

# The last samurai essay

[Business](#), [Management](#)



Think about your friends, family, and your loved ones for a second.

Think about what luxuries you have and how you have come to love them.

Doesnt it make you feel blessed and lucky to be who you are? Now imagine being thrown onto enemy territory, a lonely and dangerous place with nothing. In order to survive you must communicate with the enemy and learn to live their way the total opposite culture you hate. In the movie, The Last Samurai, the author portrays a Civil War veteran, Captain Algren, commander and trainer of Japans new technology-efficient military.

His task is to defeat a rebellion of the remaining Samurai in Japan. After Algren is captured, he is taken into their village as an information tool. He begins to learn their way of life and finds himself caught up in two situations.

As Algren misses his old way of life, he tends to love the way of the Samurai, along with a woman. The captain has now become the enemy he initially wanted to kill. This story presents the finest meaning of finding true identity and communication, through verbal and nonverbal expression. It shows the way a persons identity and self-concept can be influenced through culture, gender, age, and even by stereotype. Since the world was changing drastically in the 19th century, technology was new and indeed new for warfare. Captain Algren was asked by his commander and personnel from the Japanese consulate to train the Japanese military. The new technology will destroy the Samurai and make the Samurai way obsolete.

He simply agrees to do this with money as his only purpose. Initially, he has no care about the Samurai, the Japanese, or his commanders intent. In that

scene, Algren shows disrespect to his commander and Japanese consulate through his nonverbal communication.

His looks, the sucking of his teeth, drinking superfluously and dry sarcasm are the body orientations that show his disinterest (226). The consulate speaks Japanese to his secretary about how rude the Americans can be, which speaks on behalf of the entire country. The stereotype they develop is based upon the first impression of Algren they have exaggerated overgeneralizations which associate with a categorizing system; the Americans (96). A scholarly journal shows that in a test of six studies, acceptance in stereotyping was more associated with implicit and explicit stereotyping of peculiar groups (Carter 1103). Groups such as less liberal gender-role values, more authoritarian attitudes, preference for hierarchies, higher social dominance orientation, less universal outlook, less complexity in describing others emotions, less utilization of emotional information, and more utilization of social categories emphasize the associations with stereotyping (1106). As well in that scene, we learn the conflict styles according to culture. The most important cultural factor in shaping attitudes toward conflict is an orientation toward individualism or collectivism (Alden 390).

The book illustrates that in Latin American and Asian cultures, the kind of assertive behavior that might seem perfectly appropriate to a North American would be regarded as rude and intensive (391). In addition, American people tend to usually think more about themselves, where the concern in the Japanese culture is the entire group. Algren is more worried

about the money, while the Japanese are anxious about the economy and their Army being trained. This also leads to the straightforward stereotype that Americans are a greedy society who only does this for that.

The transactional model of communication depicts the way communicators communicate with each other (11). There is a scene with Captain Algren and Katsumoto first meeting each other in which they perfectly display a transactional model gone wrong. Algren argues and asks furiously why he is captured in his village. Keep in mind that he is also stuck a place unknown to him creating his communication environment a big blur. Katsumoto wants to get straight to the point and demands Algren to speak about the strength and strategy of the US forces. The environment containing all this noise from both parties is the main contributor to the horrible communication.

No message is getting to each of the communicators, and they are worse off from where they started. According to a journal on Students Classroom Communication Effectiveness, it states that if people are more effective communicators in terms of involvement, responsiveness, and assertiveness, they are generally cited with greater affective learning, indicators, and motivation to act (Frymier 212). A little more into the movie, Katsumoto and Algren start to communicate like civilized people brothers almost. They learned that arguing will not get them anywhere, and need to take appropriate actions. In accordance with scholarly journal, Why Nurses Need High Self-Esteem the definition of self-esteem has two parts (Dekkers 2).

First, self-esteem is mastery-orientated rather than achievement-orientated. Meaning, the central issue of self-esteem is to master abilities rather than to

pursue goals as effortlessly as possible. This will make a person feel better overall. Second, it monitors a persons suitability for membership of desired groups and relationships. A scene took place where a young samurai got caught in an area he wasnt supposed to be in. The police officers made a fool of him and kicked him down to the ground. They then began cut off his top knot, which is a tradition in the Samurai culture. It was an egobuster to the samurai they acted in a large way to reduce his self-esteem (Alden 51).

He had no top knot and part of the closeness to his culture felt further away than prior having one. Thus, it dropped the young samurais self-esteem and started a chain reaction including self-concept, the spectrum of identity, and self-confidence to churn. It was easy to see that the captains identity was influenced by several factors. The culture he was soaked in, re-shaped the way he drank, ate, spoke, and lived the days. According to the book, in collective cultures, a person gains identity by belonging to a group (61). This means the degree of interdependence, or the relying on one another is very high.

We can see that in the movie when someone in the group succeeds, the pride and self-worth are lifted to a higher level. During this time, Captain Algren is in the process of changing his self-concept. He started to adapt to the environment and began to have a realistic perception on himself after he realized that learned the way of the Samurai was what he wanted to do. He put the unrealistic evaluations and negative feedback away, because he knew he could succeed in this his realistic expectations (68). Most importantly, he had the will to change.

Often, people think that it may be too difficult to even try and pursue an act they think is too hard. Each time Algren fell to the floor, he got right back up and tried to fight again. The dedication and inspiration that was in him was an indicator he was willing to change. What the captain lacked was the skill to change. The community saw that he was willing to change; therefore, they decided to help him in the warrior skills necessary to become Samurai.

Algren first sought advice, and then he observed the people around him which made him a better warrior (69). Throughout the movie, Captain Algren learns to construct multiple identities, which are a characteristic of identity management and an element of communication competence (73). Algren plays different roles as a Commander of Japanese Army, to a captive in a Samurai village, a lover, a second father, a new brother, and in the end, turns into his old enemy. His management changed by situation and was unconsciously happening; totally unaware of his actions (75). The only reason why he was unaware of his changing self-concept was because he had no where to go.

As the story moved forward and the captain had spent some time with the Japanese family and culture, he learned why he was there. Finding out that he was there to start, manage new relationships and to gain compliance of others, was the reason why managed his identities (78). Captain Algren's self-concept was one of the main focuses in the movie. We see him grow throughout the movie.

The beginning of the movie shows the captain having numerous flashbacks to wartime slaughters against the American Indians. He becomes an

alcoholic, which leads to his carelessness. As he becomes sober from the natural refreshment of a new culture, he is able to change his self-concept and starts to speak the language. While kneeling at a dinner table with the family, they start to describe things around the table and on the face in Japanese. Algren starts to wear Japanese clothing, eat Japanese food, and begins to perfect the traits that they do on a daily basis. His American views start to change into the Samurai way of living and their beliefs, making him change the way he views himself. This shows examples of linguistic relativism notions that language exerts a strong influence on perceptions which make them seem valid (203). The differences between languages are not so much in what can be said, but in what it is relatively easy to say.

There are many scenes where Captain Algren understands that the language has phrases or words that cannot be easily translated in English, which is known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (202). As this occurs, the samurai community around him start to give Algren positive feedback, welcoming him into their society. Thus, his reflected appraisal, the fact that his self-concept is reflected by the way others see him (51).

According to the journal *Samurai Culture the Military Root in Japanese History*, the name kamikaze (divine wind) was given to Samurai warriors for acting as typhoons when in battle. In a defeat, they kill themselves because of their shame. Shame (haji) is the most important word in a samurai's vocabulary. Nothing is more shameful than not understanding shame<sup>3</sup>.

A samurai cannot stand a defeat (Ikegami 1353). Captain Algren realizes this fate, accepts and adapts to it. He does this not because he has to, but

because he chooses to. In closing, the story of the Last Samurai expressed great examples of good and bad communication via the transactional model and nonverbal language. In addition, personally identifying who a person really is through management and influences was a very strong point in the film. We have seen how communication conflict can arise in a different culture because of diverse beliefs, ideas, and values.

Linguistic relativism plays a big role because a language is a power in its own. If a person can start to relate languages, soon enough they will relate their beliefs, ideas, and their morals as well. We, as a society, need to notice communication traits and values not just in movies like these, but in our own lives as well. This will definitely increase harmony and world peace in countries around the world. Cultural isolationism is an untenable position in a world of ever-growing cultural homogenization and assimilation (Richards 3).