# 2 CULTURE AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

## NOAH AND J.D.

The information posted on the company's Facebook page was found in the Mission Statement section and highlighted with bold print: "WE EMBRACE AND CELEBRATE DIVERSITY IN OUR EMPLOYEES." Yet, Noah, a 14-year employee and wheelchair user, and J.D., an African American man who has been with the company for 11 years, had vastly different views from what the company claimed it stood for. Each had various stories of feeling either patronized or dismissed because of their cultural markers and today, each was more than willing to share these experiences with the other. While in the break room, what started out as a casual conversation soon evolved into a personal story of reflection:

> *Noah:* So, yeah. I think that no one can understand what I have to go through every day sitting here. It's not easy.
>
> *J.D.:* I get it. As a guy of color in a company where everybody pretty much looks the same, I can't tell you how tough it is to get my point across without someone rolling their eyes or saying something patronizing to me.
>
> *Noah:* That's nothing. I actually have some people who will not even open the door for me. When I was down the hall last week, someone actually said to me: 'You can push the handicap button to open the door, right?' I mean, c'mon . . .
>
> J.D. moved closer to Noah as if to make a point and interrupted him.
>
> *J.D.:* Hey you're not being stopped by the police because of your skin color.
>
> *Noah:* Are you kidding me?! You're gonna go down that path?! It takes me a lot to even get up in the morning. You can drive, you can walk, you can go to the bathroom without worrying about how big a partition is in that place.
>
> *J.D.:* Noah, . . . you just don't know. . . .
>
> He stopped midsentence. He started thinking about the fact that the two of them were challenged at work for different reasons. J.D. knew that Noah wasn't the "problem," and he stopped instantly to think carefully about his next words. J.D. clearly didn't want to turn this into a "one-up" of who has it worse in the workplace. He said,
>
> *J.D.:* I can't believe we're getting into this during a break, Noah. I think we're both lashing out at the wrong person. I do have a great family and some good friends and they help me keep perspective. I don't want to be mad at you.
>
> *Noah:* Totally get it. Sorry about that. Some people around here see a guy in a wheelchair and automatically think "helpless." You've never treated me like that and I've always appreciated that.
>
> *J.D.:* No worries. And you've always shown *me* respect. We're what? Visibly unique, but we're alike in some ways—we know what's it like to be "different."

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### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

**After studying this chapter, you will be able to**

**2.1**  Recognize and clarify the interpretation and complexity of culture.

**2.2**  Understand the importance of cultural diversity in the United States and beyond.

**2.3**  Identify reasons for studying intercultural communication.

**2.4**  Describe the dimensions of cultural variability.

**2.5**  Explain the obstacles to achieving intercultural effectiveness.

**2.6**  Differentiate among various social media platforms and their emphasis on intercultural communication.

**2.7**  Name and exemplify three skills related to improving your intercultural communication.

There is no escaping the fact that we live in turbulent times. From one corner of the Earth to the other, people find themselves in profound and challenging circumstances. Whether it's reconciling the various coronavirus vaccination excuses/decisions, managing poverty, calming social protest, navigating the pains of immigration, or another global event, our world is filled with struggle and confrontation. At the root of so many of these challenges is intercultural communication and its relationship to our potential and desire to resolve so many of these cultural difficulties.

Many people communicate with the mistaken belief that others will always understand them. For instance, at a superficial level, some people use personal expressions or inside jokes when, in reality, these words, phrases, and stories are not universally understood. Yet, on a more compelling level, especially in the United States, most people don't think twice about using the English language to make their point. This is rather vexing, given that millions of people who live in the United States speak different languages and are members of various cultural groups where English is not the primary option for communication.

In addition, most English speakers employ their own nonspeaking codes without thinking about how nonverbal communication differs across cultures. For example, looking someone directly in the eyes during a conversation is considered a valued norm in many parts of the United States, but is typically viewed as disrespectful or a sign of aggression in other parts of the world. In addition, some in the United States value emotional expressiveness, yet research shows that in many cultural groups, especially those in East Asian cultures, feelings are often suppressed.[1] (We address the topic of nonverbal communication in detail in Chapter 5.)

Today more than ever, our ability to tend to cultural challenges and the meaning derived from our interactions require an understanding of a communicator's cultural background. And this communication must always take into consider *context*—a term we introduced to you in Chapter 1 and will clarify it later in this chapter. So, for instance, as we see with Noah and J.D. in our opening story, the two work colleagues started to discuss the various challenges related to Noah using a wheelchair and J.D. identifying as an African American man. But, both realize that the context of the company in which they are employed cannot be ignored as they grapple with feelings that are disconnected from the corporate mission.

Our discussion in this book, thus far, has focused on the interpersonal communication process. This chapter focuses on one important and decisive influence upon that process: culture. *Culture pervades every component of interpersonal communication.* Further, cultural diversity is a fact of life. By thinking about and understanding culture, we can learn a great deal about the ways that we and others communicate in a multicultural society. Important too, as we conclude later, we will gain a great deal of understanding about our own communicative strengths and shortcomings.

Today, particularly with virtual workplaces popping up across the globe, it has become even more important to communicate with culture in mind. The cultural identity of an individual

doesn't simply disappear in a Zoom screen, behind a mask, or beyond six feet of social distance! In fact, we must be even more adept at practicing cultural understanding because of the varied approaches that societies have embraced as a result of the coronavirus.

As you can see, the emphasis of this chapter is on intercultural communication. For our purposes, **intercultural communication** refers to the exchange of messages between two or more communicators whose communication may be influenced by their cultural backgrounds. Some researchers distinguish between communication across national cultures (e.g., people from Japan and from the United States) or communication between groups within one national culture (e.g., wheelchair users and African Americans). In this text, we embrace the notion of *intercultural* encounters as those opportunities in which we find ourselves communicating with individuals from across a variety of cultural groups. In many U.S. communities, once they arrived to the country's shores, many immigrants of color were instrumental in developing neighborhoods in metropolitan cities, despite the fact that these locations were dominated by European Americans. But, clearly times are changing. Babies of color now comprise the majority of births and the 2020 U.S. Census indicated that the "White majority" will dissipate in about 20 years, with about a nine percent decrease since 2010 and an over 20% increase in the Hispanic/Latino populations. Hawaii was found to be the most diverse state , and Maine continues as the least diverse state in the country.[2]

We live in a world that is more culturally diverse than ever. We dissect this cultural complexity in this chapter and look at the significant issues associated with culture and interpersonal communication. The following words resonate as a primary rationale for this chapter: "What members of a particular culture value and how they perceive the universe are usually far more important than whether they eat with chopsticks, their hands, or metal utensils."[3] In other words, knowledge and practice of others' cultural values and behaviors often lead to enhanced intercultural communication understanding.

Finally, we wish to point out that many of our conclusions related to cultures and communication should be interpreted with caution. While the research and best practices related to intercultural communication have discovered an abundance of differences *between* and *within* national cultures, we can also point to a vast number of similarities. Further, it's also likely that you will be able to find personal and professional examples that may not coincide with some of the conclusions we identify. We welcome those opportunities for you to read and reflect upon the information and its relationship to your own experiences.

## IPC VOICE: MIA

The material I'm reading in this course makes me constantly think about how lucky (privileged?) I am being born in the United States. I've had a good home, great parents, nice clothes, supportive friends, and now a college education. I know that when I think about the people who've had to leave their countries and are refugees, it makes me so sad and even angry. The real issue is what can I do about it? Donate money? Volunteer to write to my political leaders? It makes no sense that I live in a culture that is so rich and we can't help the people in countries that are so poor. I keep going back to the images of innocent people who did nothing except to be born in the country where they live! Some don't even have the right to go out of their houses without a man! This chapter has made me so aware of so many things but maybe realizing my own privilege is the most important.

*Reflection:* Mia is clearly sad and bothered by the images she has seen around the world of people being forced to leave their countries—including the tragic departure of Ukranians during the Russian invasion. What other images can you point to that demonstrate the privilege you may have? Think about this domestically that is, can you see this inequity in the United States as well? Explain.

For intercultural communication to occur, individuals don't have to be from different countries. In a diverse society such as the United States, for example, we can experience intercultural communication within one state, one town, or even one neighborhood. You may live in an urban center where it's likely that people from various cultural backgrounds live together. As authors, we find ourselves immersed in this exciting cultural stew. In the South End of Boston, for instance, it is common to see people with Caribbean, Cambodian, and Latinx backgrounds all living on the same street. In Milwaukee, one would be able to find both Polish and Mexican communities residing on the south side of the city.

Trying to understand people who may think, talk, look, and act differently from us will be challenging at times (see IPC Around Us), as both Noah and J.D. believe of some of their coworkers. Just think about the words people use to describe those who may be culturally different from them: *odd, weird, strange, unusual*, and *unpredictable.* These associations have existed for centuries. Consider the words of 5th-century Greek playwright Aeschylus: "Everyone is quick to blame the alien." Today the "alien" takes many shapes and forms, with many of us embracing the diversity and heterogeneity in the population and others simply rejecting it.

## DEFINING AND INTERPRETING CULTURE

Intercultural communication researchers believe that humans cannot exist without an attachment to culture.[4] After all, our individuality is constructed around culture. As we will learn in Chapter 3, our identities are shaped by our conversations and relationships with others. Our cultural background enters into this mix by shaping who we are as well as our communication practices and our responses to others. We tend to use other people as guideposts for what we consider to be "normal." And, in making this comparison, we begin the process of understanding how cultures are different or similar to ours. Again, think about Noah and J.D. in our chapter opening. Both seemed to be comparing their experiences with the other. Or, consider, when Paige, a citizen from the United States, meets Japanese citizen Aiko, in her philosophy class. Paige might notice how Aiko smiles more frequently than her U.S. counterparts. Paige might also observe that Aiko is much more deferential to the professor than are her U.S. classmates . Yet this comparison is incomplete. Intercultural scholars and practitioners believe that although this classroom difference exists, a host of cultural similarities—some observable, others not—exist between Aiko and her U.S. student counterparts (e.g., economic background). We note this point because this chapter explores both what factors culturally bind us as well as what elements divide us.

Culture is a very difficult concept to define, partly because it's complex, multidimensional, and abstract. Some researchers[5] have discovered over 300 different definitions for the word! For our purposes, we believe that **culture** is the shared, personal, and learned life experiences of a group of individuals who have a common set of values, norms, and traditions. Culture is what distinguishes one group from another. These standards, patterns of communication, and

cultural customs are important to consider in our communication with others. They affect our interpersonal relationships within a culture, and the three are nearly impossible to detach from our understanding of intercultural communication.

## IPC AROUND US

China remains the most-populated country in the world. Further, despite mainland China's crackdown on Hong Kong and its non-Communist ways, many U.S. businesses continue their economic engagement with this country of over 1.4 billion people. China's business market and booming tourism has prompted many newcomers to travel to places like Hong Kong with little, or no, understanding of the cultural expectations. One important element in this cultural economy is something called *cultural etiquette.* This sort of etiquette is necessary in order to win business and sustain credibility. Many rules and appropriate cultural expectations exist. For instance, punctuality is key in China, and being late is a sign of disrespect. Other Chinese customs should be considered and adhered to, particularly as they pertain to eating and drinking.

*Reflection:* Apply the principle of cultural etiquette to three different cultural groups on your campus. Be sure to employ the chapter's discussion of the components of culture as you determine the organizations that you assess.

As we define the term *culture*, keep in mind that we embrace an expansive interpretation. That is, many communication scholars believe that culture necessarily includes a variety of communities who subscribe to particular membership. When you identify with a group that is part of a more extensive cultural group, you are a member of a **co-culture**. Co-cultural membership, often found in many societies, can include many subsets:

- **Age and Generation** (e.g., adolescents, older adults)
- **Gender** (e.g., masculine, feminine, cisgender)

- **Sex** (e.g., male, female, intersex)

- **Race/ethnicity** (e.g., African American, Cherokee)

- **Sexual identity** (e.g., lesbian, bisexual)

- **Spiritual and Religious identity** (e.g., Catholic, Muslim)

- **Geographic region** (e.g., New Englanders, Midwesterners)

- **Family background** (e.g., single parent, cohabiting couples)

- **Ability** (e.g., visual impairments, physical challenges)

Our examples throughout this book reflect this expansive view of culture. Let's now look at three underlying principles associated with our definition of culture: Culture evolves from one generation to another, culture both promotes and divides community, and culture is multilevel.

## Culture Evolves From One Generation to Another

We aren't born with knowledge of the practices and behaviors of our culture. People learn about a culture through the communication of symbols for meaning and we do this learning both consciously and unconsciously. Culture is a lived experience and it's passed on from one generation to another. And, we can learn about culture directly, such as when someone actually teaches us ("Here's what we do during Hanukkah."), or indirectly, such as when we observe cultural practices from afar, say learning about "The Festival of Lights" on *YouTube.* In the United States, family, friends, schools, and (social) media are the primary teachers of our culture. Yet, as we note throughout this chapter, be careful of accepting everything that you read, see, or hear. For instance, if you read a blog about a cultural community, keep in mind that one person does not necessarily "speak" for that community. Later in the chapter, we address some skills that aim to improve your skills in this area.

Learning cultural rituals is typically undertaken by generations. For example, baby boomers pass along cultural values and practices to Millennials who then may pass them along to Generation Z. Yet, the cultural practice can evolve significantly. Think about dating over the generations, for instance. Even in the late 20th century, Baby Boomers rarely lived together and were still asking parents for permission to get married. As Millennials began to date, they not only often abandoned the "permission" behavior, but even cohabited before making any decision—if any— related to marriage. And, Generation Z— the "tech generation"—not only has used dating apps to find partners, but have also "ghosted" their partner and even texted them to let them know that a long-term relationship is now over! Identifying with one generation may be age-dependent; baby boomers who are in their 60s may



Cultural understanding is usually passed on from generation to generation.

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feel more aligned with Gen Z's approach to dating. Conversely, some Gen Z individuals may identify more with the values of baby boomers (sometimes called "old souls").

When you identify and even acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that allow you to become fully functioning in your culture, you are said to be enculturated. **Enculturation** occurs when a person learns to identify with a particular culture (i.e., generation) and a culture's thinking, way of relating, and worldview. Enculturation allows for successful participation in a particular society and typically makes a person more accepted by that society.

Learning about a cultural society usually first takes place within a family or close relationships. For instance, in many multiracial families, children learn about the many consequences of being a member of a multiracial family from the parents and extended relatives.[6] With respect to gender enculturation, think about 13-year-old Jillian and her mom, Emma:

**Emma:** "Look, honey. I want you to go back to your room and change your clothes. You have a lot of cute skirts and dresses in your closet. Those jeans make you look like you don't care about . . . "

**Jillian:** "I don't want to wear what you think I *should* wear! I'm sick of your damn . . ."

**Emma:** Don't you *ever* use that language, Jillian Suzanne! I took it from your brother, but I will not have my only daughter talking like that. And . . ."

**Jillian:** And what? Tell me how to walk?! Tell me who to be friends with? Yes, Mother. You have so many plans for your *only* daughter!"

In this scene, Jillian is slowly becoming enculturated, despite her adolescent overt rejection of the female script her mother is presenting her. She may be resistant to listening, but Jillian is learning rules about how to speak to her mom, the rule against profanity, the differential treatment between her and her brother, and how to dress appropriately for a girl, among others. Although she is young, Jillian is slowly being enculturated into her culture, and this process will likely continue—both directly and indirectly—throughout her lifetime.

Whereas enculturation occurs when you are immersed in your own culture, **acculturation** exists when you learn, adapt to, and adopt the appropriate behaviors and rules of a host culture. Acculturated individuals have effectively absorbed themselves into another society. However, you don't have to sacrifice your personal set of principles simply because you've found yourself in another culture. For example, some immigrants to the United States may attend school in a large city such as Phoenix or Miami. These individuals typically adapt to the city by using its services, understanding the laws of the city, or participating in social gatherings on campus. But, they may return to many of their cultural practices while in their homes, such as participating in spiritual healings or eating a family meal with multiple family generations present. To sum up, enculturation is first-culture learning, and acculturation is second-culture learning.

## Culture Both Promotes and Divides Community

Central to our definition of culture is the assumption that it helps to create a sense of community. We view **community** as the common understandings among people who are committed to coexisting. For example, a Cuban American community, a Lebanese American community, and a community of Native American people are all co-cultures within one larger national culture (the United States). Each community has unique communication behaviors and practices, but each also subscribes to behaviors and practices (e.g., city laws, voting requirements) embraced by the larger U.S. culture. While tensions and challenges between and among co-cultural communities exist, there is also harmony as well, since many of these communities often experience

the same struggles (e.g., equity, verbal attacks, ). Membership in a co-culture provides individuals with opportunity and **social identity**—the part of one's self that is based upon membership in a particular group. Still, such membership may be problematic. For instance, some research[7] shows that if you are a member of an unrepresented or marginalized co-culture, you are disadvantaged in job interviews because "interview protocols" are determined by dominant groups. We will address this issue in more detail later in the chapter.

Many times, cultures mesh effortlessly; however, sometimes a **culture clash**, or a disagreement or conflict over cultural expectations, occurs. For example, consider what the reaction might be of a new immigrant from Mexico who is learning English as they try to assimilate into a small group with three students who have lived in the United States their entire lives. Imagine the challenge of understanding slang ("dog and pony show," "jerry-rigged," "that's dope," etc.). Or, consider the reaction of a recently immigrated Muslim woman, who is accustomed to wearing a hijab (a headscarf or veil that covers the head and chest). In many Western countries, there are now federal laws prohibiting the wearing of the hijab in public. Many people do not embrace such modesty in dress and therefore may ridicule or express fear of the head covering. Each of the preceding scenarios is opportunistic for culture clashes.

Finally, although a much less substantial example than those above, a mediated culture clash occurred when MTV introduced the show *Jersey Shore.* In one early episode, the show relocated to Florence, Italy, and the cast was targeted for cultural offenses. To the citizens of Florence, being Italian required respect for Italy's customs and reputation—the land of Michelangelo and Gucci, for instance. And so, when cast members, including Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi and Mike "The Situation" Sorrentino, publicly claimed to be Italian—combined with their public displays of drunkenness and profanity—the native Italians were not amused. Soon, "*No Grazie*, Jersey Shore" signs began appearing all over the city.

Still, cultural conflicts are not necessarily bad; In fact, having the opportunity to view a situation from a different cultural point of view can be productive. For instance, a writer for *Construction News* indicates that across the globe, culture clashes have resulted in increased productivity.[8] She writes that when a new hospital was being built in Sweden, the contractor (who worked in both the United Kingdom and Sweden) integrated various managerial styles and viewed it less as a difficulty and more as a step in a positive direction. The U.K. management style was more of a top-down style. The Scandinavian management style was more democratic, such as including everyone in the central decisions of building. This "culture clash" resulted in producing a "dynamic give-and-take, generating a solution that may have eluded a group of people with more similar backgrounds and approaches."[9]

## Culture Is Multilevel

On the national level of culture, we assume that people of the same national background share many things that bind them in a common culture: language and traditions, for instance. Thus, we expect Germans to differ from the Hmong based on differing national cultures. However, as discussed in the previous section, cultures can be formed on other levels, such as generation, sexual identity, gender, race, and region, among others. For example, in many parts of a country, regionalisms exist. People who live in the middle of the United States (in states such as Kansas, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Indiana, and Wisconsin), for instance, are often referred to as Midwesterners. People who live in Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut are called New Englanders. Both Midwesterners and New Englanders often have their own unique way of looking at things, but the two regions also share something in common—namely, pragmatic thinking and an independent spirit.

A second example of the multilevel nature of a co-culture is a culture that develops around a certain age cohort. Let's look at people who grew up in different cultural eras, or time frames—for example, Depression babies of the 1930s and gun control advocates and protesters of the 2000s. The culture of the Great Depression in the 1930s reflected the efforts of people trying to survive during troubling financial times. Thus, values of frugality and family unity dominated. Now consider this century. In 2018, the shootings of 17 people at a Parkland, Florida, high school ushered in calls for swift change in gun laws. Think about the "struggle to survive" across these two cultural levels. Depression babies eventually had to take up multiple jobs to survive. Gun control advocates had to take to protesting to survive. Is there a difference between the two in how they viewed "survival"? Now, apply the notion of "survival" to Noah and J.D. in our opening story.

Our discussion about culture thus far has focused on a general framework for understanding culture. We continue our cultural journey by addressing U.S. diversity and its value.

### APPLY IT!

We have provided an expansive view of what *culture* is. Do you agree or disagree with having such a broad interpretation of culture? Are there limitations to our position? Strengths? Provide examples as you construct a response.

## DIVERSITY AROUND THE GLOBE AND IN THE UNITED STATES

Intercultural contact is pervasive around the globe (see Figure 2.1) and in the United States. This diversity affects family structure, corporations, religious institutions, schools, and (social) media. Over eight billion people live on Planet Earth and there are over 250 births globally per minute and over 120 deaths per minute and in the United States, one birth every 7 seconds and one death every 12 seconds.[10] Your view of the world may be influenced by where you live and there are astonishing differences among the continents. In particular, Asia comprises the largest

**FIGURE 2.1  ■  Ethnically Diverse Countries Across the Globe**



- ▲ More ethnically diverse
- More ethnically homogenous ▼
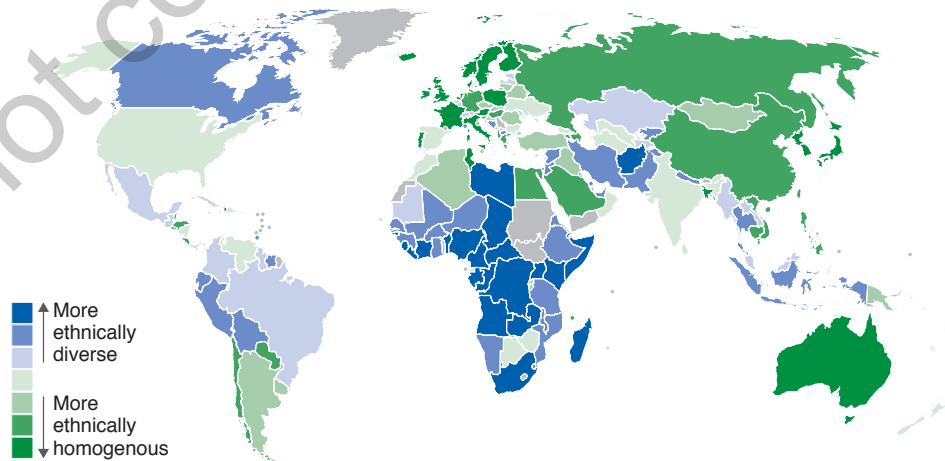
*Source*: Fisher, M. (2013). A revealing map of the world's most and least ethnically diverse countries. *Washington Post*.

percentage of the world's population (60%), followed by Africa (17%), Europe (10%), North America (8%), South America (6%), Oceania (.05%), and Antarctica (.0002%). In even starker terms, China and India comprise about 37% of the world's population.[11]

The United States, with more than 330 million citizens, is a country that has quickly become a microcosm of the global population. In other words, the nation is a heterogeneous mix of various cultural communities. The increase in diversity over the past several years is not without consequence. And U.S. diversity can be challenging, for as one essayist observes: "All across the country, people of different races, ethnicities, and nationalities, are being thrown together and torn apart. . . . .[I]t is a terrifying experience, this coming together, one for which we have of yet only the most awkward vocabulary."[12]

The idea that diversity can be "terrifying" may strike many of you as odd. After all, we're pretty confident that most of you believe that diversity—from the way people look to the way they talk—is exciting and valuable. Yet, **xenophobia**, defined as the fear or hatred of people who one perceives as strange or foreign, sickeningly pervades across the globe.

Perhaps you know of people who are not so embracing and supportive of diverse people, experiences, and points of view. Perhaps, even in your immediate relationship circle, you know of others who have been the target of xenophobic intolerance or violence. Think about, for instance, the numbers of killings involving Black people by law enforcement over the past few years— from George Floyd to Breonna Taylor to Eric Garner to Trayvon Martin to Daunte Wright to so many others. Think, too, about the venomous attacks on people of Asian descent, with hateful incidents often being perpetrated because of misinformation related to the origins of COVID-19. Trans individuals, recent asylum-seekers, those who identify as Jewish, Muslims, among other co-cultural communities have also had to contend with the terrifying episodes. Although this subject is quite uncomfortable to discuss for some, interpersonal communication scholars believe that no conversation about culture and diversity can take place without a conversation about xenophobia.[13]

Over the past few decades, xenophobic perceptions of immigration, in particular, have prompted increased anxiety in the United States, resulting in intercultural misunderstandings and relational challenges. The Migration Policy Institute,[14] for instance, notes that since the terrorist attacks in 2001, there have been significant immigration developments, including increased deportation, fence building along the Mexico–United States border, denying driver's licenses to those given deportation relief, and a host of other activities and laws designed to "control the immigration problem." While the United States traditionally, as a country, supports cultural newcomers from the Southern hemisphere, polls now show that growing majorities do not support admitting large numbers of refugees. Perhaps they have been influenced by the historic decrease in refugee admissions, begun by then-President Trump. By some estimates, there are some nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants living and working in the United States,[15] so this topic will continue to resonate within families and across society for years to come.

In what can only be considered prophetic, over 50 years ago, anthropologist Edward Hall wrote that "culture is communication and communication is culture."[16] In other words, we learn how, where, why, when, and to whom we communicate through cultural teachings. Conversely, when we communicate, we reproduce and reinforce our cultural practices. Hall's words still apply today. The United States is more diverse than ever, and everyone has been exposed to this increasing diversity in some way. The nation's growing diversity has been hotly debated, with some cultural critics believing that diversity is destroying society,[17] while others believe that understanding diversity allows for the growth of an individual.[18] Regardless of these divergent opinions, cultural variability continues to be a critical part of our country's evolution.

We are all now reminded that living with diversity is, well, a fact of life, with various impressions associated with this cultural variation surrounding us. With such diversity, learning how to communicate effectively with members of different cultures is a hallmark of a thoughtful and effective communicator. In that vein, let's explore this issue further by examining the importance of intercultural communication and why we integrate cultural issues throughout each chapter of this book.

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### APPLY IT!

Celebrating the diversity around us is a fundamental theme of this chapter and book. What is your response to those who believe we're drawing too much attention to the cultural variation around us? Do you believe that their view is appropriate? Inappropriate? Why?

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## WHY STUDY INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION?

Adopting a cultural perspective is essential to function effectively in your lives. Intercultural communication scholars[19] note several reasons to study intercultural communication. We identify six "imperatives," or critical reasons, and provide their application to interpersonal relationships. At the heart of this discussion is our belief that intercultural communication will continue to be important well beyond the class you are currently taking.

### Technological Imperative

The extent to which technology has changed the United States cannot be overstated. Computers ushered in so much more than ways to communicate online. Personal computers and smart phones prompted the New Information Age, which, even now, continues to move in unpredictable ways. Few will dispute the fact that the internet remains one of the most significant influences on culture, communication, and our relationships with others.

Technological changes increase opportunities for intercultural communication and at times, unforeseen encounters. For example, consider Yolanda's experience with eBay. When Yolanda finds out that she holds the high bid on antique vintage handkerchiefs she wants to buy, she discovers that the seller is from a small town in Colombia. Yolanda e-mails the seller and tells him that her grandmother has relatives in the town of Tunja. He responds back to tell her that he, too, has relatives in that same town. As the two continue to e-mail each other, they are astounded to find out that both sets of relatives in Colombia know each other! Later that year, they all *Zoom* together—a tech event they decide to repeat each year. Stories such as these underscore the fact that technology remains vital in our cultural landscape as new relationships are established and interpersonal communication is attained.

### Demographic Imperative

Earlier in this chapter, we noted that cultural diversity continues to shape and reshape the United States, and we provided information about the demographic changes in the United States. Yet, the statistical trends frequently neglect to acknowledge the variation within a demographic group. For instance, many co-cultures within a country reject the notion that "blending" into a national culture is ideal. Since dialogues about diversity began, writers and scholars have referred to the United States as a "melting pot," a metaphor that evokes a unified national character

| TABLE 2.1 ■ Metaphors of/for Culture | |
|---|---|
| **Metaphor** | **Assumption** |
| River | Culture flows through various peaks and valleys, and is often carved or restricted (e.g., laws, traditions) by its embankments. |
| City Map | Culture provides its members some direction of where to go and how to do things. |
| Organism | Culture uses the environment to grow, but uses boundaries to maintain uniqueness. |
| Jelly Bean | Each jelly bean is a color but a different color, underscoring the uniqueness of members of cultures. |
| Celebration | To understand culture, we need to acknowledge that it is "special"—like a birthday, anniversary, or other day separate from the "work week." |

*Source*: https://www.culture-at-work.com/concept2.html

formed as a result of immigration. In the past, immigrants frequently changed their names, clothes, language, and customs to "fit in." Some of this behavior can be attributed to *E pluribus unum*—out of many, one—which we can see on the back of the $1 bill.

In contrast, to accommodate the variety of cultural groups existing in the United States, more contemporary metaphors for diversity in the United States have emerged. They include a symphony, mosaic, kaleidoscope, or salad, suggesting that diversity provides for unique textures, tastes, and prisms. In these metaphors, different cultures retain their unique characteristics even while simultaneously becoming a part of the U.S. demographic. For a review of several other metaphors of culture, look at Table 2.1.[20] Now, consider what metaphors Noah and J.D. would express as you think about their words from the chapter-opening vignette.

Demographic metaphors suggest that the larger culture can accommodate and appreciate the contributions of co-cultures and co-cultural values. For example, in the United States, it's not uncommon for our food, dress, religion, and street signs to identify individual cultural groups. We eat at Korean restaurants, witness Saudi men wearing a *thawb* (an ankle-length white shirt), and read greeting cards celebrating Kwanzaa (an African American holiday affirming African culture). In addition, despite the efforts of the English-only movement we mentioned earlier, signs and labels in some parts of the country are written in two languages—for example, Spanish and English in the Southwest, and French and English in northern New England.

As a country, the United States demographic has changed vastly and rapidly. The homogenous nature of culture, as you now know, has been replaced with a



Various co-cultures remain important sources of information on how people communicate.
We Are/DigitalVision/Getty Images

multicultural population. You don't have to be a celebrity like Alicia Keyes, Cardi B., or Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson to know that the days of a culturally homogenous nation are effectively over.

## Economic Imperative

Today, only a handful of places on Earth are completely out of touch with the rest of the world. The phenomenon referred to as the **global village** means that all societies—regardless of size—are connected in some way.[21] No country is economically insulated any longer and it's difficult to find a country that exists in isolation. For instance, in 2020, with the exception of Canada, Belgium, and the United Kingdom, seven of the top 10 U.S. economic exports went to countries where English is not the dominant language.[22] Therefore, the United States depends on other countries for its economic sustainability. Today, because of the availability of cheap labor, U.S. firms continue to send work and workers overseas, a practice you probably know as **outsourcing**. People in business and industry, education, media, and politics communicate with others of different cultures, if for no other reason than that it's cost efficient to do so. All of these exchanges of human resources represent one piece of the process known as globalization.

Workers from other countries who come to the United States often receive no training in intercultural similarities and differences. The result can be problematic, as one writer observes: "[International workers] can't be expected to learn our [United States] customs through osmosis."[23] Others would add that citizens of the United States can't be expected to learn about others through osmosis, either.

## Peace Imperative

The Lakota Indians have a saying: "With all beings and all things we shall be as relatives." Yet, is it really possible for cultures to work together and get along on one planet? Our current state of world affairs makes it difficult to answer this question. In 2020, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace, only 10 countries in the world were determined to be not at war and considered to be "the most peaceful countries in the world" (Switzerland, Japan, Czech Republic, Singapore, Canada, Denmark, Austria, Portugal, New Zealand, and Iceland).[24] On one hand, the Berlin Wall has been torn down; on the other hand Russia's "Iron Curtain" has once again emerged. Centuries of violence in the Middle East and Africa, tensions between China and Taiwan, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and other major global conflicts make this a challenging time for cultural understanding.

The introduction of COVID-19 into our global midst also exacerbated the strife within a culture. Countries such as India and Brazil have found themselves riddled with internal conflicts because many rural parts of the country were not provided any vaccination options. In fact, some would argue that this cultural conflict found its way into the United States with many communities of color, prisoners, and other groups were unable to access vaccination sites during a critical phase of the virus.

We're not suggesting that if cultures understood each other, cultural warfare would end, disease would be eradicated, and harmony would ring around the world! Rather, we believe that learning about how the beliefs, values, and behaviors of other cultures may aid in understanding conflicting points of view—perhaps resulting in a more peaceful world. As we will learn in Chapter 3, looking at an issue from another's perspective is critical to interpersonal relationships and communication.

### Self-Awareness Imperative

If you've ever visited another country, you likely became aware of your presence rather quickly. Maybe it was your speech, skin color, height, weight, language, accent or other characteristics and how they differed from the citizens of the country you were visiting. Maybe there was a greeting ritual that was unique to you or the extent to which someone looked at you that made your think. What you experienced was self-awareness of how you "fit" into another culture, regardless whether you were visiting for a week or a year.

As we will discuss later in the book, each of us has a **worldview**, which is a unique way of seeing the world through our own lens of understanding. Worldviews can help us understand our "place and space" (e.g., privilege, level of comfort talking with others) in society. Although these perspectives are often instinctive, they are directly derived from our cultural identity. When we have a reasonable understanding of who we are and what influences and forces brought us to our current state, we can begin to understand others' worldviews. For example, an attraction to someone of the same sex likely affects you differently if you adhere to a religion that considers this type of attraction unnatural or immoral than if you come from a spiritual background that embraces LGBTQ individuals. Becoming personally aware of your own worldview and the worldviews of others will inevitably help you manage the cultural variation in your relationships and allow you to reflect on your own cultural assumptions.

### Ethical Imperative

Recall from Chapter 1 that ethics pertains to what is perceived as right and wrong. Culturally speaking, ethics can vary tremendously.[25] That is, different fields of cultural experience dictate different opinions of what constitutes ethical behavior. Consider the experiences, again, of Noah and J.D. It is not enough to just post a Facebook announcement about a company Mission Statement that supports diversity. The company should go further and be ethically compelled to talk to the long-term employees who are members of the cultures the company claims it supports. As writers have noted, we need to hear the voices of everyone,[26] voices that are part of the company's cultural fabric.

Now, let's consider an historical behavior associated with "the family" that is usually viewed differently in the United States than in China. In the past, in China, boys were valued more than girls; and until 2013, parents were required by Chinese policy to have only one child. As a result, when a mother gave birth to a girl in China, the child may have been abandoned or given up for adoption to allow the parents to try again to have a boy. Chinese officials, however, have "loosened" this policy because of an "elderly boom," whereby seniors cannot work and need support from younger generations. That responsibility generally falls to the female relatives, and thus, the policy has been revisited.[27]

You may agree or disagree with this practice based upon your ethical perspective(s). Regardless of our personal opinions, each of us has an ethical obligation to understand various cultural behaviors and values. We also are ethically compelled to ensure that we fully understand cultural practices rather than imposing our own cultural will on others.

In Table 2.2, we summarize the six imperatives. Each imperative is accompanied by examples of how that imperative applies to the study of intercultural communication.

| TABLE 2.2 ■ Reasons for Studying Intercultural Communication | |
|---|---|
| **Imperative Type** | **Example** |
| Technological imperative | *Zoom* is facilitating communication between and among cultures. The internet, overall, has brought cultures closer together than ever before. |
| Demographic imperative | The influx of immigrants from Mexico, Russia, and Vietnam has changed the workforce and cultural profile in the United States. |
| Economic imperative | The global market has prompted overseas expansion of U.S. companies. Business transactions and negotiation practices require intercultural understanding. COVID-19 has ushered in new discrepancies between and among economies. |
| Peace imperative | Resolution of world conflicts, such as those in the Middle East, requires cultural understanding. |
| Self-awareness imperative | Self-reflection of cultural biases aids in cultural sensitivity. Understanding personal worldviews promotes cultural awareness. |
| Ethical imperative | Cultural values are frequently difficult to understand and accept. We have an ethical obligation, for instance, to appreciate the cultural variations in dating, marriage, and intimacy. |

### APPLY IT!

We've identified various "Imperatives" for studying intercultural communication. First, choose one that you find especially compelling and explain why you believe it to be so important. Second, determine an additional imperative that was not listed, explain it, and explain some examples why it should serve as a motivator to study the contents of this chapter.

## DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

No one is more renowned for their work on the dimensionality of culture than Dutch anthropologist, Geert Hofstede. Prior to becoming a professor, Hofstede worked at IBM as a trainer and overseer of employee opinion surveys, totalling over 100,000 across 40 IBM cultures and locations across the globe.[28] His work showed that five dimensions of cultural values were held by corporate managers and employees in multinational corporations: uncertainty avoidance, distribution of power, masculinity–femininity, individualism–collectivism, and long- and short-term orientation. These five areas comprise **Cultural Variability Theory**, and we address each dimension below. Keep in mind that because his results are based on averages, you will most likely be able to think of individuals you know who are exceptions to the categorization identified below.

### Uncertainty Avoidance

Reducing uncertainty is a quality that defines various regions of the world. The notion of **uncertainty avoidance** can be tricky to understand. Overall, the concept refers to how tolerant (or intolerant) you are of uncertainty. Those cultures that resist change and have high levels of anxiety associated with change are said to have a high degree of uncertainty avoidance. Because

cultures with a *high* degree of uncertainty avoidance desire predictability, they need specific laws to guide behavior and personal conduct. The cultures of Greece, Chile, Portugal, Japan, and France are among those that tolerate little uncertainty. Risky decisions may be discouraged in these cultures because they increase uncertainty.

Those cultures that are unthreatened by change have a *low* degree of uncertainty avoidance. The cultures of the United States, Sweden, Britain, Denmark, and Ireland tend to accept uncertainty. They are comfortable taking risks and are less aggressive and less emotional than cultures with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance.

Intercultural communication problems can surface when a person raised in a culture that tolerates ambiguity encounters another who has little tolerance for ambiguity. For instance, if a student from a culture with high uncertainty avoidance is invited to a party in the United States, they will probably ask many questions about how to dress, what to bring, exactly what time to arrive, and so forth. These questions might confuse a North American host, who would typically have a high tolerance for uncertainty, including a laid-back attitude toward the party—"Just get here whenever." We should point out that cultures with high uncertainty avoidance prefer to have rules and clear protocol more than cultures with low uncertainty avoidance.

## Distribution of Power

For many of you, a democratic culture is one characterized by equality. Yet, in many cultures around the world, some people (e.g., members of an aristocracy) and institutions (e.g., church) have amassed all the power. How a culture deals with power is called **power distance**, which is the extent to which a society accepts an unequal distribution of power. Citizens of nations that are *high* in power distance (e.g., the Philippines, Mexico, India, Singapore, and Brazil) tend to show respect to people with higher status. These populations typically do not work against authority-centeredness. Further, differences in age and income, for instance, are exaggerated in these cultures, and people accept these differences.

Across the globe, societies vary in how much they accept an equal or unequal distribution of power. India is an example of a culture that is high in power distance, exemplified by the caste system subscribed to by many of the Hindu people. The caste system is a social classification that organizes people into four castes or categories: *brahmins* (priests), *kashtryas* (administrators/rulers), *vaisyas* (businesspeople or farmers), and *sudras* (laborers).[29] Each caste has various duties and rights. This caste hierarchy inhibits communication among caste groups. In fact, only one group (the priests), which historically has been afforded full respect, has the prerogative to communicate with all other social groups.

The cultures that are *low* in power distance include the United States, Austria, Israel, Denmark, and Ireland. People in these cultures generally believe that power should be equally distributed regardless of, say, a person's age, sex, or status. Cultures with low degrees of power distance minimize differences among the classes and are able to accept challenges to power in interpersonal relationships. Although included on the list of cultures low in power distance, the United States is becoming higher in power distance because of the growing disparity between rich and poor.

Intercultural encounters between people from high and low power distance cultures can be challenging. For instance, a supervisor from a high-power distance culture may have difficulty communicating with employees who come from lower power distance cultures. Although the supervisor may be expecting complete respect and follow through on directives, the employees may be questioning the legitimacy of such directives.

Across the globe, societies vary in how much they accept an equal or unequal distribution of power.

Jake Norton / Alamy Stock Photo

## Masculinity–Femininity

We're confident that many of you no longer subscribe to the binary nature of your gender. In fact, gender fluidity is most pronounced in Gen Z with over 35% knowing someone who embraces gender neutrality, compared to 25% of Millennials, 16% of Gen Xers, 12% of baby boomers, and 7% of those born between 1925 and 1945 (the Silent Generation).[30] In describing cultures, however, Cultural Variability Theory articulates the presence of binary gender identity by survey participants. The *masculinity–femininity* dimension depicts the extent to which cultures represent masculine and feminine traits in their society. As Hofstede notes, masculinity is not the same as *male*, and femininity is not the same as *female*, although the use of these terms still reinforces fixed notions of how men and women should behave. **Masculine cultures** focus on achievement, competitiveness, strength, and material success—that is, characteristics typically associated with masculine people. Money is important in masculine cultures. Masculine cultures are also those in which the division of labor is based on sex. **Feminine cultures** emphasize gender and sex equality, nurturance, quality of life, supportiveness, and affection—that is, characteristics traditionally associated with feminine people. Compassion for the less fortunate also characterizes feminine cultures.

Hofstede's research showed that countries such as Mexico, Italy, Venezuela, Japan, and Austria are masculine-centered cultures. Countries such as Thailand, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Finland are feminine-centered cultures where a promotion of gender equality exists. The United States falls closer to masculinity.

What happens when a person from a culture that honors such masculine traits as power and competition intersects with a person from a culture that honors such feminine traits as interdependence and quality of life? For example, suppose that a woman is asked to lead a group of men in an assigned project. In Scandinavian countries, such as Denmark and Finland, such a task would not be problematic. Many political leaders in these countries are feminine (and female), and gender roles are more flexible. Yet, in a masculine culture such as Japan and Mexico, Hofstede's works suggests that a female leader might be viewed with skepticism, and her leadership might be challenged.

## Individualism–Collectivism

Some societies embrace the individuals whereas other cultures embrace the group. Similar to other components of Hofstede's model, this preference impacts the intercultural communication taking place. When a culture values **individualism**, it prefers competition over cooperation, the individual over the group, and the private over the public. Individualistic cultures have an *I*- communication orientation, emphasizing self-concept, autonomy, and personal achievement. Individualistic cultures—including the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, and Italy—tend to reject authority (think, for instance, how many rallies have occurred in the United States denouncing U.S. presidents and their policies) and typically support the belief that people should "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps."

**Collectivism** suggests that the self is secondary to the group and its norms, values, and beliefs. Group orientation takes priority over self-orientation. Collectivistic cultures teach their members about duty, tradition, conformity, and hierarchy. A *we* communication orientation prevails. Collectivistic cultures such as Colombia, Peru, Pakistan, Chile, and Singapore lean toward working together in groups to achieve goals. Families are particularly important, and people have higher expectations of loyalty to family, including taking care of extended family members.

Interestingly, the collectivistic and individualistic intersect at times. For instance, in the Puerto Rican community, a collectivistic sense of family coexists with the individualistic need for community members to become personally successful. In fact, as one researcher noted, "A Puerto Rican is only fully a person insofar as he or she is a member of a family."[31] Still, younger Puerto Ricans have adopted more independence and have accepted and adapted to the individualistic ways of the U.S. culture. We see, therefore, that even within one culture, the individualism—collectivism dimension is not static.

## Time Orientation

Every culture has its own perception of time. And, every culture must reconcile the past with the challenges of the present and an uncertain future. And, each culture handles Hofstede's fifth dimension differently. Some societies find it beneficial to stay focused on the future. They are **long-term orientation (LTO) cultures** (e.g., Poland, Germany, and Canada) and countries that are enthusiastic about change and persistent. Hofstede believes that LTO societies focus their efforts on future goals. They believe that the world is always in motion and adapting to the changes is paramount. LTO cultures also appreciate perseverance and pragmatism, encourage innovation, and make decisions with these values in mind. The **short-term orientation (STO) cultures** (South Korea, Morocco, China) emphasize the present and the past and consider them more important than the future. Honoring tradition is imperative and from a nationalistic perspective, members of STO cultures are quite proud of their country. If you are a member of a STO, you will likely embrace time-honored traditions and believe that the social hierarchy remains adequate and you will fulfill your social obligations as necessary (e.g., getting married to another person within the co-culture).

The communication between those from LTO and STO cultures requires some finesse at times. Social scientists point out, for instance, that managers who understand the different time orientations will have more success in motivating their employees.[32] So, if a bonus is given to increase motivation, that incentive would likely be highly attractive to a STO person; a contribution to retirement, however, would be appealing to a member from a LTO culture. Certainly, we can see that both workers would want a bonus AND an increased retirement incentive! But if supervisors are trying to negotiate intercultural understanding with worker productivity, using appropriate cultural incentives is important to consider.

Viewing issues and communication from these cultural dimensions will likely have an impact upon the decisions and strategies you undertake in your conversations with others at home, at work, in your apartment, and in other environments. A summary of Hofstede's five dimensions of culture is provided in Table 2.3.

Let's reexamine one prominent ongoing feature related to the discussion of cultural dimensions: *context*, a term we introduced earlier and in Chapter 1. Intercultural communication theorists find that people of different cultures use context to varying degrees to determine the meaning of a message. Scholars have referred to this as **Context Orientation Theory**.[33] Context Orientation Theory answers the following question: *Is meaning derived from cues* outside *of the message or from the words* in *the message*?

The cultures of the world differ in the extent to which they rely on context. Researchers have divided context into two primary areas: high context and low context. In **high-context cultures**, the meaning of a message is primarily drawn from the surroundings. People in such cultures do not need to say much when communicating because there is a high degree of similarity among members of such cultures (i.e., homogeneity). That is, people typically read nonverbal cues with a high degree of accuracy because they share the same structure of meaning. Several Native

| TABLE 2.3 ■ Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions | |
|---|---|
| **Dimension** | **Description** |
| Uncertainty Avoidance | Cultures high in uncertainty avoidance desire predictability (e.g., Greece, Japan). Cultures low in uncertainty avoidance are unthreatened by change (e.g., United States, Great Britain). |
| Power Distance | Cultures high in power distance show respect for status (e.g., Mexico, India). Cultures low in power distance believe that power should be equally distributed (e.g., United States, Israel). |
| Masculinity–Femininity | Masculine cultures value competitiveness, material success, and assertiveness (e.g., Italy, Austria). Feminine cultures value quality of life, affection, and caring for the less fortunate (e.g., Sweden, Denmark). |
| Individualism–Collectivism | Individualistic cultures value individual accomplishments (e.g., Australia, United States). Collectivistic cultures value group collaboration (e.g., Chile, Colombia). |
| Long-Term Orientation | Long-Term Orientation cultures focus on a pragmatic future and set personal and professional goals accordingly (Germany, Poland). |
| Short-Term Orientation | Short-Term Orientation cultures embrace the value of the past and focus on how tradition can help understand the present and future (e.g., South Korea, China). |

American tribes as well as Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Korean cultures are all high-context cultures. On a more fundamental level, high-context communities are less formal, and as decisions are undertaken, there is an emphasis on relational harmony.

In **low-context cultures**, communicators find meaning primarily in the words in messages, not the surroundings. In such cultures, meanings are communicated explicitly; little of the conversation is left open to interpretation. As a result, nonverbal communication is not easily comprehended. Self-expression, then, becomes a relational value. Examples of low-context cultures include Germany, Switzerland, United States, Canada, and France.

Think about how cultural differences in context might affect interaction during conflict episodes, job interviews, or dating. If one person relies mainly on the spoken word and the other communicates largely through nonverbal messages, what might be the result? Or, if one person's communication is direct and expressive, what are the consequences and implications if the other communicator employs silence and indirect forms of communication?

So far in this chapter, we have discussed what culture is and explained why you need to understand intercultural communication. We're confident that you are beginning to become more aware of the cultural diversity in your lives and that you are prepared to work on improving your intercultural communication skills. A critical step toward understanding your culture and the cultures of others is to understand the problems inherent in intercultural communication, a subject we outline below.

## APPLY IT!

Hofstede's research was conducted many decades ago, but scholars continue to believe that his work has relevancy today. Looking at the dimensions we explored above, which seem to continue to have applicability today and/or which seem to be non-applicable today? Why did you choose a particular dimension?

## CHALLENGES OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Although intercultural communication is important and pervasive, becoming an other-centered intercultural communicator is easier said than done. In this section, we explain five obstacles to intercultural understanding: ethnocentrism, stereotyping, anxiety and uncertainty, misinterpretation of nonverbal and verbal behaviors, and the assumption of similarity or difference. We point out these challenges so you become aware of them in your own relationships and can effectively manage them when they emerge.

### Ethnocentrism

The process of judging another culture using the standards of your own culture is termed **ethnocentrism**. The term is derived from two Greek words, *ethnos*, or "nation," and *kentron*, or "center." When combined, the meaning becomes clear: nation at the center. Ethnocentrism is a belief in the superiority of your own culture in such areas as customs, traditions, and political systems. The term's application to populations and communities has its roots tracing back to the 1800s with the rise of U.S. nativism (the protection of native-born interests). Normally, ethnocentric tendencies exaggerate differences and usually prevent intercultural understanding.

At first glance, being ethnocentric may appear harmless. Few people even realize the extent to which they prioritize their culture over another. For instance, you will note that throughout this book, we avoid the use of the single term *American*. Like many researchers and practitioners, we believe that *American* can refer to people in North America, Central America, and South America. Although we understand the everyday usage of the term is normally attributed to those in the United States, we also acknowledge that the word can have a broader application. In fact, many in Latin America believe that when people in the United States refer to themselves as "Americans," such a behavior reinforces "imperialistic tendencies,"[34] a point we elaborate on in our discussion of various cultural communication skills.

We tend to notice when people from other cultures prioritize their cultural customs. For example, although many people in the United States value open communication, not all cultures do. Many Asian cultures such as China revere silence. In fact, the Chinese philosopher Confucius said, "Silence is a friend who will never betray" (In Chapter 5, we will discuss some of the drawbacks to silence in communication encounters). Consider what happens in conversations when the Western and Eastern worlds meet. Let's say that Sebastian, a young business executive from the United States, travels to China to talk to Yao, another executive, regarding a business deal. Sebastian is taken aback when, after he makes the offer, Yao remains silent for a few minutes. Sebastian repeats the specifics of the offer, and Yao acknowledges his understanding. This standstill in their discussion leads Sebastian to believe that Yao is going to reject the offer. However, if Sebastian had studied Chinese culture sufficiently before his trip, he would know that to Chinese people, silence generally means agreement. One speaks only if they have something of value to add. This cultural ignorance may cost the company both money and respect. And the inability to look beyond Sebastian's own Western view of silence represents ethnocentrism.

## IPC CAREERS

### CULTURAL AWARENESS AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT



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A robust and productive working environment requires a culturally sensitive and diverse workforce. And, human resource (HR) professionals are key to achieving such a work climate. HR professionals should strive to ensure that cultural diversity remains paramount in both the employment and training of employees. Because of the job duties required of HR personnel, cultural awareness is multidimensional: *recruitment* ("Consider the demographics of your local community when recruiting new staff."), *staff education and development* ("Include a cultural diversity component in all staff orientation."), and *organizational support* ("Address cultural diversity in all organizational policies and practices."). A number of other key considerations for HR professionals exist: working on securing bilingual staff, encouraging staff to learn a second language, providing facilities for a variety of religious and spiritual observances, reviewing assessment programs and practices for cultural bias, advertising job vacancies in publications targeting un(der)represented communities, among others.

*Reflection:* Suppose you were asked to advise an HR director regarding the role of culture in social media. What recommendations would you provide to show the consequences of ignoring culturally offensive posts on Instagram or Twitter?

## Stereotyping

Consider the following statements:

- Girls are not as good as boys in sports.
- Middle Eastern men don't show emotions.
- Asians excel in math.
- Senior citizens don't understand technology.

These statements are **stereotypes**—the "pictures in our heads"[35]—or the fixed mental images of a particular group and communicating with an individual as if they are a member of that group.

Stereotypes assume that "they're all alike." We have all stereotyped at one point or another in our lives. Stereotypes are everywhere in U.S. society, including politics ("All politicians are crooked."), medicine ("Doctors know best."), entertainment ("Hollywood celebrities use Botox."), journalism ("The media are so liberal."), and sports ("They're just dumb jocks."). Such statements generalize the perceived characteristics of some members of a group to the group as a whole.

You may not have thought about this before, but as we illustrate above, stereotypes can be good or bad. Think about the positive stereotypes of firefighters, police officers, emergency personnel, and other rescue workers after the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Words like *heroic, compassionate, daring*, and *fearless* have all been attributed to these groups of individuals, regardless of the cultural identification of the members of these groups. However, right after the attacks, many Arabs living in the United States were accused (and still are) of being terrorists simply because of their Middle Eastern identity, and people employ(ed) hurtful and hateful speech while interacting with Arab Americans.

This stereotyping became even more profound at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020. With then-President Trump and other political leaders calling the virus the "Wuhan virus" or the "China virus," as we noted earlier, it was not long before many citizens of Asian descent found themselves stereotyped as the cultural group responsible for the virus and its prevalence. As one writer put it, stereotyping is essentially used to justify racism and racial attacks.[36] The point is that we must be willing to look beyond the generalizations about a particular group and communicate with people as individuals.

## Cultural Appropriation

A few years back, singer Katy Perry found herself getting recognition for the wrong reason. At several points in her career, during both music videos and live performances, Perry dressed up in Geisha costumes, employed culturally offensive dance moves, and even wore her hair in cornrow braids, seemingly unaware at the time that such behavior was a mockery of the very cultural communities she wished to emulate. Perry's reasoning suggested she didn't know that what she did was wrong and also felt that she was doing it out of respect for the various cultures. Critics, however, pointed out that the Asian cultures need no help promoting its rich heritage, particularly from a privileged white and affluent celebrity.

What Perry and countless others have done is called *cultural appropriation*. Individuals who culturally appropriate misuse a culture's values and practices and employ them in ways that are incongruent with or unintended by the original culture. To put it more candidly, some have called it "a form identity theft" in that it is an opportunity for others to adopt and integrate a cultural custom, practice, or behavior and with little to no respect for that culture. And others have termed it a form of "plunder," which is, effectively, stealing from another. Clearly, there is a marked difference between cultural *appreciation* and cultural *appropriation*.

In communication encounters, **cultural appropriation** can be quite problematic. Typically it occurs when a member of the majority culture trivializes or even disrespects the ideas, art, images, and ideas of a minority culture. Imagine Morgan, a white 19-year-old from Atlanta. Morgan is running for secretary of the Student Government Association. On Candidate's Day, she introduced her speech with a song by Beyoncé that was dedicated to women of color and their experiences. Even before the speech was done, Morgan's cell phone was blowing up with texts accusing her of cultural appropriation. Morgan was mortified and even though she later wrote in the student newspaper that her intentions were not to offend, many others didn't see it that way. As we know from Katy Perry and Morgan, cultural appropriation may be unintentional in nature, but it usually prompts misunderstanding and meaning crossfires within intercultural relationships.

## Anxiety and Uncertainty

You may feel anxiety and uncertainty when you are introduced to people who speak or look differently from you. Most societies have few formal guidelines to help people through some of these early awkward intercultural moments. People commonly question what words or phrases to use while discussing various cultural groups. Most of us want to be culturally aware and use language that doesn't offend, yet we frequently don't know what words might be offensive to members of cultures other than our own. For example, you might wonder whether you should refer to someone as American Indian or Native American or another as African American or Black. These cultural references can be unnerving, and even in the communities that are affected by the terminology, there are serious disagreements on appropriate and sensitive word usage.

Our family and friends remain influential on our perceptions. In particular, their observations and reactions to cultural differences are often passed on to us. And they can prompt us to either feel that we are members of what social scientists call an in-group or an out-group. **In-groups** are groups to which a person feels they belong, and **out-groups** are those groups to which a person feels they do not belong.

Perceptions of belonging are directly proportional to the level of connection an individual feels toward a group. Let's say that Lianna and Nate, a devoutly Christian married couple, meet Nate's best friend, Rose. Although Rose is Jewish, she feels that she has in-group affiliation with the couple and communicates with them comfortably. Now suppose that Lianna and Nate meet Rose's mom, an atheist who believes that the couple spends too much time talking about "being saved." Her mom will likely view Lianna and Nate as an out-group member because she does not feel a sense of belonging with the husband and wife. Being a member of either an in-group or an out-group can influence our degree of comfort in intercultural communication.

## Misinterpretation of Nonverbal and Verbal Behaviors

Speakers expect to receive nonverbal cues that are familiar. However, nonverbal behaviors differ dramatically across and within cultures. A proverb states that "those who know, do not speak; those who speak, do not know." If Paola is a person who believes that communication must be constant to be effective, she may struggle with interpersonal exchanges with a Western Apache or an Asian Indian who generally value silence. However, as is true of other facets of culture, nonverbal communication varies within cultures as well as between cultures. For instance, although Italians might gesture more than people from the United States in general, not all Italians use expansive gestures. We could certainly find someone from Italy who gestures less than someone we pick from the United States. We return to the topic of culture and nonverbal communication in Chapter 5.

Additional challenges exist in the communication differences exist between and among various co-cultures, specifically, for example, from different age groups. With several generations working together—both in person and online—it's inevitable that communication usage will vary. One generation may prefer face-to-face communication while another will prefer Slack, email, or a quick Zoom. Or, while one person may prefer to openly thank another for a job well done, another may prefer to send a written note to express appreciation for a job, another may send a TikTok link of a video showing a much more animated appreciation. These are just a few of the many examples of how co-cultural generations may differ and yet, we must understand these nonverbal and verbal differences between and among cultural communities if we are to achieve meaning in our intercultural relationships.

### The Assumption of Similarity or Difference

This assumption suggests that intercultural communication is possible because it simply requires homing in on people's inherent similarities. At the other end of the continuum is the belief that people from different cultures are vastly different from one another, and therefore communication between them is difficult if not impossible. Assuming similarity fails to appreciate difference, and assuming difference fails to appreciate cultural commonalities.

In the United States, we need to be careful when we place a premium on what some may call the "American way." We are quite narrow in thinking if we believe that other cultures should do things the way that we do things here or if we hold cultures in higher esteem if they imitate or practice our cultural customs. In many cases, people who are unfamiliar with U.S. traditions often question these practices. Further, simply because something is practiced or revered in the United States (e.g., advertising prescription drugs, saying "thank you" so frequently) does not mean that it is similarly practiced or revered in other cultures. Assuming similarity across cultures, then, is problematic.

We have given you a number of issues to consider in this chapter so far. First, we defined culture and co-culture and discussed the dimensions of culture. We then proceeded to outline several reasons for studying intercultural communication. Next, we addressed some of the most common challenges to intercultural communication. Before recommending various skills to enhance your cultural understanding, we wish to first address the intersection between culture and one of the most significant ways we share and use content: social media.

### APPLY IT!

As noted above, the line between cultural *appreciation* and cultural *appropriation* is rather delicate and thin. We must be careful never to use the terms interchangeably. To demonstrate the difference, review several magazine images and advertisements. Find at least two images or ads and place in either the "appreciation" or the "appropriation" category. What criteria did you use to select each?

## TECHNOLOGY, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Globalization has permanently ushered in a world without borders. No society can live in isolation any longer because each is connected in some way by technology (e.g., "the global village"). Yet, some cultures such as North Korea and Cuba struggle to connect electronically with others. And, some societies, interestingly, remain at both the top and bottom of internet users. That is, both India and China comprise the most number of people in the world without an online connection.[37] Right now, there are over a dozen countries that either limit, prohibit, or don't provide internet service to their populations, typically among the poorest in the world.[38] Therefore, we always need to remain vigilant when and if we assume technology accessibility around the world.

There are a host of topics we could elaborate upon related to the interplay of technology, social media, and intercultural communication. New media technologies and a variety of popular social media platforms exist that allow different cultural communities to express their identities and document their cultural experiences. Conversely, these digital opportunities can also

serve to obstruct cultural groups from communicating. Let's first unpack the complexity of this theme by addressing the influence of technology—and social media, in particular—on one crucial issue which persists today as a primary global challenge: immigration.

Many of you are familiar with the pictures and images of refugees and asylum-seekers making long journeys across countries. Usually, these marginalized and diverse populations seek out more hospitable countries than where they live because of war, persistent poverty, low wages, violence, and corruption in their native homelands. In one of the most compelling and sad examples of refugee migration, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia resulted in millions of Ukrainian refugees entering neighboring states including Poland and Romania. Regardless of whether a country is considered wealthy or not, these refugees were greeted with support and resources in order to help them in their exhaustive journey and to reclaim their cultural identity. Other migrations around the world are just as fraught with sadness, despair, frustration, and death.

These journeys are anything but fluent and technology is present from the beginning. With respect to some refugee pathways, migrant advocates often note that to locate smugglers, asylum-seekers canvass social media platforms like Facebook for advice and even for suggestions on border crossings and impending dangers that may be lurking. Once in route and when the internet is present, several technologies are employed to magnify the voice of the migrant. Email is used to communicate between travel companions and with smugglers for timing and money transfers. The final destination may be hundreds of miles away, but many discover internet access and may tweet their experiences (see #asylumadvocacy), use Instagram to chronicle their reactions and feelings (see "My Life as an Asylum-Seeker" on Instagram) or find allies to record a video about border agents or refugee camps to post on YouTube (see "Ukrainian Refugees Begin to Spread Into Neighboring Countries").

Initiatives such as "digital storytelling" and microblogging are frequent undertakings during travel.[39] Clearly, those who migrate hundreds and thousands of miles to find a more hospitable home find technology and social media ever-present and ever-important.

Not all uses related to technology and social media are as compelling as those related to immigration. In fact, every day, people find themselves confronting their ability to adapt to new situations. This has been called **intercultural adaptability**, or an ongoing process by which individuals, upon entering a new (co)culture, work to establish a relatively "stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment."[40]

Intercultural adaptability occurs in a variety of situations and technology functions prominently in those circumstances. School and the workplace are two of the most common locations for transition. Consider, for instance, the challenge of a first-generation college student from a low-income family who enrolls in a community college and who has little understanding of college life. Finding Twitter friends or watching TikTok videos related to the campus and its students will likely be helpful. Or, imagine the possible communication and relational challenges of a new college roommate who is a devout Christian and another roommate who is Buddhist. Both may be watching YouTube videos on religious differences before moving in together. In addition to school, organizational challenges are present for prospective employees who identify with various cultural communities usually seek out technology to assess their adaptability. For example, a trans employee may be searching the company social media pages for a corporate mission statement and company practices related to gender diversity and inclusiveness. A single mom of an adolescent may download the Human Resources manual to find out what options she has if she is required to work evening hours. And, a child of an aging parent may be reading online reviews of a long-term assisted living location or reviewing Pinterest GIFs of the facility before seeking

out a location for care. Although some organizations provide workshops for those with various cultural fields of experience, many new and seasoned employees find them dated and—in the case of J.D. and Noah from our opening story—having limited cultural value.

Intercultural adaptability usually takes some time and requires us all to tolerate the unknown a bit and learn more. And, it's clear that employing technology is primary in how individuals learn to be stable, reciprocal, and functional in various environments.

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### APPLY IT!

We've noted that intercultural adaptability is essential in how we react to and manage technology in our relational lives. Point out several examples of the difficulties you've encountered as you began to establish your online relationships with others. In turn, how did you resolve these difficulties and how was the adaptability process undertaken?

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## SKILL SET FOR IMPROVING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

In this section, we present three ways to improve your communication with people from different cultures. Because most cultures and co-cultures have unique ways of communicating, our suggestions are necessarily broad, but still allow you to work toward achieving meaning in your conversations. Communicating with friends, classmates, coworkers, and others from different cultural backgrounds requires **cultural relativism**, which is the ability to understand another culture on its terms, while avoiding judgments or comparisons to other cultures (contrary to cultural appropriation). In the end, knowing the extent to which you are sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of your conversational partner is a very good first step. We have summarized the skill set (see Table 2.4) and encourage you to add your suggestions to this list based on your own cultural experiences.

### Be Mindful of Biases

Despite our best efforts, we enter many conversations with biases. And, we may employ bias in ways that result in significant consequences. Some research has found that **implicit bias**, or the unconscious attribution of qualities to a member of a cultural group, is more frequent than we may wish.[41] During the job application process, in particular, researchers have found implicit bias that stigmatizes and undercuts intercultural understanding. In one study, when evaluating fictitious job applicants who were both African American and white, women of color with "natural hairstyles" were perceived to be less competent, less professional, and less likely to get a recommendation.[42] Using fake resumes, another team of researchers found that the resume of "Adam" was offered 12 interviews while the resume of "Mohamed" was offered four interviews.[43] Similar bias occurred in a study examining LGBT applicants who were "out."[44] The researchers found that across experimental conditions, self-identified gay and lesbian applicants were rated significantly lower in competence, social skills, and hireabilty than the heterosexual applicants.

Finally, in another pioneering study undertaken in Norway, researchers sent out 1,200 fictional applications to 600 employers advertising for jobs. After consulting with disability advocacy groups, the team put together an application with a cover letter that partially read, "Due to a congenital back injury, I use a wheelchair. This does not affect my ability to do the job [. . .]. In being a wheelchair user, I have learned to look for solutions, rather than limitations." After collating the

| TABLE 2.4 ■ Skill Set for Enhancing Intercultural Understanding |
|---|
| **Be Mindful of Biases. |
| **Practice Cultural Humility. |
| ** Educate Yourself. |

replies, it was found that wheelchair users were 48% less likely to be invited for job interviews than nondisabled applicants.[45]

Each of the aforementioned examples were undertaken in both a fabricated and real setting, and each study illuminates a clear pattern: Regardless of intention, job applicants who are members of marginalized cultures were found to be less effective and ultimately less likely to get a job interview. The structure and standards for evaluating some cultural communities are clearly different than others. (We delve much deeper into the interplay between bias and perception in Chapter 3.)

We hope you're troubled by the conclusions from these research episodes and we also hope you're asking, "How do I know I have these sorts of biases?" Listening carefully to others' responses to our ideas, words, and phrases is an excellent first step. Have you ever told a story about a cultural group that resulted in a friend saying, "I can't believe you just said that!" That friend may be pointing out that you should rethink some culturally offensive language or risk facing challenges from others during conversations. Again, if you pause before relating a culturally insensitive comment in front of the member of a particular cultural group, you should be asking yourself, "Why?"

We need to stay aware and refrain from imposing our predispositions and prejudices on others. Many views of different cultural groups are frequently outdated or otherwise inaccurate and require a constant personal assessment. Being mindful of your biases and even being aware of your fears or anxieties related to a cultural community are essential first steps toward intercultural communication effectiveness.

Recall that ethnocentrism is seeing the world through your own culture's lens. We may like to think that our particular culture is best, but as you have seen through our many examples, no culture can nor should claim preeminence. We first need to admit that to some extent, we all are biased and ethnocentric to some extent. Next, we need to honestly assess how we react to other cultures. Looking inward is helpful.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What have I done to prepare myself for intercultural conversations? Am I harbouring outdated views of a cultural group?

- Do I use words that are biased or potentially offensive to people from different cultures?

- What is my reaction to people who use offensive words or phrases while describing cultural groups—am I silent? If so, do I consider my silence problematic?

- How have my perceptions and biases been shaped? By school? By my family? By social media? By talking to others?

These are among the questions you should consider as you begin to know yourself, your perceptions, and how you may act on those perceptions. We all need to understand our outdated and misguided views of others that have falsely shaped our impressions of other cultures.

The extent to which we tolerate and respect cultural practices varies around the world.

Gaertner / Alamy Stock Photo

Recognizing that your family, friends, coworkers, school, and the media influence your prejudices is critical. Getting rid of the unwanted or misguided biases is essential if we are to begin to forge intercultural relationships with others.

## Practice Cultural Humility

The brother of Rich, one of the book's authors, was an off-shore excursion supervisor for a large cruise line. A few years back, while on a cruise to the Caribbean, he accompanied a small group of cruisers for an architectural tour of the island. But, instead of marveling at the vibrancy of the homes and their colors, his (and others) attention was focused on the couple from Texas who would constantly ask "Where's KFC?" Aside from being annoyed at the interruptions, everyone on the bus was embarrassed, particularly those who were from the United States.

We are all familiar with the term, *humble*. For some, it means self-reflection of behaviors. For others, it means placing your life in relationship to others. And still for others being *humble* means a self-examination of one's beliefs, attitudes, and values. All of these orientations would be correct and each is at the core of our second skill, cultural humility.

When we practice **cultural humility**, we are adopting an interpersonal perspective that allows us to recognize and value the worldview of others. When we are culturally humble, we are willing to engage in self-critique. We must be willing to be open to our static impressions of different cultural identities. Even when we think that others are the "same" as us, this "sameness" still has difference (there is much diversity in the bisexual population, for instance). To a large extent, cultural humility is an opportunity to be other-centered and to imagine that your singular view is one of a myriad of views.

Various traditions, customs, and practices allow cultures and co-cultures to function effectively. Skilled intercultural communicators who practice cultural humility respect those cultural conventions. No one culture knows "the right way" to solve work problems, raise children, and manage interpersonal relationships. In fact, **cultural imperialism** is a process whereby individuals, companies, or the media impose their way of thinking and behaving upon another culture. With cultural imperialism, a belittling of another culture occurs. We can avoid this practice by employing cultural humility. This requires us to show that we accept another culture's way of thinking and relating, even though we may disagree with or disapprove of it. Different societies have different moral codes, and judging a culture using only one moral yardstick can be considered both arrogant and self-serving.

When you practice cultural humility, you empathize with another culture. **Cultural empathy** refers to the learned ability to accurately understand the experiences of people from diverse cultures and to convey that understanding responsively. When you are empathic, you are on your way to appreciating the life experiences of another person or social group. In other words,

we try to reach beyond the words to the feelings that the communicator is trying to show. Yes, being humble regarding cultural backgrounds necessarily means you have to be patient and tolerant to a large extent (we address the notion of empathy throughout the book).

Developing cultural humility involves trying to look at a culture from the inside. To do so, however, you must be ready to interrogate your **standpoint**, or the outlook you have regarding various cultural identities. Your standpoints are ever-changing, of course. They often shift based on your intercultural conversations and the settings in which these conversations take place. Think about, for instance, the two standpoints of J.D. and Noah from our opening and how



Mobile technology can bring culturally diverse people together, with connection, information, and communication at their fingertips.

Gaertner / Alamy Stock Photo

they have evolved over the years. There is a good chance that each standpoint developed based on everyday interactions with others and with those who work beside each of them. Those who practice cultural humility would never ask about "the handicap" button, for example. They would simply open the door to be polite, recognizing that Noah's physical challenge is secondary to the fact that the door needs to open. Certainly, those who are not wheelchair users would be most humble if they left that interaction with a self-reflection of their privilege. Communication must always take into consideration the cultural point of view of the other and blurting out inappropriate and patronizing nods to an individual with a particular cultural identity is naive and insulting.

## Educate Yourself

You are unlike many others in that you are learning directly about culture and communication and the intersection between the two. First, you are enrolled in a course in which culture is sustained as a theme throughout. Second, if you're in a classroom, look around and be confident that there is much cultural diversity in your midst. Even in the most troubled times of COVID-19, our Zoom-anchored classrooms provided for even more cultural engagement as students—literally from around the world—talked from their homes in Japan, Brazil, Israel, and other places.

A third way in which your role as a college student affords you intercultural understanding is through the courses in which you enroll. For instance, it's likely that you are required to take courses in your General Education related to U.S. Diversity and Global Diversity. Further, there are college courses dedicated to culture and diversity with titles such as "Religions of the World," "War, Genocide, and HIV in Africa," "Gender and Sexuality," "American Sign Language," "American Indian History," among many, many others. Further, at many colleges and universities, students can major in international business, cultural and critical studies, queer studies, among others. Finally, college students across the world are able to enroll in Study Abroad programs, enabling them to be part of a cultural immersion experience in countries around the

globe. Clearly, as a college student, educating yourself about intercultural communication is both deep and broad.

Yet, your learning and the education of your friends, colleagues, and coworkers can be augmented by taking advantage of other cultural opportunities. First, read. That's right: Read all that is available to you about other cultures. Browse magazines and books that are dedicated to culture, intercultural communication, and intercultural relationships. And, search the web. Many websites allow you to travel virtually across cultures.

What we note here is only a beginning in the intercultural opportunities afforded to all of us as we work to learn more about diversity, culture, and communication. This information will provide you a backdrop for future reference and will allow you to discover more about your own culture as well.

Educating yourself also requires that you learn about cultures through others and their communities. Participate in community lectures and discussions about cultural groups. Don't be afraid to chat with people, for example, who represent another racial group, religion, nationality, or other cultural group. Community organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League continually host lectures—both in person and virtual—in communities across the United States. Listening to personal reflections and life testimonies is an excellent foundation to draw upon as you try to understand the cultural fields of experiences of others. You might also visit various co-cultures found in many urban centers, including Koreatown, Chinatown, Little Italy, Little India, Greektown, and other communities to observe customs in language, dress, and food. In fact, **gastrodiplomacy**, generally viewed as the employment of food to promote cultural values and practices,[46] dates back many years with high levels of success, for instance, with countries such as Denmark, Thailand, and Malaysia.

Although we believe that each of you should educate yourselves, please don't accept everything written about culture and communication as truth. Be critical in how you receive your information and be cautious in your acceptance. Above all, be willing to seek out information that is based on both research and personal experience.

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## IPC VOICE: DUSTIN

I never would've understood all of the stuff related to culture if I didn't read this chapter. I'm a PA (Performing Arts) major and although we're surrounded by people from around the world, I never really stopped to think about all of the different issues related to them being here. From trying to speak the language to clothing differences to even how they make friends—so many different things to be concerned with. I think I now have more empathy. No, I'm *sure* I have more empathy!

*Reflection:* Thinking about your own major and ultimate career interest, what cultural issues or themes in this chapter resonated with you? Given that any career choice will involve cultural conversations, explain some reasons why others should be required to understand culture and identity.

## CHAPTER WRAP-UP

This chapter explored the most decisive influence upon our interpersonal communication: culture. We defined and interpreted the notion of culture and three of its underlying assumptions. We also described several reasons for studying intercultural communication followed by an examination of four dimensions of culture. Numerous obstacles preventing effective cultural understanding were also introduced. We concluded the chapter by elucidating a number of different skills you might consider as you work toward achieving higher levels of excellence in your cultural communication with others, namely being mindful of biases, practicing cultural humility, and educating yourself.

In Chapter 1, we identified the transactional process as a communication effort involving two people simultaneously sending and receiving messages from each other. After reading and reflecting on this chapter, we hope you can see that to achieve transactional communication, we need to have an understanding of culture. Cultural similarities and differences exist across the interpersonal communication span—from the way we use our eye contact to the word choices we employ to the way we establish, maintain, or terminate a relationship. Culture is unequivocally an essential ingredient to shared meaning and it will remain an instrumental influence in our lives.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT: THE INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY SCALE

Sometimes, we may believe that we're culturally sensitive and yet we may not be able to measure this belief. Below is a series of statements concerning intercultural communication. There are no right or wrong answers. Please work quickly and record your first impression by indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = uncertain, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

**Please put the number corresponding to your answer in the blank before the statement.**

_____**1.**  I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.

_____**2.**  I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.

_____**3.**  I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.

_____**4.**  I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.

_____**5.**  I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____**6.**  I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____**7.**  I don't like to be with people from different cultures.

_____**8.**  I respect the values of people from different cultures.

_____**9.**  I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____**10.**  I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____**11.**  I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally distinct counterparts.

_____**12.** I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.

_____**13.** I am open-minded to people from different cultures.

_____**14.** I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____**15.** I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____**16.** I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.

_____**17.** I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.

_____**18.** I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.

_____**19.** I am sensitive to the subtle meanings of my culturally distinct counterpart's communication during our interaction.

_____**20.** I think my culture is better than other cultures.

_____**21.** I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.

_____**22.** I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally distinct persons.

_____**23.** I often show my culturally distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.

_____**24.** I have a feeling of enjoyment toward differences between my culturally distinct counterpart and me.

**Interaction Engagement** (your feelings of participation in intercultural communication)

(Items 1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23, and 24).

**Respect for Cultural Differences** (your perception of how you orient to or tolerate another's culture or cultural opinions)

(Items 2, 7, 8, 16, 18, and 20)

**Interaction Confidence** (how confident you are in an intercultural setting)

(Items 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10)

**Interaction Enjoyment** (your positive or negative reactions toward communicating with people from other cultures)

(Items 9, 12, and 15)

**Interaction Attentiveness** (your effort to understand what is taking place in an intercultural encounter)

(Items 14, 17, and 19)

_Source:_ Adapted from Lippman, W. (1922). _Public opinion._ MacMillan.

## KEY TERMS

Acculturation (p. 44)
Co-culture (p. 42)
Collectivism (p. 55)
Community (p. 44)
Context Orientation Theory (p. 56)
Cultural appropriation (p. 60)
Cultural empathy (p. 66)
Cultural humility (p. 66)
Cultural imperialism (p. 66)
Cultural relativism (p. 64)
Cultural Variability Theory (p. 52)
Culture (p. 41)
Culture clash (p. 45)
Enculturation (p. 44)
Ethnocentrism (p. 58)
Feminine cultures (p. 55)
Gastrodiplomacy (p. 68)
Global village (p. 50)
High-context cultures (p. 56)

Implicit bias (p. 64)
In-groups (p. 61)
Individualism (p. 55)
Intercultural adaptability (p. 63)
Intercultural communication (p. 40)
Long-term orientation (LTO) cultures (p. 56)
Low-context cultures (p. 57)
Masculine cultures (p. 55)
Out-groups (p. 61)
Outsourcing (p. 50)
Power distance (p. 53)
Short-term orientation (STO) cultures (p. 56)
Social identity (p. 45)
Standpoint (p. 67)
Stereotypes (p. 59)
Uncertainty avoidance (p. 52)
Worldview (p. 51)
Xenophobia (p. 47)

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. **Closing the Loop:** Look back, again, at the opening story of J.D. and Noah. Based on the content and skills you've learned in this chapter, what advice would you give to the two as they try to reconcile their cultural identities with the company's Facebook claim of inclusiveness?

2. What rewards or challenges exist for individuals as they compare their personal cultural customs and beliefs with those who have dissimilar customs and beliefs?

3. Identify and explain how you can recognize and celebrate the differences within a cultural community at your school.

4. Explore and describe various culturally sensitive values you have "presented" via social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat) and how they have enhanced your understanding of individuals who are different from you.

5. Suppose you were asked to go to dinner with the president of the NAACP. What topics would you likely introduce and what would a conversation look like? (Write the actual dialogue between you and your dinner companion).

6. Canvass *YouTube* and find various music videos that depict cultural appropriation. Was there a common thread between and among the musical artists who were culturally appropriate? What conclusions can you draw from this quasi-experiment?