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1 INTRODUCING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

1.1 Explain the relationship among intercultural communication, global connectivity, and attitudes toward diversity.

1.2 Discuss the interface between culture and communication.

1.3 Distinguish cultures within cultures, explaining the ways in which culture and co-cultures, as well as positionality, influence cultural identity.

1.4 Describe dimensions of cultural variability in action.

1.5 Demonstrate technology's role in bringing diversity into people's lives.

Welcome to *The Intercultural Communication Playbook!* Playbooks contain game plans—strategic plans of action designed to achieve results. Every playbook introduces its users to the master plan of a specific subject area—whether a sport like football, a vocation like acting, or a discipline like intercultural communication. In intercultural communication, as in any sport or vocation, preparation and practice are key. Used in real-life situations, playbooks stress the importance of mastering their contents (e.g., their specific plays), equipping those who use them with a wide range of methods, including new ideas and creative approaches to apply immediately. Playbooks provide practitioners the knowledge and skills they need to adopt multiple perspectives and develop multiple solutions to problems. As such, they are empowering, helping practitioners visualize situations, understand the importance of continuous improvement, and work until they achieve their goals and succeed.

What results do we aspire for you to achieve once you master *The Intercultural Communication Playbook* and this course? What will you gain from employing a playbook approach to studying intercultural communication? You will learn the many ways that cultural values can shape perceptions, which in turn can influence how you respond to others. You will come away with skills to help you understand, navigate, and manage cultural differences. Designed to inspire you to approach the study of intercultural communication with a creative mindset, *The Intercultural Communication Playbook* helps you develop an understanding of different ways of thinking and doing things, keep moving beyond your comfort zone, use varied lenses through which to perceive the world, and discover how to make connections between contrasting perspectives and beliefs so that people become more knowledgeable about themselves and cultural "strangers."[1] The playbook approach to intercultural communication prepares you to connect with one another, whether or not you share the same cultures, live next door, in different neighborhoods, another state, or across the globe. It frees you to use your creativity and knowledge to help people of diverse backgrounds better understand and appreciate each other.

Why is *The Intercultural Communication Playbook*'s approach particularly valuable right now? In late 2019 and early 2020, the world first learned of a new virus—the novel coronavirus, which causes the illness known as COVID-19. The spread of the virus and the reactions it engendered worldwide spurred discussions as well as a backlash regarding just how interconnected our world had become. Some wondered whether the world should continue to integrate—coming together

The study of culture is the study of people. What can you learn about people from this photo?

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to solve global problems creatively—or if it would now be better to intensify the pushback to global connection, and separate.[2] In addition to threatening people's physical and mental health, unfortunately, the virus also had a number of other negative effects. It worsened **xenophobia** (i.e., excessive fear and dislike of outsiders, increasing hostility toward anyone outside of one's social group or country and sparking hatred for anything or anyone strange). It exposed **racism** (i.e., the marginalization or oppression of people of color based on a racial hierarchy that privileges a particular people over others, also referred to as systematic oppression). And it precipitated "**othering**," or fear of "the other" (i.e., fear of those perceived to be intrinsically distinct or different, such as fear of outsiders or strangers, including refugees and immigrants).[3]

The virus also taught a number of valuable lessons. It demonstrated how inextricably intertwined we now are with one another. No border existed that the virus could not penetrate. To not experience any of the virus's effects, one would have had to turn off the media, avoid the internet, and hide at home—never venturing outside of a self-imposed cocoon—a defensive response with its own risks.[4] Closing national borders or banning travel does not put a pause on communication. What we ultimately learned was that no wall—physical or psychological— was high enough to keep out the

Why do global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic call for global collaboration?

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great threats we face. Since we are tied to one another in a global village, both physically and virtually, we cannot avoid intercultural communication. Developing effective intercultural communication skills is not just desirable, it is a necessity. Yet, although some aspire for the world to be a single community, we often work at cross-purposes. *The Intercultural Communication Playbook* will guide you in working cooperatively to contribute to the resolution of serious problems that affect us all, including how we communicate during a pandemic and what we can do to foster an antiracist global community.[5]

This first chapter lays the foundation for our study of intercultural communication. It introduces you to the field, explores the significance of intercultural connections, and begins our exploration of culture and its many dimensions. As you begin your studies, it's important to take notice of the bias inherent in the intercultural communication discipline itself. Much of the field's research has a European and North American perspective creating cultural blind spots that arise from focusing on difference and "the other." As culture serves as the lens through which other cultures are seen, much of what research reports reflects a Western model of thinking. Thus, part of our responsibility is to help you recognize the lenses you use to view the world and to encourage you to develop multiple ways of seeing. This is essential for becoming effective intercultural communicators.

Before resuming your reading of this chapter, take this basic knowledge pre-test. Which of these five statements do you believe to be true, and which do you believe to be false?

1. Living in a Global Village makes communication impossible.   T   F

2. We only can practice intercultural communication abroad.   T   F

3. The fastest growing demographic group in the United States are multiracial Americans.   T   F

4. The terms *culture* and *co-culture* are interchangeable.   T   F

5. High-context cultures disparage traditions.   T   F

Continue reading the chapter to discover how to improve your ability to engage in intercultural communication and how many of your answers to the preceding questions are correct.

(Ans: 1. F; 2. F; 3. T; 4. F; 5. F)

MAKING INTERCULTURAL CONNECTIONS

> **1.1**   Explain the relationship among intercultural communication, global connectivity, and attitudes toward diversity.

Diversity, the recognition of difference, is also about appreciating and seeing the value in our differences, and determining how we can develop healthy and sustainable intercultural

relationships. Studying intercultural communication affords us opportunities to establish connections with persons who come from different cultural backgrounds than our own. While potentially beneficial, not all of us are eager to do this. What about you?

INSIGHT BUILDER
THINKING ABOUT COMMUNICATING INTERCULTURALLY

Insight builders are exercises designed to help you learn more about yourself. They are explorations through which you can discover the degree to which your attitudes and beliefs influence your behavior toward persons from your own and other cultures. With that in mind, indicate how true you believe each of the following statements to be:

	Always True	Usually True	Rarely True	Usually Untrue	Always Untrue
I am at ease whenever I talk to people from a culture that is different from mine.					
I can confidently explain how my culture shapes my own perceptions and behaviors.					
I do not have a moment of confusion or surprise when I talk to someone who is not from the same culture.					
When I talk to someone who is different from me, I never worry about offending them.					

(*Continued*)

(*Continued*)

	Always True	Usually True	Rarely True	Usually Untrue	Always Untrue
I try my best to avoid talking to people who are different from me.					

Review your responses. What do they suggest about your knowledge, skill, and motivation to engage in intercultural communication?

According to Russell Jacoby, US American author of the book *On Diversity*, instead of forging connections based on difference many of us are spending increasing amounts of time becoming more and more alike, demonstrating a desire to communicate on and offline with others who both mirror our thinking and confirm our beliefs.[6] Sameness and uniformity of outlook, sadly, are not what challenging times like ours call for. Such characteristics actually inhibit effective problem solving. What we need is a diversity of viewpoints and attitudes, characteristics that facilitate creative problem solving—but which might make some of us uncomfortable.[7] To be sure, as we confront serious global challenges, we need to collaborate with one another. We need to be able to understand one another if we are to coordinate and cooperate to solve problems that divide us and make social justice an elusive goal. How better it would be to have the skills and knowledge that we need in order to align our actions and accept that our fates are intertwined. The key to succeeding is to understand ourselves and others. The study of cultures, after all, is the study of people.

Review the following statements and decide with which of them, if any, you agree. Respond honestly:

1. Asian people are good at math.

2. French people are snobs.

3. Islam is a dangerous religion.

4. Jewish people are thrifty.

5. Blondes and jocks are unintelligent.

6. Gay men are effeminate and flamboyant.

7. Old people are despondent.

8. Women are emotional.

9. People with disabilities are depressed.

10. Black people are good at sports.

If you find yourself affirming any of the preceding statements, or think any one of them is especially true, it is likely that stereotypes are playing a part.

A **stereotype** is a perceptual shortcut, and a concept that we will refer to often in this playbook. It expresses the knowledge, beliefs, and expectations individuals have of the members of a particular group.[8] Whereas some of the stereotypes people hold of a cultural group's members are positive, others are negative. Some may seem to contain kernels of truth; however, they all keep us from facing our misconceptions. Which groups of people do you stereotype positively or negatively? What stereotypes might others hold of you? And how do our evaluations of one another affect our ability to form meaningful connections? To be sure, stereotypes contribute to our misperceiving and misunderstanding individuals from different cultures, and stereotyping is a key obstacle to forming meaningful intercultural relationships. In order to achieve intercultural understanding, we need to be able to connect and get along with one another, especially in the face of our differences. With this goal in mind, we will explore a host of variables influencing the willingness and ability to communicate in a multicultural society and global world.

Why can we not avoid intercultural communication?

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Decades ago, Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan, an early observer of technology's effects on behavior and thinking, forecast that our world would be transformed into a global village.[9] Was McLuhan ever right! We now are connected physically and electronically to others around the globe. Those whom we once considered strangers are friends and

coworkers, highlighting the importance of **multiculturalism**—engagement with and respect toward people from distinctly different cultures. Although we live in a multicultural world, how much do we identify as members of this global village?

Defining Culture, Intercultural Communication, and Diversity

Culture, intercultural communication, and diversity are broad but connected concepts. Let us explore each in turn.

What Is Culture?

Three-quarters of a century ago, in 1952, there already were some 160 different definitions of culture.[10] For our purposes, we define **culture** as learned patterns of behavior and attitudes that are held by a group of people and lead to a particular way of life characterized by shared traditions, customs, language, values, and beliefs. Culture enables us to give meaning to our intercultural environment, fostering a shared identity with others in the same group.

What Is Diversity?

Diversity, as we noted, is the recognition and valuing of difference and encompasses such factors as nationality, age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, mental ability, and socioeconomic status (including education and income level). Each aspect of the diversity spectrum can be called a culture because each aspect refers to a group of people that hold patterned values, attitudes, and behaviors that distinguish them from other groups.

Working and living with diverse people has its opportunities and challenges. Embracing diversity relies on learning about our own and other cultures, which in turn can foster stronger and more meaningful ties between persons from different aspects of the diversity.

What Is Intercultural Communication?

Intercultural communication is the process of interpreting and sharing meanings with individuals from different cultures to help people better understand the richness in cultural variability.[11] How do we acquire our knowledge of cultural variability? In addition to frequenting social networking sites that can provide increased access to such information, together with chances to connect with those we otherwise might never have connected with, many of us also find other ways to connect. For example, we pick up and move for personal or professional reasons.[12] Many people living in the United States travel regularly throughout the country and the world; some visit friends and relatives (one in five people residing in the United States was born abroad or has at least one parent who was),[13] others travel to represent an employer, and still others to vacation. Experiences like these provide us with opportunities to encounter cultural differences and benefit from improved intercultural understanding as we add to our knowledge base and make new person-to-person connections with individuals from across our community, city, country, and the world. We don't have to be in the diplomatic corps to assume an active role in developing relationships. We do, however, need to rely on intercultural communication to embrace cultural diversity.

In reality, we practice intercultural communication in our own backyards as well as with people around the world, because culture is not limited to national borders. Intercultural communication has different areas of focus. For example, one aspect of it is **international communication** (which occurs between people representing different nationalities). Among other foci are **interracial communication** (which occurs between people of different races) and **interethnic communication** (which occurs when the communicating parties have different ethnic origins while sharing the same nationality). Intercultural communication also takes the form of **intergenerational communication** (which occurs between people of different generations) and **interreligious communication** (which occurs between people with different religious beliefs). By sensitizing ourselves to culture's many faces, we become better able to respond appropriately to varied communication styles, expand our choices as communicators, and increase our effectiveness in interacting with individuals belonging to different cultural groups.

Why Do People Hold Varying Attitudes Toward Diversity?

Some people don't embrace diversity eagerly. This mindset is not new. Diversity means difference, and differences entail uncertainty and unpredictability, which often make people uncomfortable. US American communication scholars Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese developed the **Uncertainty Reduction Theory**, which explains that uncertainty is inherently undesirable in human experience. When uncertain, people engage in reduction behaviors by either seeking more information or avoiding the situation altogether.[14] US American intercultural scholar William Gudykunst extended the Uncertainty Reduction Theory to intercultural communication and developed the Anxiety Management Theory. **Anxiety Management Theory** claims that uncertainty can lead to anxiety if not managed, and for successful intercultural communication to take place, anxiety must be between the minimum and maximum levels that an individual can accept. If anxiety is outside the thresholds, people will not engage willingly in intercultural communication because it either is beneath their interest and motivation level or beyond their skillset, and consequently too overwhelming to handle.[15]

Many factors influence our comfort level with diversity: Some people are naturally more anxious in all social situations while others might react to differences because of their prior experience. In the book *Bowling Alone*, written at the turn of this millennium, author Robert Putnam reported that reciprocal and trustworthy social networks were on the decline. Aware that individuals were doing more and more things alone, Putnam asked why. After studying 30,000 people across the United States, Putnam found a correlation between ethnically mixed environments and withdrawal from public life. He reported that the people living in diverse communities tended to "hunker down." Sadly, they were more likely to distrust their neighbors—whether they were of the same or a different race, a similar or different background.[16] Do you find this still to be true today? The revised and recently republished twentieth anniversary edition of *Bowling Alone* notes that over the intervening two decades not much has changed. If anything, Americans are not only more alienated and isolated, but also more polarized, fragmented, and individualistic. Familiarity and similarity are much

more comforting and easier to navigate than differences and uncertainty. However, such comfort and easiness significantly limit our ability to develop an understanding of others and ourselves. In a follow up book, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*, Putnam explores the need for us to recover a sense of solidarity, observing that this can be accomplished if we change from a culture of "I" to a culture of "we."[17] To what extent, if any, do you agree?

How and why is it different in the working world? Happily, much of the working world reveals a contrasting story. In organizations, people with *identity diversity* (say, people who come from different, races, and religions) and *cognitive diversity* (people who have different ways of perceiving and solving problems) join together to do the organization's work.[18] Accordingly, the challenge facing us as intercultural communicators is to follow the lead of diverse organizations and work to create a new and broader sense of "us." In effect, it is up to us to harness the interpersonal connections capable of creating community out of diversity.[19]

Why Do People Embrace Contrasting Cultural Philosophies?

Where do you stand? Are you more comfortable when communicating with those who are more similar to you than you are with those who are not as like-minded? To what extent has the amount of contact you have with people of diverse cultural backgrounds changed since you were a child? Shifts in demography and technology have made it more likely that you will need to connect with others unlike yourself. For most of us, intercultural communication now is the norm. In fact, living in the United States gives us an incredible opportunity to engage with intercultural communication without having to use our passport or pay for international travel. But this hasn't always been true.

The Philosophy of Assimilationism or Melting Pot Philosophy

At the beginning of the republic, the United States embraced the **assimilationist philosophy**, which is often understood as a **melting pot philosophy**. According to this theory, when individuals immigrated to the United States, they needed to lose or give up their original heritage in order to assimilate into mainstream society in the United States. The national motto, *E pluribus unum*, a Latin phrase meaning "one out of many," reflected the approach. The belief was that diverse cultural groups, or **micro-cultures**, which are smaller in population, should be assimilated into the parent or dominant culture, or the **macro-culture**. This philosophy is rooted in classic individualism and universalism, which expect immigrants to lose their original identity to be molded into the then-new US American identity. The belief is that assimilation will lead to equality and fairness, so no one will be treated differently because of their original background. This philosophy has been driving many aspects of the political and social lives of US Americans. For example, members of the "English only" movement wanted to require that all immigrants to the United States speak English and that US American public schools only offer curriculum in English.[20] **Assimilationism** also affects perceptions of differences. Because the fundamental ideology of assimilationism is individualism, micro-cultural identity is de-emphasized. Instead, an individual's performance outcome is attributed solely to the individual's own motivation and perseverance, dismissing the group-based or systemic barriers.

E pluribus unum means out of many, one. How do you interpret this with intercultural communication in mind?

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The Philosophy of Pluralism or "Salad Bowl" Philosophy

Over time, the philosophy of **pluralism**, allowing for micro-cultures to maintain their unique group identities and differences from the macro-culture while coexisting in broader society, emerged. Pluralists believe in group-based identity and emphasize micro-cultural differences as if cultural groups are different pieces of a salad, mixing together in the bowl while maintaining their unique identities. In a pluralistic multicultural society, every micro-cultural group will do things differently, and that's encouraged and valued. Unlike assimilationism, pluralism is rooted in relativism and outcome-based equality, recognizing that groups may not all share the same experience. The policy of affirmative action is an example of pluralism. Affirmative action was designed to rectify the fact that women and ethnic minorities did not have the same employment and education opportunities as did men and the ethnic majority.

Many Americans nowadays, however, are somewhere in between the assimilationism and pluralism philosophies in their perception of the relationship between macro- and micro-cultures. They often are called "centrists" or "moderates." On the one hand, centrists or moderates believe that there should be a dominant cultural identity, but on the other hand, they firmly acknowledge the group-based identity differences and encourage unique micro-cultural practices. Such practices, they believe, must be in balance and moderation, and aimed toward the integration of different groups and micro-cultures, rather than their separation.

How Is Diversity Reshaping Intercultural Relations?

Demographers tell us that diversity is reshaping the United States' future, transforming person-to-person ties even more quickly than was originally predicted. According to the 2020 US

Census Bureau reports, the percentage of white people dropped below 60 percent: 57.8 percent of the population identified as non-Hispanic white or white alone; 12.1 percent as Black or African American alone; 6.1 percent as Asian alone; and 1.1 percent as American Indian and Alaska Native alone. Another 2.8 percent identified as two or more races. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders comprised .2 percent of the population. At 18.7 percent, Hispanic and Latinx Americans are now the largest minority group. The under-18 population is now majority people of color at 52.7 percent. Within one generation, underrepresented groups are forecast to become the majority.[21] (See Table 1.1.)

TABLE 1.1 ■ Projected Population by Race and Ethnicity: 2030 to 2060 (in millions)				
Characteristics	**2016**	**2030**	**2060**	**Change from 2016 to 2060**
Total Population	323,128	355,101	404,483	81,355
White	248,503	263,453	275,014	26,511
Non-Hispanic White	197,970	197,992	179,162	-18,808
Hispanic	57,470	74,807	111,216	53,746
Black or African American	43,001	49,009	60,690	17,689
American Indian and Alaska Native	4,055	4,663	5.583	1,528
Asian	18,319	24,394	36,815	18,496
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	771	913	1,125	354
Two or More Races	8,480	12,669	25,255	16,775

Source: Based on information in Jonathan Vespa, Lauren Medina, and David M. Armstrong, "Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections 2020 to 2060," *Current Population Reports* (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, issued March 2018 and revised February 2020), https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p25–1144.pdf.

Additionally, in 2010, acknowledging the blurring of racial lines and the evolution of racial identity, the US Census let the nation's more than 308 million people define their racial makeup as more than one race for the first time.[22] Families across the United States have grown more diverse. The 2020 census results reveal that multiracial Americans are among the fastest grow- ing demographic groups.[23] The number of Americans identifying as multiracial has more than doubled since the last census in 2010, growing from 16 million to 33.8 million people.[24]

The number of people now living in the United States who identify as Asian tripled over the past three decades, making Asians the fastest growing of the country's four largest racial and ethnic groups. Asians in the United States represent twenty different homelands in East

Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. The Asian population in the United States is geographically dispersed, and like members of other underrepresented groups, Asians are not a single entity, but diverse, with vast differences in income, age, education, citizenship status, and other demographic factors.[25]

The United States is one of the most demographically diverse countries in the world, making it very probable that the number of contacts residents have with persons of other cultures will continue to multiply in the future. This alone makes it important for people to be able to understand and communicate with those whose backgrounds, nationalities, and lifestyles differ from their own.

THE CULTURE/COMMUNICATION INTERFACE

> **1.2**   Discuss the interface between culture and communication.

As the US American cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall put it, "Culture is communication and communication is culture."[26] Culture is the lens through which we view the world. It is the mirror we use to reflect and interpret reality.[27] It teaches us how to think and what to think about. It reveals to us what is beautiful or ugly, helpful or harmful, appropriate or out of place. Culture, in concert with our life experiences, determines our **worldview**—the general perspective toward the world that shapes our responses to life.

Culture Is a Teacher

Every culture provides its members with a series of lessons. Among the lessons learned are how to say "hello" and "goodbye," when to speak or remain silent, how to act when angry or upset, where to focus the eyes when functioning as a source or message encoder and receiver or message decoder, how much to gesture, how close to stand to another, and how to display emotions such as happiness or rage. By instructing its members, culture guides behavior and communication, showing members how to act, think, talk, and listen.[28] In effect, culture is ubiquitous in every aspect of our lives. Its influence passes from our family, friends, schooling, traditional and social media, and rites and rituals. It is in the food we eat, the music we listen to, the art we appreciate, the games we play, and the friends we make. It is our entire social interaction with the world that shapes the cultural being we are, and which in turn, we also will pass on.

What aspects of your life does culture influence? Take a moment to think about your life growing up. What is your name? Is there any meaning in your name? Does the name reveal your gender identification? What language(s) do you speak? Do you go to religious services? If so, do you attend regularly or only during certain days of the week or of the year? Who have you lived with growing up? What holidays do you celebrate? What do you do during the holidays? What food do you always eat, and what decorations do you always put up? What values are these holidays celebrating? What music do you listen to the most? What TV shows do you find most entertaining? When attending schools, which behaviors are rewarded, and which are not? What

is your definition of success? What kind of person do you want to be? Now think about these answers and ask yourself why you answer this way.

Cultural Ignorance Is Costly

Cultures operate with their own expectations for behavior and communication. If we fail to realize how cultures influence people, including ourselves, to think or act, we risk appearing insensitive, ignorant, or culturally incompetent (lacking knowledge and skill in managing cultural differences). The culturally confused pay a high price. The following examples demonstrate how cultural ignorance can contribute to the misunderstanding of messages.

- Showing the sole of a shoe (while crossing one's legs, for example) means nothing to observers in North America or western Europe. In Middle Eastern cultures, the gesture is perceived as insulting.[29] Similarly, crossing your legs in the United States indicates you are relaxed, whereas in Korea it is a social faux pas.

- McDonald's fast-food chain unintentionally offended thousands of Muslims when it printed an excerpt from the Qur'an on its throwaway hamburger bags in the early 1990s.[30] Muslims saw this as sacrilegious.

- Japanese people view business cards as an extension of a person, handling them with great care, whereas Americans view them as a business formality and a convenience. Consequently, Americans often end up insulting the Japanese by treating a business card too casually.[31]

- Arab people typically adopt a direct body orientation, standing straight-on to face the person to whom they are speaking, which can seem aggressive and unnerving to North Americans who employ a stance that is somewhat less direct.

- Arab and Latin American peoples as well as Mediterranean Europeans tend to gesture vigorously when speaking to others, which the less physical North Americans may construe as inappropriate and unmannerly. It is common in Middle Eastern cultures for both men and women to physically exaggerate responses, whereas in the United States emotions are more likely to be less public. In Japan, individuals may try to hide or mask certain emotions. It is common among East Asian cultures to exhibit reserve and emotional restraint.

- US Americans place a high value on looking someone in the eye to show interest and attention and tend to distrust those who fail to do so. In contrast, many Japanese people believe eye contact over a sustained period of time shows disrespect. Among East Asian cultures, direct eye contact is often associated with aggressiveness especially from a lower-ranked person in the social hierarchy (e.g., a subordinate to a superior, or a younger to an elder person). On the other hand, Arab people tend to maintain direct eye contact for prolonged periods.

- Trust is a socially constructed experience. In the United States, openly disclosing information communicates trust. Some Romanian immigrants to the United States

were raised during a communist regime. Growing up in a collectivist culture, they were taught to distrust foreigners. They believe that "explaining things" accomplishes nothing. For them, the meaning of "trust," is in the person, not in their words. For these Romanian immigrants, trust is created by sharing emotions and through actions. Thus, moving from a high-context culture in which communicators primarily rely on subtleties to a low-context culture in which communicators expect to say exactly what they mean may impede trust development.[32]

Do you have the communication skill needed to handle a diversity of viewpoints?

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Cultural Imperialism and Hegemony Present Dangers

Cultural imperialism, the expansion or dominion of one culture over another culture, occurs when one culture presents itself as superior to others. **Cultural hegemony** is the dominance of one country or social group over others in a culturally diverse society with the effect of achieving imperial control. As a result of imperialistic and hegemonic practices, communication between members of different cultures may suffer. Not taking cultural practices into account impedes relationship building, whereas recognizing, respecting, and responding to differences among cultures allows more meaningful relationships to develop.

Deficient cultural awareness in oneself and others take a toll on individuals and society. Some years back, a survey was conducted of 1,259 teenagers from twelve countries whose main contact with people living in the United States was through popular culture, including television programs and movies they watched and the music they listened to. Based on these experiences, in their judgment, people living in the United States were violent, materialistic, sexually promiscuous, disrespectful of people unlike them, unconcerned about the poor, and prone to criminal activity. The study concluded that the export of US American popular culture contributed to impressions of cultural imperialism. Because the way of life in the United States was promoted by popular culture as superior to other ways of life, feelings of anti-Americanism had been fostered inadvertently.[33] Even French leaders have expressed concern that social theories imported from the United States on race, gender, and postcolonialism threaten French identity and France.[34]

People around the world express concern that the United States does not consider the interests of others or respect their cultural practices to the extent that it should.[35] Consider, for example, the criticism leveled at US late night TV host James Corden for the food bits featured on his show. Corden sometimes dares visiting celebrities to eat foods he calls "disgusting" in lieu of answering very personal questions about their lives. Many of the so called "disgusting" foods are samples of foods popular in different cultures. Sometimes ingredients and snacks such as chicken feet, balut (a fertilized duck egg), scorpion dusted plantains, and fermented eggs are featured. Critics counter that Corden's description of the "disgusting" foods is racist and hegemonic in that he presents offerings from cultures outside of the Western and European heritage in a negative light, rather than respectfully. Using food to elicit disgust from onlookers has a history as a source of entertainment in the United States. The practice, however, is being called out as disrespectful to people's cultures. In this case, because the food is mostly from Asian cultures, such portrayals make those who identify as members of Asian cultures feel more marginalized and vulnerable at a time when violence against them has significantly increased, due at least in part to the COVID-19 pandemic originating in China.[36] Recall the infamous "bat soup" picture that went viral on social media at the beginning of the pandemic. It directly pointed to Chinese people eating wild animals as the cause of the pandemic. The misinformation contributed to the increased hate crimes and hate speeches against people of Asian and Pacific Islander descent.[37] In March 2020, a man stabbed an Asian American family of three in Midland, Texas. The youngest victim was only two years old. The attacker said that he did this because he thought they were "Chinese and infecting people with the coronavirus."[38]

US Indian American author and TV host Padma Lakshmi, for example, called out columnist Gene Weingarten for a piece he wrote that headlined these words: "You Can't Make Me Eat These Foods." In the column, he singled out what he doesn't like about traditional Indian dishes.[39] Calling food "disgusting" when you don't understand the meanings it elicits for those who eat it functions not only as a rejection of the food, but also as a rejection of the people who are associated with the food. Effectually, food functions as a metaphor for what is considered "normal." As one critic noted, "It steers you toward being more Americanized and turning your back on your culture."[40]

According to critics of cultural imperialism and hegemony, the news, entertainment, and products of industrialized countries such as the United States tend to overwhelm the national

cultures of other countries. However, US pop culture is becoming more diverse. For example, an increasing number of foreign films or films directed by non-US directors have been successful in the United States. Between 2010 and 2021, all but one of the Academy Awards for Best Director were awarded to non-US directors. The Korean TV show *Squid Game*, released in 2021, received more than 100 million views worldwide, becoming Netflix's most successful TV show ever.

US music charts also regularly feature vocalists from the United States or other countries who sing in languages other than English, often Spanish. Korean pop groups are increasingly popular in the United States. (We discuss more of the media and pop culture's role in Chapter 12.) Advances don't come easy, however. In fact, in 2020 President Donald J. Trump bemoaned the accolades bestowed on the film *Parasite*, opining that the United States had enough problems with South Korea when it came to trade for us to bestow on them the honor of an Academy Award.[41]

Cultural globalization and hegemony remain controversial. The compression of diverse cultures into a single culture has many negative implications and ample examples of the kinds of cultural clashes that would result. While the sharing of cultural aspects could be enriching, the creation of a single overarching culture would instead be homogenizing.

Feelings About Difference Matter

When we interact with people whose values or behavioral norms are different from ours, we need to be sensitive to the differences. Being culturally flexible enables us to develop more effective relationships.

The Perils of Ethnocentrism

The reason we reject cultural diversity altogether could be driven by our **ethnocentrism**, the tendency to see one's own culture as the norm, superior to all others. Ethnocentrism is a natural and universal tendency that members of any culture tend to experience. This is because our culture is where we develop our own worldview, and when we encounter a different culture or worldview, we rely on our pre-existing perceptual lens to make sense and interpret the observation, which leads to judgments of other cultures. Researchers argue that ethnocentrism is both innate and learned. Without intentional efforts to combat the tendency to be ethnocentric, it will be a major barrier in effective intercultural communication. For example, people who are highly ethnocentric experience greater unwillingness to engage with others outside their culture.[42] They may say things like, "They are weird," "They take our jobs," "They're everywhere," or "They're just not like us." The more ethnocentric individuals are, the greater their tendency to view groups other than their own as inferior. As a result, they blame others for problems they face and often turn the facts inside out, making unsupported accusations.[43]

The Promise of Cultural Relativism

To overcome the obstacles erected by ethnocentrism, we need to cultivate **cultural relativism**. When individuals develop such a mindset and practice cultural relativism, instead of viewing

the group to which they belong as superior to all others, they work to understand the behavior of other groups based on the context in which the behavior occurs, not just from their own frame of reference.

INSIGHT BUILDER
ETHNOCENTRISM VERSUS CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Persons who are ethnocentric are likely to embody the behaviors identified below, which are included by US American intercultural scholars James Neuliep and James McCroskey in their Generalized Ethnocentrism Scale.[44] Consider the extent to which you either embody or do not embody these behaviors. To accomplish this, first label each of the statements as either true or false. After doing this, provide an example of how either employing or refraining from employing the specific behavior affected the nature of your interaction with a member of a culture other than your own.

1. My culture should be the role model for other cultures.
2. Lifestyles in other cultures are just as valid as those in my culture.
3. People from other cultures act strange and unusual when they come into my culture.
4. People in my culture have just about the best lifestyles of anywhere.
5. People in other cultures could learn a lot from people in my culture.
6. I'm very interested in the values and customs of other cultures.

What do your answers and examples reveal? What steps are you willing to take, if any, to help to minimize the potentially negative effects of ethnocentrism?

Be Wary of Stereotypes and Prejudice

Stereotypes and prejudice also influence the reactions of people to others whose cultures differ from their own. Stereotypes, again, are mental shortcuts that individuals carry around in their heads. The reason that they are shortcuts is because people rely on them to make fast decisions and judgments about others that are based on simply visible or known indicators of micro-cultures or diversity (e.g., age, gender, race and ethnicity, etc.). These shortcuts, which may be positive or negative, are used to guide our reactions to others.[45]

Stereotypes can generate unrealistic pictures of others, preventing people from distinguishing an individual from a group. When stereotypes represent rigid, inflexible attitudes toward the members of a group, they function as **prejudice**. **Racial profiling**, the use of race or ethnicity as the sole grounds for targeting and suspecting someone of committing a crime or offense and a form of prejudice, is just one example of how stereotyping affects people.

Why do people engage in racial profiling? Consider these facts: The human brain categorizes people by race in the first one-fifth of a second after seeing a face. Brain scans suggest that, even when asked to categorize others by gender, people also categorize them by race.[46] Racial profiling is indicative of prejudice. Prejudice describes how individuals feel about a group of

people whom, more likely than not, they don't know personally. It serves to differentiate in-groups (groups with whom we identify and whose members we value) and out-groups (groups whom we are skeptical about or feel detached from and whose members we devalue). Whether it is a negative or positive prejudgment of someone whom we have not yet gotten to know, preju-dice arises in an intergroup context when differences between in-groups and out-groups become overt, and perceived differences underline conflicting values (e.g., communist versus capitalist societies), as well as when someone wants to feel more positively about their own group or exert dominance by suppressing their differing values. The response is to perceive others present as a threat, whether that threat is real or imaginary.[47] Thus, prejudice arises as a result of in-group and out-group differences, and when unchecked, likely leads to discrimination.

Because of the negative expectations that stereotypes and prejudice produce, people may try to avoid interacting with those who are the objects of their prejudice (perhaps individuals of another ethnicity or race) or behave with hostility when they do engage with them.

SELF-ASSESSMENT 1.1
CULTURAL ATTITUDES

Use the statements listed below to analyze some of your cultural attitudes. Use a scale of 1–5 where 1 represents totally disagree, 2 represents disagree, 3 represents neutral, 4 represents agree, and 5 represents totally agree.

Attitude	Totally Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Totally Agree
1. My culture should be the role model for other cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Most people from other cultures just don't know what's good for them.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Most people would be happier if they lived like people in my culture.	1	2	3	4	5

(*Continued*)

(*Continued*)

Attitude	Totally Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Totally Agree
4. I respect the values and customs of other cultures.	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
5. Lifestyles in other cultures are just as valid as those in my culture.	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
6. People in my culture could learn a lot from people in other cultures.	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*

Scoring Method: Selective Sum

Scoring Calculation: Review your total score for questions 1–3 and your total score for questions 4–6. The higher your score is on 1–3, the more likely it is that you possess ethnocentric tendencies. The higher your score on questions 4–6, the more likely it is that you believe in cultural relativism.

Total Score for Q 1–3: _____ out of 15

Total Score for Q 4–6: _____ out of 15

What implications do both your scores have for the way you will conduct yourself with persons belonging to different cultures?

In light of their importance, we will return to consider the effects that ethnocentrism and stereotypes have on our intercultural communication effectiveness in subsequent chapters.

CULTURE IS LAYERED: CULTURES WITHIN CULTURES

> **1.3** Distinguish cultures within cultures, explaining the ways in which culture and co-cultures, as well as positionality, influence cultural identity.

To become more adept at communicating with people who differ culturally from us, we need to learn not only about their cultures but also our own.

How is culture like a layered cake?

istock.com/Irina Taskova

Cultures and Co-Cultures

Culture is a system of knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that is acquired, shared, and used by its members during daily living.[48] Contained within a culture as a whole are co-cultures, which used to be referred to as "minority cultures" or "subcultures." A **co-culture** is composed of members of the same general culture who differ in some ethnic or sociological way from the dominant or macro-culture.[49] **Co-cultural communication** refers to interactions occurring between members of the dominant culture (macro-culture) and people in other groups—those who are traditionally underrepresented as a result of existing dominant societal structures.[50] In US society, white, male, heterosexual, Christian, upper- and middle-class, able-bodied, and neurotypical Americans represent the dominant, macro-culture. Therefore, Black Americans, Hispanic and Latino/a Americans, and other non-white Americans; women and the nonbinary gender; the LGBTQIA+ community; non-Christians; people who live in poverty; people with disabilities; and people who are neuroatypical are just some of the co-cultures belonging to the same general culture.[51] (See Figure 1.1.)

Co-Cultures and Communication Strategies

People who identify with any micro- or co-cultures, or marginalized or underrepresented groups—that is, groups whose members are often treated as outsiders—use different strategies to navigate the relationship with members of the macro- or dominant culture. Have you noticed the strategies that follow?

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Culture and Co-Cultures

Culture

Co-Culture

Co-Culture

Co-Culture

Co-Culture
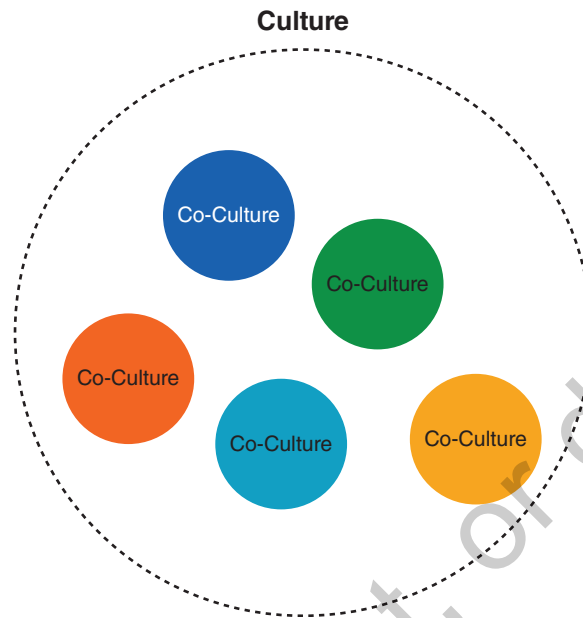
Co-Culture

Assimilation. Co-culture members who use the strategy of assimilation attempt to fit in or join with members of the dominant culture. Co-culture members converse about subjects that members of the dominant culture talk about, such as cars or sports, or they dress as members of the dominant culture dress. Co-culture members may give up their own ways in an effort to assume the modes of behavior of the dominant culture, placing more value on fostering relationships with members of the host culture. For example, some Chinese American immigrant parents intentionally do not teach Chinese to their children to avoid their English being "tainted" with a Chinese accent.[52]

Accommodation. In comparison, co-culture members who use the strategy of accommodation attempt to maintain their cultural identity even while they strive to establish relationships with members of the dominant culture, placing value on both the micro-culture and the macro-culture. A gay man or lesbian woman who takes their partner to an occasion at which heterosexual couples of the dominant culture will be present, such as a company or family celebration, is using the strategy of accommodation.

Separation. On the other hand, when members of a co-culture resist interacting with members of the dominant culture, they employ the strategy of resistance, or separation. Because the co-culture members, such as those of the Hasidic Jewish faith and Amish community, prefer to interact with each other rather than have contact with people perceived to be outsiders, they tend to keep to themselves, placing more value on maintaining their cultural heritage.

Co-Cultures and Communication Approaches

Members of co-cultures use specific communication approaches that are passive, assertive, aggressive, or confrontational to accomplish the objectives relative to the dominant culture. Depending on their strategy—assimilation, accommodation, or separation—these approaches play out differently.

Passive Communication. Co-culture members who use a passive communication approach seeking assimilation accept the micro-culture's nondominant position in the cultural hierarchy and emphasize commonalities between co-cultures and the dominant culture. Co-culture members who use a passive communication approach and seek accommodation try to de-emphasize the differences between co-cultures and the dominant culture. These individuals might increase their own visibility by dispelling stereotypes while stressing the importance of diversity and improving dialogue and interaction with members of the dominant culture. Co-culture members who use a passive communication approach and seek separation will avoid interaction with members of the dominant culture, using physical, verbal, or nonverbal communication barriers to distance themselves from the dominant culture.

Assertive Communication. Co-culture members who use an assertive communication approach to achieve assimilation engage in intentional and active ways to be accustomed to the dominant culture. Through efforts to become the model based on the dominant culture's standard, co-culture members may even conform to the dominant culture's stereotypes of them in order to be accepted. Co-culture members who use an assertive communication approach to achieve accommodation develop relationship networks with both members of the dominant culture and other co-cultures. Through open dialogues and relationship building, co-culture members seek opportunities to educate the dominant culture about the co-culture. Co-culture members who use an assertive communication approach to achieve separation engage in active efforts to form exclusive networks with other co-cultures. Through exemplifying and highlighting the co-cultures' identities and successes, co-culture members empower each other without conforming or validating the dominant culture's standard of success.

Aggressive or Confrontational Communication. Co-culture members who use a more aggressive approach to assimilate to the dominant culture dissociate from their own co-cultural identity. Instead, they mirror the dominant group's behaviors and communication. They do this even if it means demeaning their own behavior and the behavior of other co-cultural groups in the effort to avoid being connected to the co-cultures. Co-culture members who use a more aggressive approach to accommodate tend to provoke the dominant culture through intense communication of their own identity, referencing their co-cultural oppression. This approach may be perceived by members of the dominant culture as "hurtfully expressive" or "self-promoting." Co-culture members adopt this strategy to demarginalize themselves and actively participate in the world known to members of the dominant culture. This way, it would be difficult for members of the dominant culture to ignore the co-cultures' presence or pretend they do not exist.[53] Co-culture members who use a more aggressive approach to separate try to inflict pain through psychological attack or sabotage the self-concept of members of the dominant group. See more examples of co-cultural communication strategy and approach in Table 1.2.

TABLE 1.2 ■ Preferred Strategies and Communication Approaches of Co-Cultural Groups		
Strategy	**Communication Approach**	**Example**
Accommodation	Passive	Wearing a yarmulke to work, wearing a sari to a party
	Assertive	Sharing information; engaging in education of others
	Confrontational	Critiquing others to promote change
Assimilation	Passive	Emphasizing commonalities to fit in
	Assertive	Downplaying differences but revealing feelings
	Confrontational	Staging a protest against co-cultural groups to negotiate position within the dominant group
Separation	Passive	Eating lunch alone
	Assertive	Maintaining independence by living with like people
	Confrontational	Criticizing discriminatory practices of members of dominant culture

Effective intercultural communication includes developing an understanding of both the general culture and its co-cultures, one's own and that of the other. It is necessary to become aware of the norms and rules of the culture or co-cultures that might influence the nature of interactions with its members. It is important to understand the ways culture shapes interaction.

Acknowledging Differences Within Co-Cultures

Stereotyping any cultural group denies the existing differences within the cultural group. For example, many co-cultures, such as Native Americans, are not a single homogenous group. Native Americans represent different geographical areas, such as the Northeast, the Southeast, the Plains, and the Southwest in the United States. A variety of lifestyles, clothing preferences, languages, and beliefs are notable among the different nations (there are more than 500 different affiliations) to which Native American people belong. Among their shared beliefs (which any individual may nonetheless reject) are that the world needs cooperation, harmony, non-interference with others, and respect within the community and between people and nature, including holding elders in high regard and being concerned with spiritual well-being more than material well-being. They also desire to preserve Indigenous rights including land, water, self-government, and culture. Patriarchy is not the only prevailing model, as many Indigenous American tribes are matriarchal affording women more significant leadership roles within tribes and the ability to share responsibilities with men. There is no one common Indigenous identity; instead, there are a multitude of Indigenous identities. Thus, *Indigenous American* is a broad-based term.[54] The same holds true for other co-culture groups, such as the growing Asian population in the United States whose diversity similarly tends to get overlooked. It, too,

is complex, and composed of 20 million people with roots extending into a dozen religions, twenty countries, and hundreds of different languages in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent.[55] The point? We need to respect the cultural diversity within all human experience.

Influences on Cultural Identity

We all belong to a number of groups, including those defined by gender, age, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, ability, mental health, and national identities. Cultural identity, based on these group memberships, influences behavior in interpersonal relationships. (We introduce group memberships here and will delve even more deeply into them in Chapter 2.)

Gender and Gender Roles

Gender is often mistaken for sex assigned at birth, which typically is understood as man/male, woman/female, and intersex (individuals born with any of several sex characteristics, including chromosome patterns, gonads, or genitals that, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies"), or nonbinary.

Gender role refers to how men and woman should behave, which is often expressed with reference to their masculinity and femininity. How gender roles are defined affects the ways individuals present themselves, socialize, work, perceive their futures, and communicate. For example, in the United States, cisgender (meaning someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth) men who identify with masculine traits tend to adopt a task-based and problem-solving orientation in their communication, while cisgender women who adopt feminine traits tend to be relationship oriented.[56] Transgender people, in comparison, identify with gender behavior that does not conform to that typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Keep in mind that for a very long time, research solely focused on the binary perspective of men and women as their sex assignment at birth. Recent research, however, has found that sex assigned at birth is less effective in explaining behaviors and perceptions than individual and gender role differences.[57] In addition, nonbinary individuals tend to have a more expansive concept of gender, choosing to distance themselves from a specific gender identity.

How one approaches gender pronouns also is revealing. In 2019, the Merriam-Webster dictionary designated the singular use of the word "they" as the word of year. The practice of referring to a person as "they" also has been accepted by the Associated Press and the Oxford English Dictionary. Gender pronouns were developed to help people referencing each other use labels that match a person's own gender identity. The aim is to achieve inclusion for those who do not identify with the traditionally and the better-known binary categories of gender.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation, according to the American Psychological Association, is "a person's sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behavior and/or social affiliation that may result from this attraction."[58] Historically, US American culture has valued and privileged

heterosexuality. We have come a long way, and the laws and regulations reflect such changing attitudes; the nation has legalized same-sex marriage and prohibited workplace discrimination against members of the LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual) community. Despite the progress of society's overall acceptance of the community, however, recent research has focused on discrimination faced by those whose sexual orientation intersects with other diversity indicators, such as race and ethnicity. Scholars in gender and sexuality studies also have adopted a critical cultural approach to examine how gender identity, including sexual identity, develops and gains dominance and hegemony in the culture.[59]

Age and Generational Identity

We also have ideas regarding the meaning and significance of age, including how people of a particular age should look and behave. In the United States, large numbers of people place great value on appearing youthful and younger than their actual ages. In contrast, in Arab, Asian, and Latin American cultures, people respect rather than deny the value of older people.

In addition to recognizing how age affects cultural identity, we also need to acknowledge the role generational differences play in our communication with one another. Demographers usually classify people into the following generations: the greatest generation (born between the 1920s and 1945), boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980), millennials (born between 1981 and 1996), Gen Z (born after 1996 but before 2012),[60] and generation Alpha (born after 2012).

What role do age and generation play in cultural identity?

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Racial and Ethnic Identities

Our racial and ethnic identities are similarly socially constructed. Historically, race focused on genetically transmitted physical attributes that differentiate one group from another. Today, many recognize that race is driven more by socially, politically, and economically constructed purposes than biology. Thus, **race** refers to a group of people who share a cultural history, nationality, or geographical location. It remains a controversial way of categorizing people, with many preferring the term *population* to race. For example, US immigrants who are descendants from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been struggling to find the "right" box to check on the US Census. For years, they have been prompted to check the box for "white," because Egyptians and Lebanese are given as examples of the "white" category; however, members of MENA populations often felt this choice was forced on them because they do not identify as European/white American, but other options were even less accurate.[61] The social effects of one's perceived race are real, and people form co-cultures (see the paragraphs that follow) based on similar experiences with respect to race.[62] (We address race in greater depth in Chapter 7.)

Ethnicity is a social classification shared by a group of people with a common geographic origin and cultural heritage. Ethnicity is dependent on a number of other factors, such as nationality, religion, and native language. For example, Chinese is not a race, because it is considered Asian, race-wise; Chinese is an ethnicity, because Chinese people can be found across the globe, belonging to different nationalities, regions, and religions.

Some racial and ethnic groups, for example, share experiences of oppression. Their attitudes and behaviors may reflect their struggles, influencing their attitudes toward contemporary issues such as affirmative action.

Religious Identity

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, the most common religions, in descending order, are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Religious identity is at the root of countless contemporary conflicts occurring in numerous areas, including the Middle East, India, Pakistan, and the United States, with anti-Muslim sentiment becoming intensified after 9/11 and a factor in the 2016 US presidential election.[63]

Religious identity also intersects with race, ethnicity, and age. For example, according to Public Religion Research Institute (PPRI), the number of white Christians in the United States has been decreasing in the past two decades with a slight upsurge in the past three years, whereas the population of Christians of color remains steady. White evangelicals are the oldest group in the country while young Americans are the most religiously diverse group according to the 2020 US Census.

Socioeconomic Identity

Socioeconomic identity, which often includes education and income level, also frames how we respond to issues of our day. The significant gap between the ultra-wealthy, the middle and working classes, and those living in poverty in the United States is contributing to their developing different attitudes on a wide array of issues. The same holds true for those belonging to the working class who resent not belonging to the middle class. The widening gulf between "the haves" and

"the have-nots" focuses attention on different forms of inequality from health care access to the digital divide, to income, to social, with the media serving up stereotypical images of working class people that are not terribly positive while perpetuating belief in economic and class mobility and "the American dream." The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated this wealth gap, with those living in poverty more vulnerable and susceptible to the disease and worse, death.[64]

National Identity

National identity refers to legal status or citizenship in relationship to a nation. Many US citizens, for example, trace their family histories to other countries. People whose ancestors were from other countries may have been US citizens for generations, yet some still perceive them as foreigners. Do you?

What might complicate national identity is that some countries such as the United States allow dual or multiple citizenships while others do not.

Physical Ability

In 2018, after the world-renowned British physicist Stephen Hawking, who used a wheelchair and speech-generating device for much of his life, passed away, a cartoon portraying a man walking away from his wheelchair toward the lights sparked many controversies. The cartoon was meant to pay tribute to Hawking, but the implied idea that Hawking was "finally free" or liberated from his physical constraint was an unfortunate demonstration of ableism on the culture of people with disabilities. US American writer and activist Megan Wildhood said, "Our disabilities are not our bodies. Our disabilities are a society based on capitalist assumptions that greatness confers meaning in one's life."[65]

US American professor Rosemarie Garland-Thomas, a longtime disability justice activist at Emory University, advanced critical disability studies by integrating feminist studies with disability studies saying, "The informing premise of feminist disability theory is that disability, like femaleness, is not a natural state of corporeal inferiority, inadequacy, excess, or a stroke of misfortune. Rather, disability is a culturally fabricated narrative of the body, similar to what we understand as the fictions of race and gender."[66]

Neurological Identity

Our mental or neurological ability and how we identify ourselves on the spectrum of neurodiversity describes differences and variations in how individuals' brains operate and how individuals behave. For a very long time, psychological disorders such as autism or depression were, like physical disabilities, considered to be a deficit and inferior to the "normal" way of thinking, experiencing, or behaving. Worse, mental disorders are often stigmatized as an illness, dangerous to society, and therefore, as something to be eliminated or "cured."[67] Affirming neurodiversity refutes the idea that there is one correct or normal way for the brain to function, recognizing and accepting the differences of our mental ability as another part of our identity, just like our age, gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical ability, nationality, etc. Temple Grandin, a prominent US American scholar and advocate for autism stated, "If I could snap my figures and be nonautistic, I would not—because then I wouldn't be me. Autism is part of who I am."[68]

IMAGINE THIS

LOOK AT YOURSELF, YOUR GENERATION, WORK, AND ENTERTAINMENT

You might have been in the workplace for years, or maybe you will enter the workforce full time for the first time soon. The activities included here encourage you to think beyond your everyday work and entertainment experiences.

1. Culture influences how we perceive work, the meanings and values behind work, and what we think things should be like at work, including what our work environment should be like, and how we should behave. Cultural influences also guide our expectations for work in a team, conceptions of leadership, ideas of rewards, attitudes toward technology, authority and power, the amount of uncertainty one can tolerate, and the topics discussed at the workplace. Of course, culture also impacts one's ability to work together with the individual members of diverse generations.

   a. First, visualize how your cultural identification influences you on each of the variables identified in the previous paragraph. Write a brief narrative summarizing your thoughts.

   b. Next, imagine the behaviors that members of your generation should adopt in order to work successfully in organizations alongside members of earlier or later generations. Also imagine the advice you would offer to members of other generations regarding how to work successfully with you. Put your thoughts regarding both into a descriptive paragraph.

   c. Finally, imagine how you would determine whether an organization's culture reflected your values and was a good fit for you, listing your criteria.

2. Select a popular film or TV show, such as *Bob Hearts Abishola*, *Unorthodox*, *Emily in Paris*, *The Big Sick*, *Encanto*, *Schitt's Creek*, or *Crazy Rich Asians* in which there are one or more relationships between featured characters affected by at least one of the identified influences on cultural identity. Based on your understanding of the influences, in a brief essay discuss the relational dynamics in play during a selected interaction.

3. After completing the preceding activities, summarize the ways in which your cultural identity makes itself visible in your relationships.

Consider Positionality

US American intercultural communication scholar Kathryn Sorrells developed the **Intercultural Praxis Model**, which identifies how our socially constructed differences present us with different amounts of power, positioning us to relate to others and make sense of the world based on our perceptions of who has more privilege. In addition to exploring the roles of reflection and inquiry, dialogue and action, Sorrells examines how position and privilege limit the frames we use to navigate and respond to cultural differences.[69] While we will explore power and privilege more extensively in Chapter 7, here we ask you to consider how the degree to which your personal position in society, including whether or not you belong to a *privileged group* (e.g., a group possessing special rights or advantages that members of other groups do not

have) frames your answers to questions related to social justice and fairness, influences your attitudes and behavior toward others, and informs what you believe to be true and untrue.

To discover how your thoughts about position affect your experiences, agree or disagree with each of the following statements, supplying a reason for each position you express.

1. Racism is part of this country's history but does not affect how I live my life today.

2. Since same-sex couples are free to marry, none of us in the United States needs to worry about homophobia.

3. Where I live, people are treated equally in every way.

4. The US Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Because of this, I am able to worship freely and openly or not at all if I choose to.

5. The United States is the land of opportunity. As a result, if we work hard, we can all live our dreams.

Each of our "life stories" provides us with a frame to decide what is and is not so, and what we can and cannot do. Different life stories and cultural backgrounds influence the kind of window through which people view their experience and the experiences of others. This likely accounts for why everyone does not answer the preceding questions similarly.

Contrasts in life experiences often parallel the contrasts distinguishing cultures. Looking through different cultural windows enables us to see and understand so much more about what members of diverse cultural groups experience, including appreciating culture's influence on identity and privilege. Engaging in intercultural praxis offers six points of entry: (1) *inquiry*, the desire to learn and know more; (2) *framing*, a range of perspective-taking possibilities; (3) *positioning*, recognizing how our geographic positioning affects our social and political positions, in other words how power and privilege are reflected in our thoughts and behavior; (4) *dialogue*, considering how we build community by showing concern for self and others; (5) *reflection*, practicing introspection; and (6) *action*, seeking opportunities to make a difference in the world. Are you ready to put these to use?

EXPLORE CULTURAL DIMENSIONS IN ACTION

> **1.4**   Describe dimensions of cultural variability in action.

There are many ways that cultures are different from each other. Two key scholars, Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist, and Edward T. Hall, an American anthropologist, contributed greatly to our understanding of the dimensions along which cultures vary.

Keep it in mind, the dimensions we review are by no means exhaustive in explaining how cultures are different. There are more dimensions out there. By exploring dimensions used to

distinguish cultures, individuals can increase the ability to understand their own and other cultures as well as determine the cultural context to keep in mind when communicating. These dimensions are useful not only to explain cultural variations on the national level, but on co-cultural levels as well.

Cultures, for example, can vary on how much they are (1) individualistic and collectivistic, (2) high power distance and low power distance, (3) masculine and feminine, (4) short-term and long-term, (5) high-context and low-context, and (6) monochronic and polychronic. We will refer to these dimensions as we continue exploring intercultural communication in subsequent chapters. As you consider them and others, keep in mind that cultures are complex. Not everyone in a given culture can be labeled singularly according to the culture's defining characteristics. We refer to these orientations to explain and predict how many identifying with a culture behave when sending and interpreting members' communication. As we introduce each cultural variation, realize that no culture is purely one or the other—rather, cultures vary in the degree to which they possess each of the characteristics. Also think about the ways in which cultures can influence one another. Although members of a culture may have emphasized one variable over the other at different points in the culture's history, this does not mean that the culture can't change over time by itself or once strongly impacted by another culture. Also, remember that while in this textbook we may sometimes use a country to refer to a culture, as many cross-cultural communication research studies do, cultural differences may not be completely represented by countries alone; cultural differences based on country are approximations only, not absolute. Every country has its co-cultures, which may or may not converge completely with the dominant cultural values. Additionally, not every member of a culture will embody the primary cultural value to the same extent—or express themselves similarly in all contexts.

Individualism and Collectivism

The cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism reveals how people define themselves in their relationships with others (see Table 1.3). Which one of these two orientations best characterizes most people in your cultural group: "I do things my way" or "I'm a team player"?

TABLE 1.3 ◼ Individualism and Collectivism	
Individualistic	**Collectivistic**
Celebrate the individual and personal independence over the group	Value harmony and team or group collaboration
Value self-realization	Reward group achievement—goals accomplished for the sake of the group

Individualistic cultures, such as those exhibited by a majority of people in Western cultures including Great Britain, the United States, Canada, France, and Germany, stress individual goals, whereas **collectivistic cultures**, represented by a majority of people in the Middle East, African, Asian, and Latin American countries including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Nigeria, Japan,

China, South Korea, Chile, Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina give precedence to group goals. Individualistic cultures cultivate individual initiative and achievement, while collectivistic cultures tend to nurture group influences. This means that, whereas the "I" may be most important in individualistic cultures, the "we" is the dominant force in collectivistic ones. In collectivistic cultures, the individual is expected to fit into the group. In individualistic cultures, emphasis is placed on developing the sense of self.

High Power Distance and Low Power Distance

Power distance measures the extent to which individuals are expecting and willing to accept power differences and inequalities among people (see Table 1.4).

TABLE 1.4 ■ Low and High Power Distance	
Low Power Distance	**High Power Distance**
Prefer a decentralized approach to power	Prefer clear lines of authority; defer to status
Egalitarian	Some people have more power and importance than others; fewer people share power
Power is broadly distributed	Adherence to hierarchical structure

Individuals from **high power distance cultures**, such as Malaysia, the Philippines, Mexico, and China, view power as a fact of life and are apt to stress its coercive or referent nature. Superiors and subordinates in these countries are likely to view each other differently; subordinates are quick to defer to superiors. In contrast, individuals from **low power distance cultures**, such as Israel, Austria, and New Zealand, believe power should be distributed equally and used only when it is legitimate; thus, they are apt to comply with those who earn their superiority, such as through knowledge, expertise, or charisma. Superiors and subordinates from low power distance countries share the decision-making process, with superiors displaying a preference for consultation of subordinates; subordinates will even contradict their bosses when necessary.[70] Low power distance cultures stress equality among people despite their occupying different power levels. This mindset is apparent when persons with less power address those with more power by their first names. Contrastingly, in high power distance cultures, power rests in the hands of the few instead of being distributed throughout the population. The hierarchy of relationships maximizes perceptions of power differences and is demonstrated through those in the lower power position using honorifics addressing those in the higher power positions.

Masculine and Feminine Culture

Cultures differ in their attitudes toward gender roles including how gender-fluid individuals are treated in masculine and **feminine cultures** (see Table 1.5).[71] In highly **masculine cultures**,

members make explicit distinctions between genders, placing value on traits such as competitiveness, aggressiveness, and strength, and on material symbols of success. In highly feminine cultures, the distinction between gender roles is blurred, and nurturance, relationships, and a high quality of life are valued. Among highly masculine cultures are Japanese culture and Hungarian culture. Among highly feminine cultures are Swedish culture and Norwegian culture. Masculine cultures socialize members to be dominant and competitive particularly among men. Thus, whereas masculine cultures emphasize maximal distinctions in the behavior of men and women and stress assertiveness among men, feminine cultures are characterized by more overlap in the social roles performed by both men and women and underscore the importance of nurturing and caring for each other. Gender-fluid individuals shift between masculine and feminine norms. Although present in both masculine and feminine cultures, gender-fluid individuals tend to be more accepted in feminine cultures than in masculine cultures. Even if same-sex couples are accepted by masculine cultures, their gender roles are still defined by those in traditional heterosexual couples, because they are often asked questions like, "Who is the man in the relationship?"[72]

TABLE 1.5 ■ Masculine and Feminine	
Masculine	**Feminine**
Emphasize achievement	Emphasize relationships
Value traditional binary gender roles	Exhibit less traditional gender role distinctions
Aim for material wealth	Aim for overall quality of life

Short-Term and Long-Term Orientation

A culture's time orientation refers to how past, present, and future are perceived by members of the culture. In long-term oriented cultures, which are found in many East Asian cultures and Russian culture, people believe that past traditions should be respected and preserved but that the most important events in life will happen in the future. Therefore, values such as saving and perseverance are emphasized. In short-term oriented cultures, which are found in most Western and African cultures, the present is emphasized, and therefore spending and instant gratification are expected (see Table 1.6).

TABLE 1.6 ■ Short- and Long-Term	
Short-Term	**Long-Term**
Value the present and past	Value perseverance and the future
Focus on spending	Focus on saving
Immediate gratification	Gratification deferred until later

High Context and Low Context

Cultures also vary in their preference for directness in communication, ranging from low-context to **high-context communication** (see Table 1.7).

TABLE 1.7 ■ Low and High Context	
Low-Context Culture	**High-Context Culture**
Pay attention to words; communicate directly	Pay attention to unspoken messages, nonverbal cues and context
Expect detailed information	Take the setting and environment into account
Perceive knowledge as a commodity, compartmentalizing and segmenting information	Rely on the context of subtle information

Whereas people living in **high-context cultures**, such as Chinese culture, Japanese culture, and Korean culture, gather information from the context, people living in low context cultures, such as the United States and German cultures, pay closer attention to the verbal code. Cultures with high-context communication systems are often collectivistic where cultural traditions orient the behavior toward maintaining harmonious relationships among group members. In addition, nonverbal cues are extremely important to interpreting messages delivered by persons from high-context cultures.

As a reminder, we sometimes use a country to refer to a culture, which is the practice in cross-cultural communication research studies on which we rely. We want you to be aware, however, that cultural differences may not be completely represented by countries alone. Cultural differences based on country are approximations, not absolute. Each country has its co-cultures, which may or may not converge completely with its dominant cultural values.

Cultures with **low-context communication** systems generally encourage members to exhibit a more direct and explicit communication style. In addition, people from low-context cultures are apt to feel that they have to explain everything in explicit terms rather than primarily rely on nonverbal, contextual information to express themselves or infer others' meanings. In contrast, people who believe that most messages can be understood without direct verbal interaction reveal their preference for high-context communication. Asian, Arab, African, and southern European cultures typically emphasize high-context communication, whereas Western cultures, including North Americans, Germans, and Scandinavians, typically represent low-context systems. For example, East Asian cultures traditionally value silence, believing that a person of few words is thoughtful, trustworthy, and respectable. For members of high-context cultures, silence between relationship partners can communicate mutual tacit understanding of the situation, whereas it makes members of low-context cultures feel uncomfortable because in those contexts it often indicates withholding information and resistance to engage. In East Asian cultures, people spend considerably less time talking than do people in the West.[73]

Persons belonging to high-context cultures rely on nonverbal cues more than words. Do you?

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Monochronic and Polychronic Time Orientation

Chronemics refers to time use. How we perceive time also influences our communication, with different conceptions of time making themselves visible in our interactions with others. Life in some places around the globe is not as fast paced as it is in most of Europe and North America. In Kenya, Argentina, and Italy, activities are often conducted at a slower rhythm and without the same sense of urgency. When not understood, such differences in conceptual orientation can become frustrating. According to Hall, cultures approach time in one of two ways: as monochronic or polychronic.[74]

People attuned to **monochronic time** schedule time carefully, one event at a time, preferring to complete an activity before beginning another. This orientation, common in Western industrialized societies, perceives time to be a limited commodity and can be wasted if not used carefully. Therefore, punctuality is valued. To members of monochronic culture, time should be spent on completing tasks. In contrast, people brought up under the **polychronic time** orientation are not obsessed with the arbitrary compartmentalization of time. They perceive time to be limitless and fluid. Rather than rigidly scheduling or segmenting their time linearly, they readily give in to distractions and interruptions, even choosing to tackle several different problems or hold several different conversations at the same time. To members of polychronic culture, time is prioritized to maintain relationships over completing tasks. It is common for polychronic people to be late for an appointment, change an appointment right up to the last minute, or opt not to arrive for their appointment at all.[75] (See Table 1.8.)

TABLE 1.8 ■ Monochronic and Polychronic	
Monochronic Culture (M-TIME)	**Polychronic Culture (P-TIME)**
Time is limited and oriented to tasks	Time is limitless and oriented to people and relationships
Value punctuality, efficiency, and productivity	Value relationships and natural course of events

Interpreting Cultural Differences

Where a culture falls on the spectrum of individualistic–collectivistic, low power distance–high power distance, masculine–feminine, low-context and high-context communication, and monochronic and polychronic time orientation (and many other cultural dimensions) affects the interactional preferences of its members. Developing a fuller comprehension of these dimensions can improve communication between the members of diverse cultures. For example, knowing whether individuals tend to understate their accomplishments or take credit for personal achievements can keep you from passing judgments that may be ill-founded. When people from diverse cultures interact, unless their differences in orientation are acknowledged, interactions may well result in misunderstandings.

STRETCH YOUR UNDERSTANDING
UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Stretch Your Understanding is an exercise designed to expand your understanding of cultural diversity. Make a list of individuals whose cultural backgrounds differ from your own and with whom you have communicated recently. How many of the following questions can you answer about yourself and each person on your list?

1. How does the individual's concept of self compare and contrast with yours?
2. How do you and the individual feel about socialization? How are they different?
3. To what extent do your values and attitudes differ from (or resemble) the individual's?
4. Which of your behaviors has the individual had difficulty understanding? Which of their behaviors have you have difficulty with?
5. Which of the individuals you interacted with did you find to be most like you? Most unlike you? Can you identify your points of similarity and difference?
6. To what extent were you more cooperative or competitive than the individual?
7. In what ways did the individual's use of verbal language differ from your own?
8. In what ways did the individual's nonverbal behavior differ from your own?
9. How did your own treatment of time and space differ from the individual's?
10. In what ways did your thinking processes differ from the individual's?

   For those questions you cannot answer, take the time to conduct some research in an effort to answer them.

CULTURE, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

> **1.5** Demonstrate technology's role in bringing diversity into people's lives.

Modern access to technology is unprecedented. Like communication, technology and culture shape one another, having both positive and negative impacts on intercultural encounters. Technology has redefined the traditional meaning of a community, including the nature of neighborhoods and neighbors, the dangers of polarization and division, and options for extending our communication reach and settings.

Neighborhoods Need Not Be Real

When we speak of community today, we no longer are limited to physical neighborhoods. We have widened the concept of community to include those existing in cyberspace, and the number of virtual communities in cyberspace continues to rise. Because the internet permeates national boundaries, it erodes the connection between location and experience, enabling us to interact more easily with people who have different worldviews than we do.[76] At the same time, it enables us to find groups of people who think the same way we do and who resemble us in every conceivable way.

How is technology redefining the meaning of community?

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We Consciously Choose Our Neighbors

We can choose our "online neighbors" just as we choose a real neighborhood. Communicating solely with like-minded people, however, may lead to the polarization of opinions, whereas

communicating with mixed-minded people tends to bring about a moderation of viewpoints.[77] A preference for likeness and an intolerance for difference often leads to the development of online in-groups (composed of people whom we perceive to be like us) and out-groups (composed of those we view as different from us) whom we may block or "unfriend."

Be Wary of Those Who Seek to Divide and Polarize

Influencers on social media have the ability to negatively impact our perceptions of others and opposing viewpoints, allowing the opinions they post to polarize us, divide us, and drive us further apart. Social media, for example, played a key role in spreading terrorist messages and fermenting violent attacks, including against the US Capitol and the Rohingya in Myanmar, just to identify two. The gulf between how we see things reflects both *affective polarization* (contributing to our disliking others more) and *ideological polarization* (a measure of how far apart we are on issues of concern, such as COVID-19 and its vaccine, the 2020 US presidential election, Black Lives Matter, gun control, and abortion).

Unfortunately, exposing ourselves to opinions countering our own, instead of swaying us to give more credence to opposing viewpoints, typically results in our "digging in our heels," serving to strengthen our original position. Since social media tend to feature and lead with extreme positions, we end up pushed away from, even repulsed by, others' stances, while our own positions are reinforced. For some reason, social media plays to the extremes, rather than leading with moderate views. Instead of reinforcing our own viewpoints and deeming the viewpoints of those opposed to ours as "crazy," it is more effective to understand the underlying assumptions of our and others' opinions.[78]

We Seek Virtual Communities for Different Reasons

Many virtual communities are social networking sites in which users create profiles or avatars—alternate selves or images of characters—that they use to interact with others online. Why are people seeking multiple lives? Could it be because the neighborhoods they live in are not delivering the person-to-person contacts they seek? Millions of people go online in search of surrogate neighborhoods and relationships. This has led some critics to assert that rather than bringing people together, computer networks are isolating us. They contend that online communities are missing the essence of real neighborhoods, including a sense of location and a feeling of permanence and belonging. But is this necessarily so?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, real life had to move online, and it accomplished this in part via gaming, with interest in participating in gaming communities rising 29 percent. An array of virtual communities became substitutes for our real-life communities. Virtual and augmented reality made it possible for us to do online what the pandemic made it unwise for us to do in the real world—attend concerts, date, and play games, including sports. In fact, more virtual activities now take place inside of gaming communities, including search, shopping, messaging, social experiences, and live events, with gaming becoming the central hub for our virtual lives.[79] Have digital happenings and customized locations provided you with new kinds of shared experiences and diverse connection opportunities?

Dialogue Conveys Power

Technology makes it possible for us to connect during natural disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes while also facilitating communication in the face of terrorist attacks. It is eminently effective at publicizing global crises. On the bright side, sites such as Instagram do let us stay in touch with friends as well as provide opportunities to reacquaint us with those with whom we have lost touch. They also let us friend people we barely know. The ability to reach so many different people from so many different places so quickly gives communicators a new sense of power. Wherever we live, we can use the internet to help bring diversity and new cultures into our lives, changing our social, political, and business lives. Some worry that the culture of computing, especially participating in the internet's message boards, attracts extreme political positions and contributes to long-standing international conflicts. In contrast, advocates believe it facilitates international dialogue.[80] What do you think?

Are all voices really being heard? Are we becoming more or less tolerant of each other? Are we aware that words posted to global online groups have consequences, just as they do when delivered in person? If we use the internet wisely, we will find ways to increase the scope and diversity of our knowledge and develop our abilities to work together in diverse teams to solve personal, professional, and societal problems.[81]

Strategically Used

The internet is used purposefully by both individuals and organizations across cultures. In most countries, there are some form of government regulations on internet usage in place (e.g., the Federal Communications Commission in the United States), although the degree of control differs widely across the globe. In some countries and regions, individuals do not have the freedom to visit any website they desire, and the messages they post on the internet are heavily monitored. Whether or not the government exerts great control monitoring its citizens' online traffic, the numbers of people going online, especially those using social media to follow world events or for social networking, continues to grow. Unfortunately, social media are also great at spreading lies and conspiracy theories. In fact, the spreading of conspiracy theories is occurring faster and more widely than ever. When people mobilize based on misinformation, communities around the world are put in danger.[82] Can you identify a current conspiracy theory being spread via social media? What would you suggest users do to counter the disinformation?

On the positive side, the hope is that the digital divide, which refers to inequality in access to technology and the internet, will continue to shrink. Members of marginalized groups, older adults, and people living in impoverished circumstances are going online in greater numbers, widening access. Still, gaining access to computers remains a problem in many places around the world including the United States because of high poverty levels and the absence or unreliability of electricity.[83]

Let us close this section with some questions for you to think about. When you go online, do you seek to interact in communities based on difference or likeness? In other words, how many of the sites you visit online are visited by people who think and behave similarly to you, and how

many are frequented by people who think and behave differently from you? Do you think the internet is better at creating more insular communities, or does it foster interest in diversity?

CREATIVE TIPS FOR PREPARING TO COMMUNICATE INTERCULTURALLY

Despite technology's inroads, there are too many of "us" who do not work as hard as we should at communicating with people from different cultures, simply because we do not wish to live or interact with "them."[84] To counter this, we need to make reducing the strangeness of strangers a priority in our lives. How can we do this? Focus on mastering and maintaining these skills as you work to eliminate ineffective behaviors.

Refrain From Formulating Expectations Based Solely on Our Own Culture

When those with whom we interact have diverse communication styles, it is critical that we are sensitive to and acknowledge the differences as the first step. By not isolating ourselves within our own group or culture, we are more fully a part of a multicultural society and thus a better communicator.

Recognize That Faulty Education Can Impede Understanding

It is important to identify and work to eliminate personal biases and prejudices we might have developed over the years. Determine, for example, the extent to which our family and friends and even schooling have influenced our feelings about people from other cultural groups. Do those we have grown up with appear comfortable or uncomfortable relating to people of different cultural origins? To what extent have their attitudes affected our intercultural communication competence?

Develop Intercultural Skills to Build Multicultural Connections and Competence

Although culture is a tie that binds, the creation of a global village makes it essential that we leave the comfort of our cultural niche, become more aware of our own, expose ourselves to other cultures, and strive to be culturally agile. Global and multicultural learning are core requisites for twenty-first-century living. During the time that the pandemic contracted our world to close family and friends, grounding study abroad programs, we understood that physically traveling to another country to gain cross-cultural insight is not required. We have the capability of experiencing global interactions by linking people from diverse cultures around the world via video and audio-conferencing tools, such as Zoom. We also can gain multicultural understanding by interacting with people from diverse communities that are closer to home.[85]

With this in mind, be sure to familiarize yourself with the communication rules and preferences of members of different cultures so that you can increase the effectiveness of your interactions. Regularly reflect on how your own culture influences you, and seek information from people whose cultures are different from your own. Use the cultural dimensions we've explored to understand how people from different cultures lead them to develop different perspectives. Pay attention to the situation and context of any intercultural communication. Consistently make the effort to become a more flexible communicator.

CASE STUDY: THE CASE OF CAMERON AND AMIR

Desiring a career in international relations, Cameron, a US American, was spending his junior year in college studying abroad in Saudi Arabia. He loved playing soccer and had arranged to meet up for a practice session with a native Saudi and fellow student, Amir. Despite being friends, and taking several of the same classes, they found maintaining their relationship challenging because cultural differences contributed to their displaying behavior that the other found confusing or objectionable.

When Cameron and Amir met up at the soccer field, Amir bent in to give Cameron a kiss, but Cameron pushed him away, extending his right hand to shake Amir's hand instead. When they chatted before taking the field, Amir stood so close to Cameron that Cameron felt the need to back up—trying to establish more space between them. Whenever Cameron backed away from Amir, however, Amir advanced toward him—seeking to close the distance Cameron had created between them. Finally, Cameron put his arm out and said, "Stop." Amir looked stunned. "Does my breath smell bad? Is something wrong?" Cameron sheepishly answered, "I'm uncomfortable having you stand so close." "Why?" asked Amir. "People will get the wrong idea about us," said Cameron. "They'll think we're plotting something." Amir chuckled. "I doubt that. If I can't smell your breath and look into your eyes, we can't communicate properly." Cameron at first looked curiously at Amir. A realization hit him. He was in Saudi Arabia not the United States. The host country was Saudi Arabia. He put his arm down and moved a step closer to Amir. "Sorry," he said. "I came here to increase my cultural knowledge—not block understanding between us. When you come visit me in the US, we'll stand this far apart—signifying an arm's length—but here, we'll do it your way. Let's play soccer." They walked to the field hand in hand.

Demonstrate your understanding by answering these questions:

1. Why was it a challenge for Cameron and Amir to establish a comfortable conversational distance?
2. What do Amir's communication practices reveal about differences between US and Saudi culture?
3. Do you think that Cameron was right to make communication concessions in order to raze communication barriers between himself and Amir?
4. How would you have responded were you Cameron?
5. What biases and blind spots does the experience of Cameron and Amir expose?
6. What are the implications of the "truths" that each had overlooked?

THINK BACK TO MOVE AHEAD: CHAPTER SUMMARY

1.1 Explain the relationship among intercultural communication, global connectivity, and attitudes toward diversity.

Diversity, the recognition of difference, is about appreciating and seeing the value in our differences. Multiculturalism is the practice of engaging with people from different cultures. Through intercultural communication, we interpret, share meanings, and develop personal connections with individuals from different cultures.

Effective intercultural communication is not easy. Ethnocentrism is a natural tendency to see one's own culture as the norm, superior to all others. Cultural relativism is a way to combat ethnocentrism. Stereotypes are mental images or pictures we carry around in our heads; they are shortcuts we use to guide our reactions to others. A prejudice is a negative or positive prejudgment that devalues others who we perceive to be different from us.

The philosophy behind the melting pot metaphor is assimilationism, which expects individuals who immigrate to another culture to lose or give up their original heritage to be accepted. As demographics change and our understanding of culture and co-cultures increase, pluralism, or promoting the identity of co-cultural groups, has gained prominence.

1.2   Discuss the interface between culture and communication.

Culture and communication influence one another, with culture functioning as a perceptual lens. Failing to understand a culture's lessons and messages can be costly. Cultural imperialism, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and prejudice impede intercultural communication, hampering the development of effective intercultural relationships.

1.3   Distinguish cultures within cultures, explaining the ways in which culture and co-cultures, as well as positionality, influence cultural identity.

A culture is a system of knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that are acquired, shared, and used by members. A co-culture is a group of people who differ in some ethnic or sociological way from the dominant culture. Among the groups that influence cultural identity, and on which cultural identity is based, are those defined by gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, nationality, physical ability, neurological ability, and generational identities. Positionality and privilege alter the processing of cultural differences and the nature of cultural identity.

1.4   Describe dimensions of cultural variability in action.

We introduce a few ways that cultures vary (which is not an exhaustive list by any means): (1) individualism and collectivism, (2) high and low power distance, (3) masculinity and femininity, (4) short-term and long-term orientation, (5) high context and low context, and (6) monochronic and polychronic time orientation. Individualistic cultures stress individual goals. Collectivistic cultures stress group goals. High power distance cultures view power as a fact of life with subordinates deferring to superiors. Low power distance cultures believe power should be distributed more or less equally. Masculine cultures value competition, strength, and material success. Feminine cultures value relationships, nurturance, and high quality of life. Long-term oriented cultures emphasize the future and value saving and perseverance. Short-term oriented cultures emphasize the present and value spending and instant gratification. High-context communication cultures value indirectness to preserve relational harmony. Low-context communication cultures encourage directness and explicitness in communication. Monochronic cultures view time as a limited commodity and are task oriented. Polychronic cultures view time as limitless and fluid, and orient the use of time toward people and relationship.

1.5   **Demonstrate technology's role in bringing diversity into people's lives.**

For many of us, the internet helps bring diversity into our lives. By enabling us to join a wide range of online communities and interact with people who hold different worldviews, the internet enhances our ability to communicate within and across cultural boundaries. We also risk becoming more isolated or insulated from other viewpoints if we are not careful.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Distinguish between the philosophy of assimilationism and the philosophy of pluralism.

2. Summarize the differences between ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.

3. Provide examples demonstrating the differences between culture and co-cultures.

4. Name and illustrate the preferred strategies and communication approaches that members of co-cultural groups use when interacting with members of the dominant culture.

5. Describe why understanding different dimensions of culture can strengthen your ability to relate interpersonally.

KEY TERMS

accommodation

Anxiety Management Theory

assimilation

assimilationism

assimilationist philosophy

co-cultural communication

co-culture

collectivistic cultures

cultural hegemony

cultural imperialism

cultural relativism

culture

diversity

ethnicity

ethnocentrism

feminine cultures

high-context communication

high-context cultures

high power distance cultures

individualistic cultures

intercultural communication

Intercultural Praxis Model

interethnic communication

intergenerational communication

international communication

interracial communication

interreligious communication

low-context communication

low power distance cultures

macro-culture

masculine cultures

melting pot philosophy

micro-cultures

monochronic time

multiculturalism

othering

pluralism

polychronic time

prejudice

race

racial profiling

racism

separation

stereotype

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

xenophobia

worldview