphasize the role of media, institutions, and discourses in constructing and perpetuating certain cultural identities while marginalizing others. Overall, philosophical perspectives on symbolic codes and cultural identity frames offer rich insights into the complex ways in which individuals and communities make sense of themselves and their place in the world through language, symbols, and cultural practices. Symbolic codes and cultural identity frames are crucial elements in understanding how culture is communicated and

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<sup>14</sup> François Cusset, *French theory: how Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Rita Dhamoon, "Shifting from 'culture' to 'the cultural': Critical theorizing of identity/difference politics," *Constellations* 13.3 (2006): 354-73.

<sup>16</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, "Language and Power: The Spaces of Critical Interpretation 1," *Language, Symbolism, and Politics* (Routledge, 2019): 269-87.

represented in various forms of media, including literature, film, art, and advertising.

### *Inclusive symbolic codes and frames*

The concepts of inclusive symbolic codes and cultural frames are closely interconnected, as they both contribute to the construction of social reality and identity. Both are normative. It allows the relation of world and deserve inclusion side these symbolic sets are also tightly intertwined.<sup>17</sup> Inclusive symbolic codes reflect the cultural values and norms of a society, while cultural frames shape individuals' interpretations and engagements with those symbols.<sup>18</sup> Inclusive symbolic codes contribute to the representation of diverse identities within a society, validating the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups.<sup>19</sup> Cultural frames influence how individuals perceive and internalize these representations, shaping their sense of identity and belonging. Inclusive symbolic codes foster social cohesion and solidarity by promoting a sense of belonging and recognition among diverse groups.<sup>20</sup> Cultural frames influence the extent to which individuals identify with and participate in collective efforts toward social justice and inclusion. Inclusive symbolic codes encompass a broad array

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<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Twelve Citizen and Enemy as Symbolic Classification: On the Polarizing Discourse of Civil Society," *Cultivating differences: Symbolic boundaries and the making of inequality* (1992): 289-308.

<sup>18</sup> Rhys H. Williams, "The cultural contexts of collective action: Constraints, opportunities, and the symbolic life of social movements," *The Blackwell companion to social movements* (2004): 91-115.

<sup>19</sup> Stella Ting-Toomey and Tenzin Dorjee, *Communicating across cultures* (Guilford Publications, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Terrence E. Deal and Kent D. Peterson, *Shaping school culture* (John Wiley & Sons, 2016).

of visual, linguistic, and cultural cues deliberately crafted to foster inclusivity and representation across various contexts, including but not limited to media, advertising, education, and design.<sup>21</sup> These codes are deeply embedded within societies and shape perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, thereby playing a crucial role in promoting diversity and equity. At the heart of inclusive symbolic codes lies the recognition of diversity in its myriad forms, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and socioeconomic status.

It is a philosophy that incorporates diverse representations into symbolic systems, challenging hegemonic norms and dismantling exclusionary narratives, thereby affirming the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals. This deliberate act of representation extends beyond mere tokenism to authentically reflect the richness and complexity of human experiences. One of the most prominent manifestations of inclusive symbolic codes is the portrayal of diverse characters in media and popular culture. From films and television shows to advertisements and literature, the presence of protagonists and supporting characters from various backgrounds serves to normalize diversity and challenge stereotypes.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, inclusive symbolic codes extend beyond visual representation to encompass language and communication. Linguistic choices, such as gender-neutral pronouns and inclusive terminology, play a pivotal role in acknowledging and affirming the identities of marginalized groups. In education inclusive frames also serves as a critical

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<sup>21</sup> Henry Jenkins, "Fandom, negotiation, and participatory culture," *A companion to media fandom and fan studies* (2018): 11-26.

<sup>22</sup> Jessica E. Tompkins and Nicole Martins, "Masculine pleasures as normalized practices: Character design in the video game industry," *Games and Culture* 17.3 (2022): 399-420.



domain for the dissemination of inclusive symbolic codes.<sup>23</sup> Curriculum materials, textbooks, and teaching practices should reflect the diversity of students' backgrounds and experiences. By incorporating diverse perspectives into educational content, educators can empower students to embrace their identities, challenge stereotypes, and develop critical thinking skills. Moreover, inclusive symbolic codes play a vital role in shaping organizational culture and policies. Workplace diversity initiatives, anti-discrimination policies, and inclusive hiring practices signal an organization's commitment to equity and inclusion. An anti-discrimination policy reinforces that commitment from the top by signaling that senior management assumes responsibility for equal employment issues and is committed to diversity.<sup>24</sup> "Inclusive symbolic codes" and "cultural frames" are fundamental concepts that shed light on how societies construct meaning, identity, and inclusivity. It explores the significance, interrelation, and implications of inclusive symbolic codes. Inclusive symbolic codes play a crucial role in shaping social interactions, identities, and power dynamics, as well as the ability to represent and accommodate diverse groups within a society, including marginalized communities based on factors such as race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion.<sup>25</sup> Language serves as one of the primary mediums through which inclusive symbolic codes are transmitted.<sup>26</sup> Inclusive language

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<sup>23</sup> Ingrid Piller and Kimie Takahashi, "Linguistic diversity and social inclusion," *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 14.4 (2011): 371-81.

<sup>24</sup> Alan S. Gutterman, "Embedding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," *SSRN* (December 20, 2023).

<sup>25</sup> Nicole M. Stephens, Lauren A. Rivera and S. S. Townsend, "What works to increase diversity? A multi-level approach," *Research in Organizational Behavior* 39 (2020): 1-51.

<sup>26</sup> Basil Bernstein and J. Gould, *A socio-linguistic approach to social learning* (1965).

acknowledges and respects the diversity of identities and experiences within a society. Cultural practices and rituals carry symbolic meanings that reflect societal values and norms.<sup>27</sup> Inclusive practices accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs, ensuring that everyone feels respected and represented. Cultural frames refer to the lenses through which individuals perceive, interpret, and make sense of the world around them. These frames are shaped by cultural beliefs, values, norms, and experiences, influencing how individuals understand themselves and others. Cultural frames serve as cognitive frameworks that guide behavior, decision-making, and social interaction. Cultural Identity: Cultural frames influence how individuals perceive their own identities and the identities of others.<sup>28</sup> For example, someone belonging to a collectivist culture may prioritize group harmony and interdependence, while someone from an individualistic culture may emphasize personal autonomy and achievement. Social hierarchies and power dynamics also shape perceptions of social hierarchies and power dynamics. In some cultures, hierarchical structures based on factors such as age, gender, or social class are deeply ingrained, influencing patterns of authority, respect, and deference. The interpretation of events and phenomena determines how individuals interpret events, phenomena, and social issues.<sup>29</sup> Different cultural perspectives may lead to varying understandings of the same situation, highlighting the subjective nature of reality. Cultural frames influence approaches to conflict resolution and cooperation. Cultural differences in

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<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural pragmatics: Social performance between ritual and strategy," *Sociological theory* 22.4 (2004): 527-73.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Hagar Salamon and Harvey E. Goldberg, "Myth-Ritual-Symbol," *A Companion to Folklore* (2012): 119-35.

communication styles, negotiation strategies, and conflict resolution mechanisms can lead to misunderstandings or facilitate constructive dialogue.<sup>30</sup> However, achieving inclusivity in symbolic codes and cultural frames is not without challenges. Dominant cultural narratives and power structures often marginalize certain groups, perpetuating exclusion and inequality.<sup>31</sup> Addressing these challenges requires deliberate efforts to deconstruct oppressive symbols and narratives while promoting alternative representations and perspectives. By reimagining and redefining inclusive symbolic codes and cultural frames, societies can facilitate social change and transformation. This involves challenging entrenched stereotypes, biases, and prejudices while amplifying the voices and experiences of marginalized communities.

### *The Relevance of Identity Frame and Codes*

Understanding symbolic codes requires cultural literacy, as the meaning of symbols can vary across different cultures and contexts.<sup>32</sup> What holds significance in one culture may not have the same meaning in another. For example, while the color white symbolizes purity in Western cultures, it can signify mourning in some Eastern cultures. In Africa, stories construct cultural identities and are considered important by a significant number of people, shaping the symbolic world and narratives of institutional identities.<sup>33</sup> Cultural

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<sup>30</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (Routledge, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> Mark Shucksmith, "Class, power and inequality in rural areas: beyond social exclusion?," *Sociologia ruralis* 52.4 (2012): 377-97.

<sup>32</sup> Bernardo Ferdman, "Literacy and cultural identity," *Harvard educational review* 60.2 (1990): 181-205.

<sup>33</sup> Donileen R. Loseke, "The study of identity as cultural, institutional, organizational, and personal narratives: Theoretical and empirical integrations," *The Sociological Quarterly* 48.4 (2007): 661-88.

identity frames refer to the ways in which cultural identity is constructed and represented within media texts. These frames shape how individuals and groups perceive themselves and others within their cultural context and reinforce the values, beliefs, and norms of the dominant culture within a society. While culture plays a significant role in shaping our view of the world, these frames are also supported and reinforced by the existing cultural norms.<sup>34</sup> They often marginalize or exclude minority cultures, reinforcing power imbalances. Challenging the dominant culture, these frames offer alternative perspectives, values, and identities. It may highlight the experiences of marginalized or oppressed groups and critique mainstream ideologies. The frame acknowledges the blending of different cultural influences and identities. It recognizes that cultural identity is fluid and can be shaped by multiple factors, such as migration, globalization, and diaspora.<sup>35</sup> The frame emphasizes the process of individuals or groups adopting the cultural norms and values of the dominant culture, often at the expense of their own cultural heritage. This frame highlights acts of resistance against cultural assimilation or oppression. It celebrates cultural pride, resilience, and activism within marginalized communities. Cultural identity frames are often used in media analysis to examine how cultural identities are constructed, negotiated, and contested within different media texts. They provide

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<sup>34</sup> Stella Ting-Toomey, "Identity negotiation theory: Crossing cultural boundaries," *Theorizing about intercultural communication* 387 (2005).

<sup>35</sup> Ann Swidler, "Culture in action: Symbols and Strategies," *American sociological review* (1986): 273-86.

insight into power dynamics, representation, and cultural politics within society.

### *Conclusion*

Symbolic codes and cultural identity frames play integral roles in shaping how culture is represented and understood. They influence how individuals perceive themselves and others within their cultural context and provide valuable insight into power dynamics and cultural politics. Understanding these codes and frames is essential for critically analyzing and interpreting media representations of culture. In conclusion, inclusive symbolic codes serve as powerful tools for challenging exclusionary narratives, promoting diversity and equity, and fostering belonging and representation. This approach not only fosters a sense of belonging and representation for marginalized groups but also challenges dominant narratives and promotes social justice. It is crucial for all sectors of society to actively engage in the process of diversifying symbolic systems to ensure that everyone's voice is heard and their experiences are acknowledged. Embracing diversity in symbolic representation is a powerful tool for promoting equity, understanding, and solidarity among all members of society.

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