Having Communication Presence in a Multicultural Society and World
AFTER COMPLETING THIS CHAPTER, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

2.1 Explain the significance of intercultural communication in the global community.

2.2 Explain how U.S. society evolved from a melting pot philosophy to a philosophy of cultural pluralism.

2.3 Analyze attitudes toward diversity.

2.4 Explain influences on cultural identity, distinguishing the difference between cultures and co-cultures.

2.5 Illustrate the five main dimensions of cultural variability.

2.6 Explain how technology brings diversity into our lives.

2.7 Apply communication skills to reduce the strangeness of strangers.

Have you ever decided that you liked or disliked someone without really knowing him or her? Has anyone ever done the same to you—forming a positive or negative opinion of you—judging you, without really knowing you? If your answer to either of these questions is yes, it is likely that stereotypes, the mental images that guide our reactions to others, played a role.

A stereotype expresses the knowledge, beliefs, and expectations we have of the members of a particular group.1 Whereas some of the stereotypes we hold of cultural groups are positive, others are astoundingly negative and overly generalized. Some contain kernels of truth, whereas others prevent us from recognizing our misconceptions.

What groups of people do you stereotype positively and/or negatively? What stereotypes might others hold of you? And how do our evaluations of one another affect our communication?

Some years back, Representative Peter King, chair of the House Committee on Homeland Security, convened a series of controversial hearings on the radicalization of Muslims in the United States. Critics of the hearings objected to the broad-stroke inquiry, arguing that we should view the Muslim community more objectively and stop
treated Muslims with automatic suspicion. Furthermore, they asserted that individuals should be able to distinguish between mainstream Muslims and those belonging to the radical fringe. Representative Keith Ellison, the first Muslim elected to Congress, observed that individuals, not communities, commit terrorist acts. He said, “When you assign their violent actions to the entire community, you assign collective blame to the whole group. This is the very heart of stereotyping and scapegoating.”

It’s not just Muslims who face stereotypes. Relations between all groups are complicated by stereotypes. Yet we all share a common desire—and a need—to get along better with one another. Stereotyping is just one of the topics we address in this chapter as we explore a host of factors that influence our ability to communicate in a multicultural society and world.

CULTURES’ MANY faces

Globalization is the increasing economic, political, and cultural integration and interdependence of diverse cultures—the worldwide integration of humanity. Diversity, a related concept, is the recognition and valuing of difference, encompassing such factors as age, gender, race, ethnicity, ability, religion, education, marital status, sexual orientation, and income. Because the likelihood of our working and living with people from all over the world is increasing, the time is right to embrace diversity and learn about other cultures so that we refrain from unfairly stereotyping them.

An early observer of how technology affects behavior and thinking, Marshall McLuhan, predicted many years ago that our world would become a global village. He was right. We now are linked physically and electronically to people around the globe. Digital technology is playing its part in erasing the notion of territorial boundaries between countries, gradually eroding the idea of the term nation.

People we once considered strangers are now friends and coworkers, highlighting the importance of multiculturalism—engagement with and respect toward people from distinctly different cultures. In addition to using the Internet with increasing frequency, many of us move a number of times during our lives for personal or professional reasons. We also travel abroad regularly, some of us to visit relatives (one in five Americans was born abroad or has at least one parent who was), others to represent an employer, and still others to vacation. Each of these provides us with opportunities to improve cultural understanding. We don’t have to be in the diplomatic corps to assume an active role.

ATTITUDES TOWARD DIVERSITY

Some people do not embrace diversity eagerly. In the book Bowling Alone, written at the turn of this millennium, author Robert Putnam reported that reciprocal and trustworthy social
networks were on the decline. Aware that people were doing more and more things alone, Putnam asked why? After studying 30,000 people across the United States, Putnam found a correlation between ethnically mixed environments and withdrawal from public life. He reported that the people living in diverse communities tended to “hunker down.” Sadly, they were more likely to distrust their neighbors—whether they were of the same or a different race, a similar or different background.7 Do you find this to be true today?

Is It Different in the Working World?

Happily, the working world reveals a different story. In organizations, people with identity diversity (people who come from different races and religions) and cognitive diversity (people who come from different outlooks and training) come together to do the organization’s work.

Thus, the challenge facing us is to follow the lead of diverse organizations by working to create a new and broader sense of “us.” In effect, we need to harness community out of diversity.8

The Many Faces of Intercultural Communication

The remainder of this chapter will explore the ways cultural values and habits influence interaction. We’ll introduce you to intercultural communication, the process of interpreting and sharing meanings with individuals from different cultures,9 to help you better understand how cultural variability influences communication. In reality, we practice intercultural communication in our own backyards as well as with people around the world.

Among intercultural communication’s many aspects are interracial communication (which occurs between people of different races), interethnic communication (which occurs when the communicating parties have different ethnic origins), international communication (which occurs between people representing different political structures), and intracultural communication (which includes all forms of communication among members of the same racial, ethnic, or other co-culture groups). By sensitizing yourself to the many faces of culture, you will become better able to respond appropriately to varied communication styles, expand your choices as a communicator, and increase your effectiveness in interacting with people from diverse cultural groups.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MELTING POT?

To what extent has the amount of contact you have with people of diverse cultural backgrounds changed since you were a child? Changes in demography and technology have
made it more likely that you will interact with people unlike yourself. For most of us, intercultural communication is now the norm. In fact, living in the United States gives us an incredible opportunity to engage with intercultural communication without having to pay for international travel. But it hasn’t always been that way.

THE MELTING POT PHILOSOPHY

Years ago, the United States embraced a melting pot philosophy. According to that theory, when individuals immigrated to the United States, they lost or gave up their original heritage and became Americans. The national motto, *E pluribus unum* (a Latin phrase meaning “one out of many”), reflected this way of thinking. It was believed that diverse cultural groups should be assimilated into the parent or dominant culture.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURAL PLURALISM

Over time, the philosophy of cultural pluralism, allowing for cultures to maintain differences while coexisting in broader society, replaced the melting pot philosophy. Cultural pluralists believe in respect for uniqueness and tolerance for difference. In a multicultural society, every group will do things differently, and that’s OK.

DIVERSITY IS RESHAPING THE FUTURE

Demographers tell us that diversity will shape our country’s future. According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, the five largest ethnic groups currently are composed of people who identify themselves as White (223.6 million), African American (38.9 million), Hispanic (50.5 million), Asian American (14.7 million), and Native American (American Indian and Alaska Native) (3.8 million). Hispanics are now the largest minority group. Within one generation, minorities are forecast to become the majority (Figure 2.1). Recent projections, however, assert that Asian immigration will make Asians the largest immigrant group by 2065 at 38%, surpassing Hispanics who are estimated to then comprise 31% of the population.

Additionally, acknowledging the blurring of racial lines and the evolution of racial identity, the 2010 U.S. Census let the nation’s more than 308 million people define their racial makeup as one race or more. Results revealed that multiracial Americans are among the fastest growing demographic groups.

The United States is the most demographically diverse country in the world, making it very probable that the number of contacts we have with people of other cultures will continue to increase in the future. This alone makes it important for us to be able to understand and communicate with those whose backgrounds, nationalities, and lifestyles differ from our own.
CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

As cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall put it, ”Culture is communication and communication is culture.”13 Culture is the lens through which we view the world. It is the mirror we use to reflect and interpret reality.14 It teaches us how to think and what to think about. It reveals to us what is beautiful or ugly, helpful or harmful, appropriate or out of place.

CULTURE IS A TEACHER

In effect, every culture provides its members with a series of lessons. Among the lessons we learn are how to say “hello” and “good-bye,” when to speak or remain silent, how to act when angry or upset, where to focus our eyes when functioning as a source and receiver, how much to gesture, how close to stand to another, and how to display emotions such as happiness or rage. By instructing its members, culture guides behavior and communication, revealing to members how to act, think, talk, and listen.15

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT DIFFERENCE MATTERS

Cultures outside of our own are operating with their own expectations for behavior and communication. If we fail to realize that people from different cultures may not look, think, or act as we
do, we risk appearing insensitive, ignorant, or culturally confused (lacking knowledge of cultural difference). The culturally confused pay a high price. The following examples demonstrate the cost of cultural ignorance and its effect on communication.

- Showing the sole of a shoe (while crossing one’s legs, e.g.) means nothing to observers in the United States or Europe. In Muslim cultures, the gesture is perceived as insulting. Similarly, crossing your legs in the United States indicates you are relaxed, whereas in Korea it is a social faux pas.
- Blinking while another person talks is considered normal to North Americans; to Taiwanese it is considered impolite.
- McDonald’s fast-food chain unintentionally offended thousands of Muslims when it printed an excerpt from the Koran on its throwaway hamburger bags. Muslims saw this as sacrilegious.
- The Japanese view business cards as an extension of a person, handling them with great care, whereas North Americans view them as a business formality and a convenience. Consequently, Americans often end up insulting the Japanese by treating a business card too casually.
- Arabs typically adopt a direct body orientation when communicating, which can seem aggressive and unnerving to North Americans, who employ a stance that is somewhat less direct. Arabs and South Americans also tend to gesture vigorously when speaking to others, which the less physical North Americans construe as inappropriate and unmannery. It is common in Middle Eastern cultures for both males and females to physically exaggerate responses, whereas in the United States emotions are more likely to be less public. In Japan, individuals may try to hide or mask certain emotions. It is common among Asian cultures to exhibit reserve and emotional restraint.
- North Americans place a high value on looking someone in the eye and tend to distrust those who fail to do so. The Japanese, in contrast, believe eye contact over a sustained period of time shows disrespect. Among Asian cultures, too much eye contact is deemed intrusive. Arabs, on the other hand, maintain direct eye contact for prolonged periods.

The Effects of Cultural Imperialism

Cultural imperialism is the expansion or dominion of one culture over another culture. When one culture presents itself as superior to others, relationships between members of the diverse cultures suffer. Not taking cultural practices into account impedes relationship building, whereas recognizing, respecting, and responding to differences among cultures allows for more meaningful relationships.
We need to be mindful not to rely on stereotypes. Everyone from a particular culture does not necessarily exhibit the same characteristics and communication traits. Failing to develop insights into cultural nuances can lead to lost opportunities and increased levels of tensions between people.

Being unaware of how others outside a culture view that culture's members can be equally costly. Deficient self- and cultural-awareness takes a toll on individuals and society. A survey was conducted of 1,259 teenagers from 12 countries whose main contact with Americans was through popular culture, including television programs and movies they watched and the music they listened to. Based on these experiences, in their judgment, Americans were violent, materialistic, sexually promiscuous, disrespectful of people unlike them, unconcerned about the poor, and prone to criminal activity. The study concluded that the export of American popular culture contributed to impressions of cultural imperialism. Because the way of life in the United States was promoted as superior to other ways of life, feelings of anti-Americanism had been fostered inadvertently.

According to critics of cultural imperialism, the news, entertainment, and products of industrialized countries such as the United States tend to overwhelm the national cultures of other countries. There are signs, however, that the reign of American pop culture is beginning to erode. Increasing numbers of foreign films have been successes in the United States. U.S. music charts also regularly feature vocalists from the United States or other countries who sing in foreign languages, often Spanish. Foreign news services are increasingly influencing news coverage. Such exposure contributes to learning about diverse cultures and ourselves.

**HOW WE FEEL ABOUT DIFFERENCE MATTERS**

When we interact with people whose values or behavioral norms are different from ours, we need to be able to accept that diversity. Being culturally flexible enables us to communicate more effectively.

**The Dangers of Ethnocentrism**

When we reject diversity, we exhibit ethnocentrism, the tendency to see our own culture as superior to all others. This also is a key characteristic of failed intercultural communication. People who are ethnocentric experience great anxiety when engaging with people outside their culture. They may say things like, “They take our jobs,” “They’re everywhere,” or “They’re just not like us.” The more ethnocentric individuals are, the greater their tendency to view groups other than their own as inferior. As a result, they blame others for problems they face and often turn the facts inside out, making unsupported accusations. When we develop sets of “alternative facts,” we close ourselves to learning the truth.
In an effort to combat revisionist histories, some decide to take action. Theo Wilson was one such person. Wilson was a Black man who had posted YouTube videos about culture and race. Wilson soon found himself being trolled by people who attacked him with racial slurs and cited twisted facts. Wilson decided to go undercover online by presenting himself as a White supremacist in an effort to figure out the reasons for their hatred of him. He created a ghost profile, and an avatar named John Carter, and passed himself off as a digital White supremacist. Through the 8 months he communicated with other White supremacists, he came to appreciate how their existence in an alt-right bubble contributed to their ability to generate an endless stream of non-White and non-Christian groups to blame for their problems as they struggled to maintain their cultural traditions; yet they were unable to offer any viable solutions.

The Promise of Cultural Relativism

The opposite of ethnocentrism is cultural relativism. When you practice cultural relativism, instead of viewing the group to which you belong as superior to all others, you work to understand the behavior of other groups based on the context in which the behavior occurs, not just from your own frame of reference.

On the Look Out for Stereotypes and Prejudice

Two other factors, stereotypes and prejudice, also influence our reactions to people whose cultures differ from our own. Stereotypes, again, are mental images we carry around in our heads. They are shortcuts, both positive and negative, that we use to guide our reactions to others. Stereotypes can generate unrealistic pictures of others and prevent us from distinguishing an individual from a group. Racial profiling is just one example of how stereotyping affects us.

Why do we engage in racial profiling? Consider these facts: The human brain categorizes people by race in the first one-fifth of a second after seeing a face. Brain scans suggest that, even when asked to categorize others by gender, people also categorize them by race. Could this be a factor in racial profiling? Racial profiling is indicative of prejudice. Prejudice describes how we feel about a group of people whom, more likely than not, we don't know personally. A negative or positive prejudgment, prejudice arises either because we want to feel more positively about our own group or because we feel others present a threat, real or not. Thus, prejudice leads to the creation of in- and out-groups with out-group members becoming easy targets for discrimination.

Because of the negative expectations that stereotypes and prejudice produce, we may try to avoid interacting with people who are the objects of our prejudice (perhaps those of another race) or attack them when we do. (We discuss stereotypes and prejudice again in Chapter 3.)

CULTURES WITHIN CULTURES

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

We all belong to a number of groups, including those defined by gender, age, racial and ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and national identities. Our cultural identity, based on these group memberships, influences our behavior, including our personal, community, and professional relationships.

Gender Roles
How we define gender roles affects the ways males and females present themselves, socialize, work, perceive their futures, and communicate. U.S. men tend to adopt a problem-solving orientation, while women tend to be relationship oriented.

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

Racial and Ethnic Identities
Our racial and ethnic identities are similarly socially constructed. Some racial and ethnic groups, for example, share experiences of oppression. Their attitudes and behaviors may reflect

ETHICS AND COMMUNICATION

Through Others’ Eyes
Imagine you arrive in the United States from another country. Perhaps unlikely, also imagine that you are totally unfamiliar with what life in the United States is like. In fact, until now you have never viewed American television, watched American films, or listened to American music. You do, however, read and understand English. You find TVGuide.com on the Internet. Based on your perusal of the titles and descriptions of prime-time network and cable programming, what characteristics would you attribute to Americans? How many of your listed characteristics would you consider positive? Negative?

If asked to summarize your discoveries, what conclusions would you draw about what Americans value? What subjects would you identify as of great interest to them? How would you assess their attitudes toward people from other cultures? Finally, what suggestions would you like to offer them?
their struggles, influencing their attitudes toward contemporary issues such as affirmative action.

**Religious Identity**

Religious identity is at the root of countless contemporary conflicts occurring in numerous areas, including the Middle East, India, Pakistan, and the United States, with anti-Muslim sentiment becoming a factor in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The least religiously diverse states in the United States are in the South.

**Socioeconomic Identity**

Similarly, socioeconomic identity frames how we respond to issues of our day. The significant gap between the ultra-wealthy and the middle and working classes in the United States is contributing to their developing different attitudes on a wide array of issues. National identity refers to our legal status or citizenship. People whose ancestors were from other countries may have been U.S. citizens for generations, yet some still perceive them as foreigners. Do you?

**Generational Differences**

In addition to recognizing how gender, racial and ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and national differences affect cultural identity, we also need to acknowledge the role generational differences play in our communication with one another.

Demographers usually classify people into the following generations: matures, boomers, Gen X, Gen Y (the millennial generation), and iGen.

**The Greatest Generation.** Called “the greatest generation,” matures were born between 1900 and 1945. World War II and the Cold War were two of their defining experiences. Matures are known for respecting authority, following the rules, being loyal to their employing organizations, and respecting timeliness.

**The Baby Boom.** Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, came of age during the space race, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and Watergate. They are famous for questioning
authority, displaying a “can do” attitude, and focusing on how to get their way. The first TV
generation, boomers actually had to get off the couch to change channels.

**Generation X.** Gen X-ers, who were born between 1965 and 1982, saw traditional gender roles
bend and flex. The Web emerged during their formative years. They are known for seeking a
work–life balance and being loyal to people, not organizations.

**Generation Y: The Millennials.** Gen Y members, born between 1983 and 1995, are referred to as the
millennial generation or as digital natives. They are known for being technologically savvy.
They also have exceedingly high expectations and think they are proficient multitaskers.
They are apt to spend more time with the Internet and media than they do face-to-face with
others. One out of three Gen Y members is a minority.

**iGeneration.** The postmillennial generation (born after 1995) is the most digitally savvy
among us and the first generation to grow up with smartphones. Also called Generation
Z or the App Generation, the iGeneration has no memory of a time without social media.
Although still forming their identities, they nonetheless are expected to present a crys-
tallized and idealized online identity. Described as conscientious, somewhat anxious,
and predisposed to “play it safe,” they are looked to as prime influencers of tomorrow
and mindful of the future. They tend to embrace anonymous media platforms where
incriminating images disappear virtually instantly. Sometimes referred as “millennials on
steroids,” they are concerned with their personal brands but believe that the generation
before them posted too openly.

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**CAREER BUILDER:**
**GEN-YOU AND FUTURE ME**

Culture influences many of our work orientations, including the ability to work in a team, conceptions
of leadership, ideas of rewards, attitudes toward
gender, ideas about power, the amount of uncer-
tainty one can tolerate, and the topics discussed
with coworkers. Of course, culture also impacts
ability to work with the members of diverse
generations.

1. First, explain how your cultural identification
influences you on each of the variables
identified in the previous paragraph.

2. Next, discuss the behaviors that you
and others of your generation should
adopt in order to work successfully
in organizations alongside members
of earlier and/or later generations.
What would you explain to members
of these other generations regarding
how to work successfully with you?

3. Finally, indicate how you would determine
if an organization’s culture reflected your
values and was a good fit for you.
CULTURES AND CO-CULTURES

A culture is the system of knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that are acquired, shared, and used by its members during daily living. Co-cultures are composed of members of the same general culture who differ in some ethnic or sociological way from the parent culture. In our society, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Japanese Americans, the disabled, gays and lesbians, and the elderly are just some of the co-cultures belonging to the same general culture (Figure 2.2).

FIGURE 2.2

Co-Cultures and Communication Strategies

Have you ever identified as an outsider? People who believe they belong to a marginalized group—that is, a group whose members feel like outsiders—have a number of options to choose from regarding how they want to interact with members of the dominant culture or even if they want to interact with them at all. Have you, or has anyone you know, used any of the strategies that follow?

Assimilation. Co-culture members who use the strategy of assimilation attempt to fit in or join with members of the dominant culture. They converse about subjects that members of the dominant culture talk about, such as cars or sports, or they dress as members of the dominant culture dress. They give up their own ways in an effort to assume the modes of behavior of the dominant culture.

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

Separation. On the other hand, when members of a co-culture resist interacting with members of the dominant culture, they employ the strategy of resistance, or separation. Because these people, such as Hasidic Jews, prefer to interact with each other rather than have contact with people they perceive to be outsiders, they tend to keep to themselves.

Co-Cultures and Communication Approaches

Members of co-cultures can use passive, assertive, aggressive, or confrontational communication approaches in their efforts to accomplish their objectives relative to the dominant culture.

Passive Communication. Co-culture members who use a passive communication approach seek to avoid the limelight. They accept their position in the cultural hierarchy. Rather than defend their ways and oppose others, they embrace the cultural beliefs and practices of the dominant culture. Recent immigrants to the United States who desire to attain citizenship may choose this path, hoping to blend in so that they do not disturb the status quo.

Assertive Communication. Co-culture members who use an assertive communication approach may seek to communicate a shared cultural identity with members of the dominant group. They want others to accommodate their diversity. They are receptive to rethinking a number of their ideas and may give up or modify some while holding on to others. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, for example, many Arab Americans spoke openly of their patriotism, their support for the war against terror, and their desire for others to allow them to live according to their values and beliefs.

More Aggressive Communication. Co-culture members who use a more aggressive communication approach defend their own beliefs and traditions with intensity and may be perceived by members of the dominant culture as “hurtfully expressive” or “self-promoting.” They make it difficult for members of the dominant culture to ignore their presence or pretend they do not exist. They adopt this strategy to demarginalize themselves and actively participate in the world known to members of the dominant culture. In the early years of Act Up, a gay rights organization, members employed this approach (Table 2.1).
TABLE 2.1  PREFERRED STRATEGIES AND COMMUNICATION APPROACHES OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>COMMUNICATION APPROACH</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Lunching alone, living in an area with similar people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Wearing a yarmulke to work, wearing a sari to a party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>Aggressive, confrontational</td>
<td>Staging a protest</td>
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SKILL BUILDER

Assessing Ethnocentrism Versus Cultural Relativism

Evaluate your culturally ethnocentric or relativistic tendencies. Label the following statements as true or false, providing an example of a behavior you used when either interacting with or avoiding interacting with a member of another culture.

1. I go out of my way to be with people who are like me.
2. I can cooperate with people like me, but I find it difficult to cooperate with people unlike me.
3. I trust those who are like me more freely than I trust those who are different from me.
4. I am less fearful when I am around people like me than when I am around people unlike me.
5. I am much more apt to blame people unlike me for causing trouble than I am to blame people like me.
6. I believe that people unlike me should make an effort to become more like me.

What do your answers and examples reveal? Are there some cultures different from your own that you are more comfortable with than others? What steps are you willing to take, if any, to minimize the potentially negative effects of ethnocentrism?
Understanding both the general culture and its co-cultures is essential for effective communication. Merely knowing another’s language is not enough. It also is necessary to become aware of the norms and rules of the culture or co-cultures that might influence the nature of interactions you have with its members. It is important to understand the ways culture shapes interaction.

**Visit the interactive e-Book to access the Exploring Diversity feature "Understanding Other Cultures," which will help you reflect on the different cultures you encounter in your everyday life.**

**DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE IN ACTION**

By exploring five dimensions used to distinguish cultures, we can increase our ability to understand our own and other cultures. These five dimensions are (1) individualistic versus collectivistic, (2) high-context versus low-context communication, (3) high power distance versus low power distance, (4) monochronic versus polychronic, and (5) masculine or feminine culture.

**INDIVIDUALISM VERSUS COLLECTIVISM**

The cultural dimension of individualism versus collectivism reveals how people define themselves in their relationships with others.

Individualistic cultures, such as those of Great Britain, the United States, Canada, France, and Germany, stress individual goals, whereas collectivistic cultures, represented by many Arab, African, Asian, and Latin American countries, give precedence to group goals. Individualistic cultures cultivate individual initiative and achievement, while collectivistic cultures tend to nurture group influences. This means that, whereas the “I” may be most important in individualistic cultures, the “we” is the dominant force in collectivistic ones. In collectivistic cultures, the individual is expected to fit into the group; in individualistic cultures, emphasis is placed on developing the sense of self.

**HIGH CONTEXT VERSUS LOW CONTEXT**

A second way that cultures vary in communication style is in their preference for high-context or low-context communication.

Cultures with high-context communication systems are tradition bound. Their cultural traditions shape the behavior and lifestyle of group members, causing them to appear to members of low-context cultures to be overly polite and indirect in relating to others. In contrast, cultures with low-context communication systems generally encourage members to exhibit a more direct communication style.

Members of low-context cultures tend to gather background information when meeting someone for the first time. Thus, they will ask people they have just met where they went to college, where they live, and who they work for. People from high-context cultures are much less likely to ask such questions up front.

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information. In contrast, people who believe that most messages can be understood without direct verbal interaction reveal their preference for high-context communication. Asian cultures typically emphasize high-context communication, whereas Western cultures typically represent low-context systems. For example, the Japanese traditionally value silence, believing that a person of few words is thoughtful, trustworthy, and respectable. Thus, the Japanese spend considerably less time talking than do people in the United States. This orientation also helps explain why the Japanese often perceive self-disclosures during interaction as socially inappropriate.

**HIGH POWER DISTANCE VERSUS LOW POWER DISTANCE**

Power distance measures the extent to which individuals are willing to accept power differences.

Individuals from **high power distance cultures** such as Saudi Arabia, India, and Malaysia, view power as a fact of life and are apt to stress its coercive or referent nature. Superiors and subordinates in these countries are likely to view each other differently; subordinates are quick to defer to superiors. In contrast, individuals from **low power distance cultures**, such as Israel, Sweden, and the United States, believe power should be used only when it is legitimate; thus, they are apt to employ expert or legitimate power. Superiors and subordinates from low power distance countries emphasize their interdependence by displaying a preference for consultation; subordinates will even contradict their bosses when necessary.35

**MONOCHRONIC VERSUS POLYCHRONIC CULTURE**

Life in some places around the globe is not as fast paced as it is in most of Europe and North America. In Kenya, Argentina, and southern U.S. states, activities are often conducted at a slower rhythm and without the same sense of urgency. According to Hall, cultures approach time in one of two ways: as **monochronic** or **polychronic**.36

People attuned to monochronic time schedule time carefully, one event at a time, preferring to complete an activity before beginning another. In contrast, people brought up using polychronic time are not obsessed with time and refuse to be its slaves. Rather than rigidly scheduling or segmenting their time, they readily give in to distractions and interruptions, even choosing to tackle several different problems or hold several different conversations at the same time. Additionally, rather than trying to be on time, like monochronic people, polychronic people may be late for an appointment, change an appointment right up to the last minute, or opt not to arrive for their appointment at all.37
MASCULINE VERSUS FEMININE CULTURE

Cultures differ in their attitudes toward gender roles. In highly masculine cultures, members value aggressiveness, strength, and material symbols of success. In highly feminine cultures, members value relationships, tenderness in members of both sexes, and a high quality of life. Among highly masculine cultures are Japan, Italy, Germany, Mexico, and Great Britain. Among highly feminine cultures are Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Thailand, and Chile. Masculine cultures socialize members to be dominant and competitive. They tend to confront conflicts head-on and are likely to use a win–lose conflict resolution strategy. In contrast, the members of feminine cultures are more apt to compromise and negotiate to resolve conflicts, seeking win–win solutions.

INTERPRETING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Where a culture falls on the individualistic–collectivistic, low-context versus high-context communication, and power distance scales affects the interactional preferences of its members. Developing a fuller comprehension of these dimensions can improve communication between the members of diverse cultures. For example, knowing whether individuals tend to understate their accomplishments or take credit for personal achievements can keep you from passing judgments that may be ill-founded.

When people from diverse cultures interact, unless their differences in orientation are acknowledged, interactions may well result in misunderstandings.

TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNITY

Like communication, technology and culture shape one another. Technology and computers are changing the traditional definition of a community.

NEIGHBORHOODS NEED NOT BE REAL

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

WE CONSCIOUSLY CAN CHOOSE OUR NEIGHBORS

We can choose our "online neighbors" just as we choose a real neighborhood.

The fear in this development is that communicating solely with like-minded people may lead to the polarization of opinions, whereas communicating with mixed-minded people
A preference for likeness and an intolerance for difference often leads to the development of online in-groups (composed of people whom we perceive to be like us) and out-groups (composed of those we view as different from us) whom we may block or “unfriend.”

On the bright side, sites such as Facebook do let us stay in touch with friends as well as provide opportunities to reacquaint us with those with whom we have lost touch. They also let us friend people we barely know.

OTHER REASONS WE SEEK VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

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

THE POWER OF DIALOGUE

The ability to reach so many different people from so many different places so quickly gives communicators a new sense of power. Wherever we live, we can use the Internet to help bring diversity and new cultures into our lives, changing our social, political, and business lives. Some worry that the culture of computing, especially participating in the Internet’s message boards, attracts extreme political positions and contributes to long-standing international conflicts. In contrast, advocates believe it facilitates international dialogue.

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

FOR GOOD AND BAD

The Internet can be used for good and for evil. Those in control of governments during periods of unrest in such places such as Egypt and China have censored the Web, even suspending access to YouTube and Twitter in the effort to preserve their power by controlling what the people in their countries were able to say and see over the Internet. However, tech-savvy activists usually find ways to circumvent such Internet controls. In fact, the Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East played out on a global digital stage. The numbers of people going online to follow world events or for social networking continues to grow.
The digital divide, which refers to inequality in access to technology and the Internet, is shrinking. Minorities, the elderly, and the poor are going online in greater numbers, democratizing access. Still, gaining access to computers remains a problem in many places around the world because of high poverty levels and the absence or unreliability of electricity.

Let us close this section with some questions for you to think about. When you go online, do you seek to interact in communities based on difference or likeness? In other words, how many of the sites you visit online are visited by people who think and behave similarly to you, and how many are frequented by people who think and behave differently from you? Do you think the Internet is better at creating more insular communities, or does it foster interest in diversity?

**COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

**Practice Communicating Interculturally**

Despite technology’s inroads, there are too many of “us” who do not work as hard as we should at communicating with people from different cultures, simply because we do not wish to live or interact with “them.”44 To counter this, we need to make reducing the strangeness of strangers a priority in our lives. How can we do this?

Focus on mastering and maintaining these skills as you work to eliminate ineffective behaviors.

**Refrain from formulating expectations based solely on your culture.**

When those you interact with have diverse communication styles, it is critical that you acknowledge the differences and accept their validity. By not isolating yourself within your own group or culture, you allow yourself to be more fully a part of a multicultural society and thus a better communicator.

**Recognize how faulty education can impede understanding.**

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

(Continued)
Make a commitment to develop intercultural communication skills for life in a multicultural world.

Although culture is a tie that binds, the creation of a global village makes it essential that you leave the comfort of your cultural niche, become more knowledgeable of other cultures, and strive to be culturally aware.

Familiarize yourself with the communication rules and preferences of members of different cultures so that you can increase the effectiveness of your interactions. Act on these suggestions.

- Seek information from people whose cultures are different from your own.
- Try to understand how the experiences of people from different cultures lead them to develop different perspectives.
- Pay attention to the situation and context of any intercultural communication.
- Make efforts to become a more flexible communicator; don’t insist that people from other cultures communicate on your terms.
Diversity is about all of us, and about how to figure out how to walk through this world together.

Jacqueline Woodson

COMPLETE THIS CHAPTER 2 CHECKLIST

2.1 I can explain the significance of intercultural communication in the global community. □

Globalization is the increasing economic, political, and cultural integration and interdependence of diverse cultures. Diversity is the recognition and valuing of difference. Multiculturalism is the practice of respecting and engaging with people from different cultures. Through intercultural communication, we interpret and share meanings with individuals from different cultures.

2.2 I can explain how and why U.S. society has moved away from a melting pot philosophy, which advocates the assimilation of different cultures into the dominant culture. □

As demographics changed and minorities gained visibility in all areas of society, cultural pluralism, or acknowledging that other cultural groups are equal in value to one’s own, has gained prominence. Respect and appreciation for difference are key in today’s society.

2.3 I can analyze various attitudes toward diversity. □

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to see one’s own culture as superior to all others. Cultural relativism is the opposite of ethnocentrism. Stereotypes are mental images or pictures we carry around in our heads; they are shortcuts we use to guide our reactions to others. A prejudice is a negative or positive prejudgment that leads to the creation of in- and out-groups.

2.4 I can explain influences on cultural identity, distinguishing the difference between cultures and co-cultures. □

Among the groups that influence cultural identity, and on which cultural identity is based, are those defined by gender, age racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, national, and generational identities. A culture is a system of knowledge: beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that are acquired, shared, and used by members. A co-culture is a group of people who differ in some ethnic or sociological way from the parent culture.

2.5 I can illustrate the five main dimensions of cultural variability. □

Cultures vary in five general ways: (1) individualism versus collectivism, (2) high versus low context, (3) high versus low power distance, (4) monochronic versus polychronic, and (5) masculine versus feminine. Individual cultures stress individual goals. Collectivistic cultures stress group
goals. High-context communication cultures are bound to tradition and value indirectness. Low-context communication cultures encourage directness in communication. High power distance cultures view power as a fact of life with subordinates deferring to superiors. Low power distance cultures believe power should be used only if legitimate. Monochronic cultures schedule time carefully. Polychronic cultures refuse to be time’s slaves. Masculine cultures value aggressiveness, strength, and material success. Feminine cultures value relationships, tenderness, and high quality of life.

2.6 I can discuss how technology brings diversity into our lives. 

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

2.7 I can apply communication skills to reduce the strangeness of strangers. 

Although the lessons taught by culture influence our communication style preferences, there are techniques we can use to reduce the strangeness of strangers. By adding to the storehouse of knowledge that underscores our communication competence, we increase our ability to handle communication challenges.

BECOME A WORD MASTER

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