CHAPTER THREE

Intercultural Communication

Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define and explain the importance of intercultural communication.
- Describe the role intercultural communication plays in communicating effectively.
- Define culture and co-culture and what it means to possess a cultural identity.
- Explain the six dimensions or frameworks for studying cultural differences.
- Distinguish among assimilation, accommodation, and separation strategies and their purpose.

CONTRACTS
AVAILABLE
PER MINUTE
CHARGE

MY NAME IS STANLEY MARTINEZ, AND I WAS INTRODUCED TO gangs, drugs, and violence at an early age. My uncle, a burly man covered in tattoos who was just released from the state penitentiary, taught me the rules of our neighborhood, and those rules, along with drugs and alcohol, served as my school of survival. I grew up fast, and the inner strength gained from my uncle's advice, my ability to watch and listen, and my common sense caused the homeboys I ran with to make me their gang leader. Their trust in me not only gave me courage and comfort but it also empowered me. They also broadened my perspective.

All through my life it was as if I were outside myself looking in, and when I lost gang members because of useless deaths on the street, addictions to drugs, and unwanted pregnancies, I realized I had a higher purpose. A member of the Chicano Youth Center (CYC) helped me secure a job, and my employer put me in contact with the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), which helped me enroll in college. In ethnic studies classes I learned of my heritage, and I didn't just begin to appreciate my culture, I began to proudly share it with others.

For my first speech in my speech communication class, I dressed as a gang member and talked about my life story. Halfway through the speech I took off a layer of clothing to reveal a shirt and tie, and I talked about the biases and prejudices of mainstream society that push down members of our ethnic cultures. It was in my speech communication class that I made a commitment to dedicate my life to breaking down the barriers that prevent homeboys and homegirls from entering college.

In this chapter we first look at the role of intercultural communication in communicating effectively and in strategic flexibility. Then we look at the word *culture* and the importance of understanding your role as a cultural being. In the next section, we discuss the importance of intercultural communication. Then we relate this topic to the model of communication discussed in Chapter 1. We present six dimensions or frameworks for studying cultural differences. There are four barriers to intercultural communication, and we examine how to deal with the barriers—which includes a discussion of dominant and nondominant cultures. We look at ways for improving intercultural communication, and, finally, we discuss the influence of the Internet.

The Role of Intercultural Communication in Communicating Effectively and Strategic Flexibility

In Communicating Effectively

What does intercultural communication have to do with communicating effectively? First, we must all agree that it is communication skills—both sending and receiving abilities—that determine how well individuals, organizations, industries, and nations do in both acquiring and applying knowledge. The better the communication, the greater likelihood of success. Second, we must all agree that because of globalization and the importance of information, there is a rising new category in the world known as the **knowledge class.** It is a class supported solely by its participation in the new information industries with little, if any, reliance upon traditional manufacturing, production, or agriculture. The ability of

members of this knowledge class to effectively negotiate the inherent cultural issues in communication will give them a competitive edge in a global world.

Closer to where you live, perhaps, the relevance of intercultural communication is no less important. What if it were your job to coordinate international student services and exchange programs on your college campus? What if you were the manager in a biotech company, responsible for leading a diverse team of scientists doing innovative research?

The world today is characterized by an ever-growing number of communications between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is likely that you will make such contacts because they occur in the areas of business, military cooperation, science, education, mass media, entertainment, and tourism, and because of immigration brought about by labor shortages and political conflicts—as well as informally in Internet chat rooms and on Internet bulletin boards. Just a quick example will make this point. The U.S. Department of Education found that close to 40 percent of public school students were minorities in 2000, (41percent in 2007, according to the U.S. Census Bureau[1]), up from close to 30 percent in 1986. Also, the number of students who spoke a language other than English at home rose by 46 percent from 1979 to 1999. Many teachers are faced with teaching a diverse student population.[2] The communication throughout all these contacts needs to be as constructive as possible to avoid misunderstandings and breakdowns.

In Strategic Flexibility

Intercultural communication has a direct and noticeable effect on each step of strategic flexibility. In the first step (anticipate), you will have a new slant or angle from which to think about potential communication situations. The needs and requirements will be different than without this new knowledge, and forecasting may require the introduction of new or different skills and abilities.

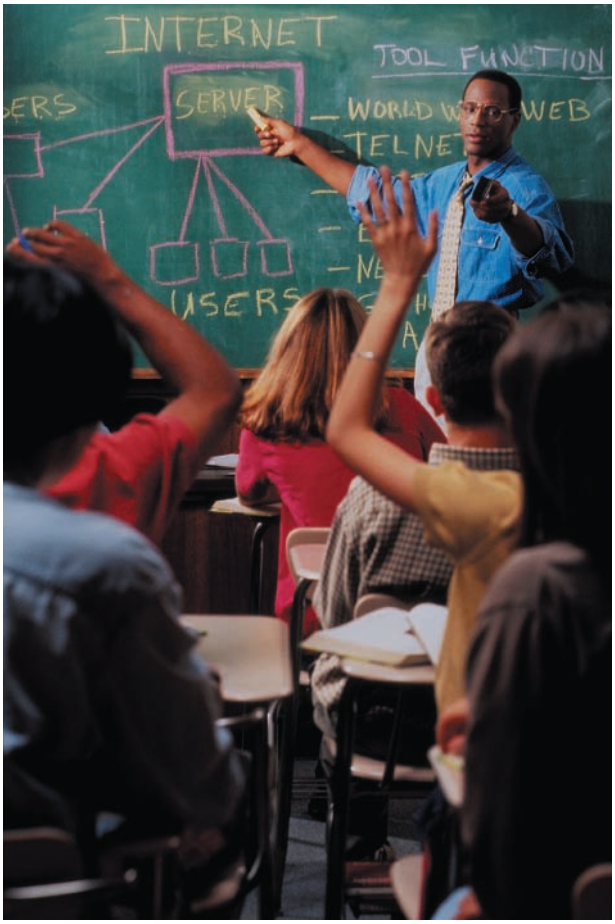
In the second step (assess), the factors, elements, and conditions of situations in which you find yourself will be different. Becoming alert to the introduction of these new ingredients will become easier as your experience broadens. In the third step (evaluate), you will more accurately be able to determine the value and worth of the factors, elements, and conditions and how they bear on your own skills and abilities. Because you will have developed more skills and abilities, in the fourth step (select) you will find it easier to select those most likely to affect the situation.

In the fifth step (apply), you will take greater care and concern and give greater attention to the factors that are likely to be affected. You will understand how to judge their relevance with greater accuracy, and when you reassess and reevaluate your actions you will have increased sensitivity to the intercultural demands of communication situations and how you can enhance, nourish, and encourage further communication efforts.

What Is Culture?

Culture is not a box but a fluid concept that is an ever-changing, living part of you, reflecting your learned, socially acquired traditions and lifestyles. The following is a useful definition. As you read it, recognize that there are no hard edges; rather, there are phenomena that tend to overlap and mingle. **Culture** is:

> *The ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors*



The words you choose reflect your culture because that is where you learned them, and that is where they originated.

(which can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion).[3]

The word **worldview** means an all-encompassing set of moral, ethical, and philosophical principles and beliefs that govern the way people live their lives and interact with others. Your worldview governs the way you think, feel, and behave, whether you realize it or not, and affects in a major way how you view every aspect of life—physical, spiritual, emotional, moral, sociological, and mental.

Culture is significant in your life because it is part of you. It includes your patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.[4] Thus, it is not only maintained but often expressed through your communication. When Jonathan left a prominent position at a prestigious company, his best friend, Adam, explained his departure this way: "Voicing concern and choked with emotion, Jonathan was no longer able to step up his efforts, as his American dream turned into a nightmare, his emotional roller coaster came to a full stop. Sending shock waves through family and friends, he said his final good-byes, and called it quits." Not only was Adam's communication full of cliches, but each one—eight in two sentences—was uniquely American. Where do the words you choose come from? They reflect your culture because that is where you learned them, that is where they originated, and they are likely to be all you know!

Because it is part of you, culture not only influences your perception of your self and your perception of others (discussed in the last chapter) but your perception of everything in life with which you have contact. Think about what might be considered true American values and freedom: things like democracy, individualism, property, equality, freedom, community, and justice. The degree to which you accept these as your own values is also the degree to which you measure your sense of self on those same values. For example, you would feel better about yourself if you were actively involved in your democracy (being informed of the positions of political candidates and voting), expressing your individualism (being assertive and sticking up for your rights), and owning property (having a nice car).

You Are a Cultural Being

One desired outcome from reading about *culture* is that you will recognize and accept *yourself* as a cultural being. **Cultural identity,** composed of ethnicity, culture, gender, age, life stage, beliefs, values, and assumptions, is the degree to which you identify with your culture, and it is determined by the values you support. If you were born and raised in the United States, your cultural identity involves the degree to which you identify with being American. But it doesn't stop there. You have a number of cultural identities—being a member of the student body, a particular race, a specific age group, a religion, and so on. The word **co-culture** represents nonwhites, women, people with disabilities, homosexuals, and those in the lower social classes who have specific patterns of behavior that set them off from other groups within a culture.[5] Which cultural identity is prominent depends on the situation, the people you are with, and the conversational topics.

Stanley Martinez in our earlier example was clearly a member of a gang co-culture. Although that co-culture was distinguished by members who followed the rules of the neighborhood and were often characterized by the use of drugs, alcohol, and violence, he was a member of two other cultures as well. First, he was a Latino American, a large co-cultural group where he lived. He grew up speaking Spanish, living in overcrowded conditions, and suffering extreme social discrimination—having been called lazy, shiftless, lawless, and violent, all unfortunate, negative stereotypes that had a direct effect on his self-concept. Second, he identified with being an American. Born and raised in the United States, his cultural identity involved a very clear identification with the beliefs, values, and assumptions of the dominant culture. The co-cultures of Martinez and their relationship to the dominant culture are depicted in Figure 3-1.

There are three things that you need to understand about possessing a cultural identity. First, cultural identities are learned. You learn the ways of thinking, acting, and feeling from your family first, then from your friends and communities. Second, cultural identities vary in strength. Morgan, for example, had all the speech and language patterns, all the actions and reactions of a typical American student. All were so deeply embedded within her that she wasn't even aware of it until she visited Australia with her debate team.

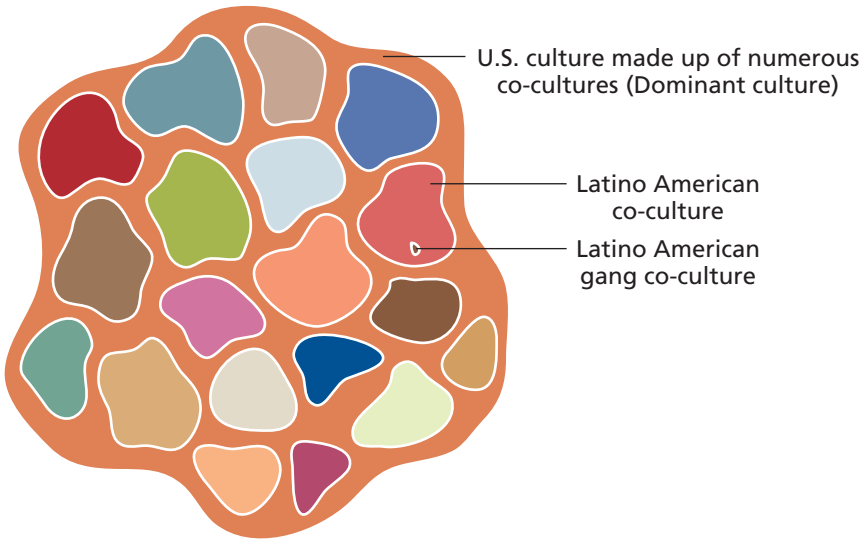


Figure 3-1
Relationship of Co-cultures to Dominant Culture

Third, cultural identities vary in their content. For example, not everyone would define what it means to be an American in the same way, just as students have different ways of defining what it means to be a student. The importance of this point becomes evident when you begin to generalize about cultures. To what extent do you value freedom, pleasure, social recognition, and independence? These are values often ascribed to members of the U.S. culture. What if you were a Japanese American and you held cultural identities for both these cultures? The Japanese culture values self-sacrifice, harmony, and accepting traditions—values that, in part, directly contradict those of the U.S. culture.

When you realize all the cultural identities people possess, you also can see the perplexities associated with the *intersection* of issues of race and ethnicity, language, religion, gender and sexual orientation, generation and age, and so forth, as they operate within individuals. These factors interact and come out differently in different people. Understanding cultural identities offers insights into how individuals relate to the many groups to which they belong, but not only that, to understand others, and yourself, you need to realize the variety of groups that create their (and your) cultural identity.[6]

Cultural identity can be a complex issue. For example, a second-generation girl, living in a minority area, whose parents are Korean immigrants, whose friends are Spanish-speaking co-workers, identifies herself as Korean American, a woman, or an American depending on the **context.**

Cultural identity can be a simple issue, too. Some groups create their own co-cultures to isolate themselves from others. In many cities the immigrants still seem to live and work in isolation and resolve to protect their heritage by maintaining all vestiges of their culture and not assimilating. Regarding your perception of others, you might perceive them based on the same set of values—those that you hold dear.

"Culture is a mental set of windows through which all of life is viewed."[7] It is more than an environment or geographical location in which you live, and it is more than any single component of your personality or background, including your race, ethnicity, nationality, language, gender, religion, ability or disability, or socioeconomic status. These components—and certainly the way they combine and interact—affect your social and educational status as well as your family, community, and professional interactions. Culture is the way you make sense of your life.[8]

From this brief discussion of culture it is easier to understand intercultural communication. When a message is created by a member of one culture, and this message needs to be processed by a member of another culture, **intercultural communication** takes place.[9]

The Importance of Studying Intercultural Communication

The chances for contacts with people from other cultures have increased dramatically with changes in the workplace; U.S. businesses expanding into world markets in a process of globalization; people now connected—via answering machines, faxes, e-mail, electronic bulletin boards, and the Internet—to other people whom they have never met face-to-face; the ever-increasing mobility of U.S. families; and the changing demographics within the United States and changing immigration patterns as well.[10] It is precisely this increased contact that makes studying intercultural communication so important. (See Figure 3-2.)

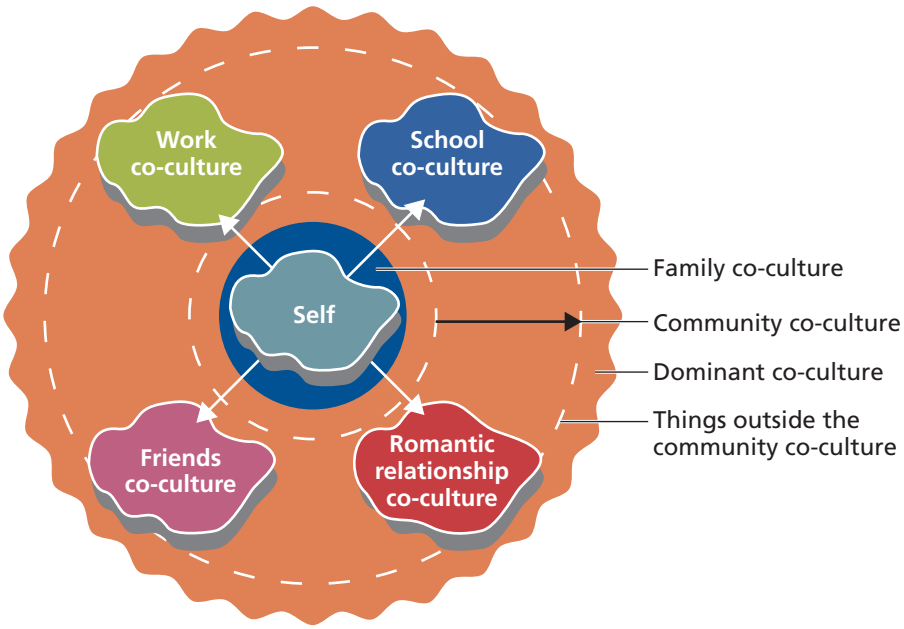


Figure 3-2

The Multicultural Self

The community co-culture may include work, school, friends, and romantic relationships, but these may occur outside the community as well.

Understanding Your Own Identity

The first reason for studying intercultural communication is to develop a sensitivity to various cultural heritages and backgrounds to better understand your own identity. In her book *Torn Between Two Cultures*, Maryam Qudrat Aseel says, "It was through the experience of living and being raised in the United States that I came to truly appreciate and understand my own religion, heritage, culture, and language."[11] Your decisions about the values you want to adopt or continue holding, the lifestyles or orientations you wish to pursue, and even the friends you want to have—not to mention the major, occupation, or profession you desire—are affected by racial, cultural, gender, and social-class factors that affect your personal identity, who you are and who you want to be.[12]

Enhancing Personal and Social Interactions

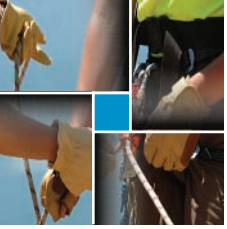
The broader your outlook, the more tolerant and accommodating you become. The chances of having close, personal, interactions with those different from you—whether in age, physical ability, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, race, or nationality—are increasing daily. Such relationships help you learn about the world, break stereotypes, and acquire new skills.[13]

Solving Misunderstandings, Miscommunications, and Mistrust

Until recently our nation has not learned, nor has it needed to learn, to be multiculturally competent.[14] The study of intercultural communication will not just unlock doors closed for generations; it will open those doors and, thus, resolve misunderstandings, miscommunications, and mistrust through honest, open, positive, healthy

STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY

Strategic flexibility requires learning about the world, breaking down stereotypes, and acquiring new skills. Greater tolerance and accommodation will expand your available skills and behaviors as you anticipate, assess, evaluate, and select from your repertoire. In addition, you will reveal greater care, concern, and attention as you apply those skills.



WORKING TOGETHER

The word *multicultural* means different things to different people. The commonly held view suggests that being multicultural means being tolerant of racial and ethnic minorities, mainly of their dress, language, food, religious beliefs, and other cultural manifestations.

For this activity, allow each member of your group to express his or her ideas and feelings on each of the following questions:

1. Multiculturalism seeks to preserve distinctly different ethnic, racial, and cultural communities (co-cultures) without melting them into a common culture. Is this definition of U.S. society an acceptable one?
2. Can diversity be preserved while also establishing a unifying set of cultural symbols—symbols like language? Should teachers in the United States, despite their background or current geographic location, teach students in English alone?
3. Should the word *multicultural* include—in addition to ethnic, racial, and co-cultures—struggles against sexism, heterosexism, classism, linguicism, and ableism?
4. Does multiculturalism encourage racial and ethnic harmony as well as cross-cultural understanding?

communication. People not only fear, but they also distrust the unknown. Trust is gained through knowledge and understanding.

Enhancing and Enriching the Quality of Civilization

Recognizing and respecting ethnic and cultural diversity are important steps on the road to valuing the ways in which diversity enhances and enriches the quality of our civilization. According to Carlos Cortes, "many multiculturalists today seem unwilling to deal with the growing factor of intermarriage. Too much of multicultural education is frozen into a kind of group purity paradigm, when in fact, intermarriage is one of the enormous changes that is taking place in America. For example, one-third of all Latinos born in the United States now marry someone who is not Latino. . . . What will these cultural blends be like?"[15] In 2002 there were 1,674,000 interracial marriages, close to a 40 percent increase in 22 years.[16] When you consider the potential for the new perspectives, cultural insights, and unique wisdom that intermarriages can produce, there is no doubt about the corresponding increase in the quality of our civilization.

Becoming Effective Citizens of Our National Communities

National communities are co-cultural groupings within the country. National communities were established from the beginning as "our forefathers acquired the lands of Native Americans, 34 percent of the territory of Mexico in 1848, and the island of Puerto Rico in 1898."[17] Prior to the 1960s, most of the immigrants to the United States came from Europe, but of the million or so immigrants who now enter the United States every year, 90 percent are from Latin America and Asia. A study by the Population Reference Bureau suggests that by 2050 the United States will be a global society in which nearly half of all citizens will be from today's racial and ethnic minorities.[18]

Intercultural Communication and the Communication Model

Using our broad definition of *culture*, and with the clear understanding that much of communication is intercultural, you can also see how much influence intercultural communication has had on the model of communication in Chapter 1.

It Influences Senders and Receivers

If my values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview are different from yours, given the same subject to respond to and with everything else in the assignment the same, I will compose a significantly different response. As the differences among communicators become greater, the results in thoughts, feelings, and messages become more divergent as well.

It Influences Messages and Feedback

When my parents taught in Pakistan, they were told that raising a question in the classroom is considered an affront to a respected and esteemed authority: the teacher. Instead of interpreting the lack of student response as indifference or lack of understanding, my parents encouraged students to respond among themselves with the teacher as overseer, guide, and outside resource. Jun Liu, in his book *Asian Students' Classroom Communication Patterns in U.S. Universities*, attributes silence in Asian cultures to politeness, the pace of the discussion in U.S. classrooms, fear of wasting class time, and face saving with other international students or with the professor.[19]

Both verbal and nonverbal messages are affected by intercultural communication. Most Americans pay attention and show respect in the classroom by maintaining eye contact with teachers. But Navajo students in the classroom show respect by avoiding eye contact.

It Influences the Setting

Setting can refer to the way communication fits into history: past, present, and future. It also describes how communication fits into a relational setting, such as the influences of power and distance, individualism versus collectivism, or femininity versus masculinity. It can refer to gender, ethnicity, or nationality.

Setting, too, can relate to your own position within a speech community. If you are the only person with a physical disability in an otherwise abled environment, or the only gay man or lesbian in a heterosexual environment, you may face specific expectations or have people project their motivations on your communication.[20]

Studying Cultural Differences

There are a number of ways to contrast a group of cultures to another group of cultures.[21] Geert Hofstede examined cultural distinctions based on deeply rooted values and derived five dimensions—power distance, individualism versus collectivism, femininity versus masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation.[22] A sixth dimension, Edward T. Hall's high context versus low context, follows our discussion of Hofstede's five dimensions.[23]

Cultural differences are manifest in the cultural identities of the people, as the examples within each category will reveal. Cultural identity influences behavior including choices of symbols, heroes and heroines, rituals, and even the values one chooses.

The dimensions discussed here are general tendencies only. They are not always true of a culture, nor true of everyone in a culture. Jackie Low is a good example. Raised in Ohio, she has never been to China, never spoken a word of Chinese, and did not know much about China. Anyone who assumed from her looks that Jackie was Chinese would have been incorrect.

Iris Chang, in her book *The Chinese in America*, verifies Jackie Low's experience when she says about the ethnic Chinese in America: "None can truly get past the distinction of race or entirely shake the perception of being seen as foreigners in their own land."[24]

Power Distance

Power distance is a way of contrasting a group of cultures to another group of cultures by measuring social inequality in each. You will notice power differences in family customs, the relationships between students and teachers, the young and the elderly, language systems, and organizational practices. When Lennie observed Tupac—who was from Africa, a high-power-distance country—he noticed he always did as he was told by their boss, who Lennie thought was authoritarian, dictatorial, and unfair, and Lennie wasn't afraid to say so. When Lennie talked to Tupac, he realized most people from Africa consider their boss a benevolent dictator and do as they are told.

Continents with high power distance include Africa, Latin America, and Near Eastern countries. Low-power-distance countries include the United States, Germany, China, and Great Britain.

Individualism versus Collectivism

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View "Culture and Self" video clip to further understand the value of examining cultural differences.

The degree of integration and orientation of individuals within groups is referred to as **individualism versus collectivism.** When Elaine worked with the Peace Corps in Argentina, she learned about collectivist cultures. Working hand in hand with Eduardo

Our way to contrast a group of cultures to another group of cultures is to use the dimension of power distance—social inequality. The picture reveals potential power distances between students and teacher as well as between the younger and the elderly.

Puerta, a native Argentinian, she realized he had never worked side-by-side with a female and needed to be in control and maintain face. In their discussions, she also came to understand his devotion to his family and preference for government control over the economy and press. Knowing about collectivist cultures helped Elaine not just understand Eduardo, but learn from and respect him as well.

You will notice that people in individualistic cultures such as Great Britain, the United States, Canada, France, and Germany value self-expression, view speaking out as a way to solve problems, and use confrontational strategies to deal with interpersonal problems. In collectivist cultures such as many Arab, African, Asian, and Latin American countries, people have unquestioning loyalty to the group, and when in conflict they use avoidance, intermediaries, and other face-saving techniques.

Femininity versus Masculinity

A way of contrasting a group of cultures to another group of cultures that looks at the division of rules between men and women is called **femininity versus masculinity.**

High-feminine cultures believe women should be nurturant, concerned for the quality of life, and reveal sympathy for the unfortunate. In general, feminine cultures allow cross-gender behaviors. High-masculine cultures believe men should be concerned about wealth, achievement, challenge, ambition, promotion, and that they should be assertive, competitive, tough, and recognize achievements. Masculine cultures are more likely to maintain strictly defined gender roles and, thus, have distinct expectations of male and female roles in society. High-feminine cultures include Africa and the Nordic countries of Europe. High-masculine cultures include Latin America, Great Britain, Japan, and the United States.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance compares tolerance for the unknown when contrasting a group of cultures to another group of cultures. When Amelia entered her math classroom on the first day, she was startled to realize her teaching assistant was from Japan. Because Amelia knew Japan was a low-uncertainty-avoidance country, she was able to put into perspective much of what she learned from Junji Akimoto. Junji behaved quietly without showing aggression or strong emotions. Easy-going and relaxed, he ran an open-ended class.

Cultures that feel threatened by ambiguous and uncertain situations and try to avoid them prefer formal rules to control social behaviors. The best example is China. Low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures need few rules and accept and encourage dissenting views and risk taking. Countries with low uncertainty avoidance include Latin America, Africa, and Japan. The United States is considered "medium" on this dimension—neither high nor low.

Long-Term Orientation

Long-term orientation measures the trade-off between long-term and short-term gratification of needs. This dimension was added by Hofstede as a result of his work with Michael Bond.[25] Bond labeled it Confucian dynamism. Elisha's roommate, Mei Li, explained by example that virtuous behavior in China means acquiring skills and education, working hard, and being frugal, patient, and persevering. Knowing what long-term orientation meant helped Elisha bond with Mei Li and appreciate her industriousness.

CONSIDER THIS

China is experiencing rapid growth, has a voracious appetite for investment, technology, commodities, goods, and services, and is marching steadily into global markets. As Ted Plafker, author of *Doing Business in China* (Warner Business Books, 2007), claims on his very first page, "Any company, whatever its size and whatever its business, *simply must get into China*" (italics his). In his chapter "Cultural Differences and Etiquette," he summarizes his cultural observations in a box entitled, "The Big Stuff, the Small Stuff, and the Little Things":

> *In matters of Chinese etiquette, watch out for the Big Stuff—issues and missteps that can really cost you. These include slighting a senior official, ignoring considerations of face, embarrassing a counterpart, losing your temper, and raising delicate political topics at the wrong time and place. Mistakes like these can cause you lasting harm.*
>
> *Be aware of the Small Stuff—but don't worry too much about it. You can score some valuable points by mastering certain forms of etiquette in banquet situations, gift giving, and the handling of name cards. But a clumsy performance is not likely to cause you much grief.*
>
> *And don't ignore the Little Things! These are issues that may seem trivial to you but can be very important to your Chinese counterparts. Be on time for meetings, don't ask people to skip meals, and be aware of holidays on the Chinese calendar.*

Source: T. Plafker, *Doing Business in China: How to Profit in the World's Fastest Growing Market* (New York: Warner Business Books, 2007).

Questions

1. Do you think all cultures have similar things—big things, small things, and little things—that people unfamiliar with the culture must be concerned about?
2. Do you think that because you are an obvious foreigner, any problems you encountered because of these items—even those Plafker labels as Big Stuff—would be excused simply because the Chinese would recognize you as a foreigner?
3. How much study do you think would be required if you were asked to go to China as your company's representative to negotiate an important business deal?

Those at one extreme on this dimension—having long-term orientation—admire persistence, ordering relationships by status, thriftiness, and having a sense of shame that emphasizes care for others and being loyal and trustworthy. China, Japan, and other Asian countries have an extraordinary long-term orientation toward life. At the other extreme—with short-term orientation—are countries like Finland, France, Germany, and the United States where people value personal steadiness and stability but do not have as much respect for tradition because it prevents innovation, nor for saving face, which can hinder the flow of business. These countries, too, favor reciprocation of greetings, favors, and gifts as related to social rituals.

High Context versus Low Context

High context versus low context contrasts how much information is carried in the **context** (high) and how much in the code or message (low).[26] In high-context communication most of the information is already in the person; very little information is in the coded, explicit, intentionally transmitted part of the message. For example, in the Japanese, African, Mexican, Asian, and Latin American cultures most of the meaning of a message is either implied by the physical setting or is presumed to be part of the individual's beliefs, values, and norms. Often, in long-term relationships communication is high context because the slightest gesture, quickest

glance, or briefest comment can be interpreted without explicit statements or extended explanations.

Why? Because most of the information has already been experienced. Few explicit statements or extended explanations are necessary unless new areas of experience or discussion occur. Some people who date a lot tire of it simply because of the time it takes to move from low context to high context—often the preferred mode of communication because it is easier and doesn't require as many explanations and clarifications.

Most Western cultures prefer low-context messages in which the majority of the information is in the communication itself—not in the context. Computer instructions are low context because they require that every space, period, letter, and number be precisely in the right location; there are no exceptions. All the information is in the instruction, or the instruction does not work.

These six dimensions are basic frames of reference to help you appreciate differences. No culture is better than another; no culture is strange; no culture is unusual or foreign. Using these tools will help reduce misunderstandings by encouraging empathy, tolerance, respect, and perhaps, a more accurate interpretation of messages from people of another culture group.

Barriers to Intercultural Communication

Some people do not know about other cultures, and some do not want to know. There is no doubt that both ignorance (lack of knowledge) and naivete (lack of sophistication) can be important barriers to intercultural communication.

In this section, we will briefly consider ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. These are barriers because each is constructed around a judgment made before any communication takes place that then biases the communication that follows. All communication has a past, present, and future; barriers are part of the past that influence the communication that takes place now and affect all that follows in the future.

Ethnocentrism

When I lectured in Australia, I was told never to show arrogance or in any way to reveal condescension or become patronizing. It was wise advice. My hosts had warned me not to be ethnocentric: a common occurrence, they said, when Americans spoke to Australians.

Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own cultural group's behaviors, norms, ways of thinking, and ways of being are superior to all other cultural groups. Ethnocentrism is not to be confused with *patriotism*, which is devotion to one's country. Ethnocentrism carries devotion to the extreme point where you cannot believe that another culture's behaviors, norms, ways of thinking, and ways of being are as good or as worthy as your own. It becomes a barrier in intercultural communication when it prevents you from even trying to see another's point of view—that is, when it hampers all attempts at empathy.

Stereotyping

Stereotypes are oversimplified or distorted views of another race, another ethnic group, or even another culture. They are simply ways to categorize and generalize from the overwhelming amount of information we receive daily.

The problem with stereotypes is that whether they are positive or negative, once they are established, it is difficult to remove them. Sometimes they exist in our subconscious; these are even more difficult to discard because we are less aware of them. We tend to pick up information from our environment that supports the stereotypes rather than

denies them. This simply embeds them more deeply. To remove them, we must first recognize them, then we must obtain individual information that will counteract them.

Prejudice

Prejudice is a negative attitude toward a cultural group based on little or no experience.[27] The difference between stereotypes and prejudice should become clear in this example: When Chris was young, his parents told him never to go into the city because Mexican gangs ruled the city streets at night. Chris, of course, then had the preconceived notion that all Mexicans were bad people. From this stereotype Chris formed a prejudice against Mexicans. The stereotype told him what a group (Mexicans) was like; the prejudice told him how to feel about the group. All this changed when Chris worked for the city to help pay his way through college, and almost all his co-workers were Mexicans. Their attitude toward Chris as well as their behavior quickly changed the stereotype and altered his prejudice.

Discrimination

Discrimination is the overt actions one takes to exclude, avoid, or distance oneself from other groups.[28] Discrimination takes stereotypes and prejudice one step further—to action, whether overt or covert. You can discriminate against someone subtly by slightly turning away your body when in a conversation, or by avoiding eye contact with them. You can discriminate against people by hurling verbal insults at them. You can discriminate, too, by using physical violence, systematically eliminating the group from which the individual comes, or even in extreme cases by using genocide, as when autocratic tyrants exterminate racial or national groups. Yet another form of discrimination occurs when you exclude others from jobs or from other economic opportunities.

Obviously, discrimination can be interpersonal when you do it against another person, collective (when a number of individuals or a group perform the discrimination), or institutional (when a business or industry chooses not to serve a particular group of people).

Dealing with Barriers to Intercultural Communication

For accurate communication to occur, sender-receivers must be operating from the same perceptual point of view. This is usually not a problem when we are interacting with people from our own race or culture; however, when we communicate with someone from a different race or background, we must realize that this person will be operating from an entirely different point of view.

Communication between Nondominant- and Dominant-Group Members

Much of the literature about communication is written from the point of view of the dominant, or majority, culture. In the United States **dominant culture** includes white people from a European background, while **nondominant culture** includes people of color; women; gays, lesbians, and bisexuals; and those whose socioeconomic background is lower than middle class.

Table 3-1 Assimilation

Nonassertive	Assertive	Aggressive
Emphasizing what the dominant and nondominant groups have in common	Carefully preparing for meeting dominant-group members	Disassociating from one's own group
Acting positive	Manipulating stereotypes	Copying dominant-group behavior
Censoring remarks that might offend the dominant group	Bargaining	Avoiding interaction with other co-cultural groups
Avoiding controversy		Ridiculing oneself

When people are not part of a dominant culture, how do they communicate with people who are? In a tantalizing piece of research, Orbe looked at how people from nondominant groups (people of color; women; gays, lesbians, and bisexuals; and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds) communicated with people from the dominant group.[29] He found that nondominant members adopted one of three basic strategies when they wanted to confront oppressive dominant structures and achieve success: assimilation, accommodation, and separation.

Assimilation Strategies

When nondominants use **assimilation,** they drop cultural differences and distinctive characteristics that would identify them with the nondominant group. As you can see in Table 3-1, there are three types of **assimilation strategies.**

Nonassertive Assimilation. In this type of assimilation, minority members want to belong to the majority group, but they do not want to use aggression to get there. In order to achieve acceptance, they emphasize what they have in common with the dominant group and sometimes censor themselves to fit in. However, it often comes at a terrible cost, as you can see in the following passage:

> *I spent the fifties essentially either going to graduate school or beginning my career as a teacher who was very much in the closet—and very much attempting to hide the fact that I was a lesbian. And that meant putting down and holding down a whole part of myself that was really vital to my being. I have these visions of faculty parties or church parties or picnics to which I would oftentimes go with a gay man friend of mine, and we would put on an incredibly good show.*[30]

Assertive Assimilation. In assertive assimilation, people are likely to take a stronger approach to fitting in. They will often carefully prepare for an encounter with the dominant group. They may overcompensate by trying to be twice as smart, twice as witty, and so forth.

African American writer Patricia Raybon, in her book *My First White Friend,* describes her assertive assimilation stage, which occurred when she was a child living in a predominantly white culture:

> *I was reared to smile, to be polite, to say please and thank you and not to act ugly. I was reared to be the cleanest, nicest, smartest, kindest black child I could possibly be. That would make people like me. White people especially.*[31]

Table 3-2 Accommodation

Nonassertive	Assertive	Aggressive
Increasing visibility	Letting DG members know who they really are	Confronting members of the DG when they violate the rights of others
Avoiding stereotypes	Identifying and working with DG members who have similar goals Identifying members of the DG who can support, guide, and assist Educating others	Referring to DG oppression of NG

Note: DG = Dominant Group; NG = Nondominant Group.

Aggressive Assimilation. In this type of assimilation, minority-group members want to fit into the dominant group at any cost. They will imply that there are no differences between the two groups and will be careful to not do or say anything that would indicate their difference, such as speaking in a dialect or making reference to their own group's behavior. They are so eager to be part of the dominant group that they might ridicule the group they belong to.

Accommodation Strategies

The next main category consists of accommodation strategies. **Accommodation** works toward getting the dominant group to reinvent, or at least change, the rules so that they incorporate the life experiences of the nondominant group. The three types of **accommodation strategies** are summarized in Table 3-2.

Nonassertive Accommodation. In nonassertive accommodation, the person does not act in any way that would cause dominant-group members to be defensive or cautious but tries to make people more aware of the group she or he belongs to and tries to change stereotypes they might have. For example, Anna, who is Mexican, often talks to her co-workers about her friends who are professionals, trying to break the stereotype of Mexicans as manual laborers.

Assertive Accommodation. Those who use this strategy try to achieve a balance between their own group and the dominant group. They try to get their own group's members to know the dominant group by sharing something about their lives; they also attempt to educate others about their group's members. Often they will choose a member of the dominant group as a mentor who can guide, support, and assist them.

They also try to educate the dominant group about their group's culture. Maria, for example, persuades some dominant-group members to go to a Mexican restaurant and guides them through the menu.

Aggressive Accommodation. The strategy in this approach is to get into a dominant group and try to change it, although nondominant-group members may confront dominant-group members to gain an advantage. For example, a woman on a committee that brings international scholars to the university may point out that no women have been chosen. Persons using aggressive accommodation may also warn dominant-group members of their history of oppression.

Table 3-3 Separation

Nonassertive	Assertive	Aggressive
Maintaining barriers between themselves and the DG Keeping away from places where DG members are found	Asserting their voice regardless of the consequences Making references to DG oppression with the goal of gaining advantage	Making direct attacks on DG members Undermining the DG by not letting its members take advantage of their privileged position

Note DG = Dominant Group; NG = Nondominant Group.

Separation Strategies

In the third category of strategies, nondominant-group members have given up. In **separation,** nondominants do not want to form a common bond with the dominant culture, so they separate into a group that includes only members like themselves. During the 1960s and 1970s, many African Americans and women, unhappy that power structures were not changing quickly enough, formed separate groups that excluded members of the dominant group as well as nondominant-group members who did not share their views (Black Muslims exclude other blacks as well as whites). Some of these groups still exist today. Table 3-3 outlines the three types of **separation strategies.**

Nonassertive Separation. In this type of separation, the nondominant person avoids the dominant group whenever possible. Although the nondominant person may work with dominant-group members, he or she won't go out to lunch with them or socialize after work. Through verbal and nonverbal cues, the dominant group senses that this person wants to be left alone. For example, when Tom, who is gay, is asked whether he is going to the office Christmas party, he answers no because he knows that the man he lives with would not be welcome.

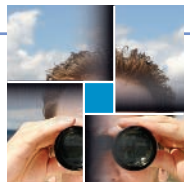
Some nondominant groups make no attempt to become part of the dominant group. An example is the Hmong people who immigrated to the United States because they were no longer safe in Laos. Anne Fadiman describes them after they had lived for 17 years in the United States:

> *Seventeen years later, Foua and Nao Kao use American appliances but they still speak only Hmong, celebrate only Hmong holidays, practice only Hmong religion, cook only Hmong dishes, sing only Hmong songs, play only Hmong musical instruments, tell only Hmong stories, and know far more about the current political events in Laos and Thailand than about those in the United States. . . . It would be hard to imagine anything further from the vaunted American ideal of assimilation, in which immigrants are expected to submerge their cultural differences in order to embrace a shared national identity.*[32]

Assertive Separation. Persons practicing assertive separation work to form organizations where they can be separate from the dominant group. While in these groups, they work against any dominant-group messages that imply the dominant group is superior and they are inferior. One communication strategy they use is reminding the dominant group of their oppression. Patricia Raybon, whose passage we quoted in the assimilation discussion, describes some of the feelings that led to her assertive separation stage:

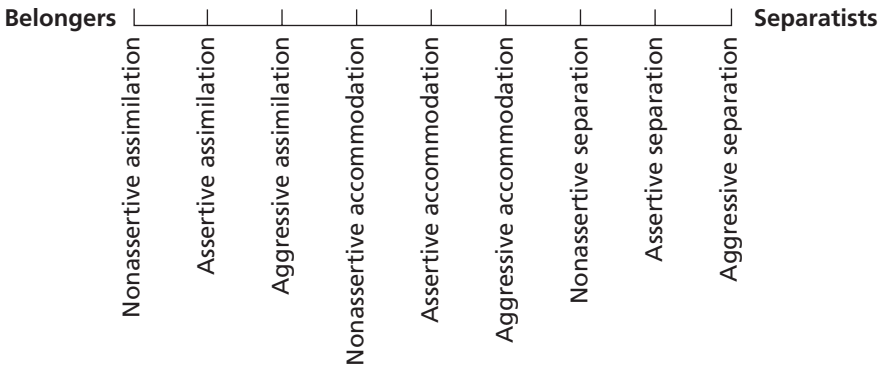
> *White people—that relentless, heavy presence. Never benign. Never innocent. "White people" as a category embodied in my view a clear and certain evil—an arrogant*

REALITY CHECK



You may not have experience with some (or any) of the international cultures that are used throughout this chapter for examples, but if you have experience with Americans with Latino, African, or European heritages, the same comments apply. Using specific examples from your own experience, cite instances of assimilation, accommodation, or separation strategies in action. Do the descriptions in this textbook make sense to you? Do the descriptions seem logical? If you were a member of the nondominant culture, which strategy would *you* be likely to use? Why? How might your strategy be implemented? How would its implementation influence how effectively you communicated?

Figure 3-3
Nondominant Persons' Communication to Dominant Groups



> *malevolence—that had done unspeakable things that I couldn't ignore because I knew the facts of these things. Names and dates and numbers. And the facts haunted me and the numbers justified my hate for all of the evil that I believed white people had done.*[33]

Aggressive Separation. In aggressive separation, people separate from the dominant group and expect their fellow nondominant-group members to do so too. They are very critical of those who practice assimilation or accommodation. It is not uncommon for groups fighting against oppression to separate from the dominant group.

If members of these groups have to have interaction with the dominant group (for example, at work), they will try to undermine the dominants by not letting them take advantage of their privileged positions. For example, an employee would bring legal action against his or her boss for discrimination.

The Consequences of Nondominant- and Dominant-Group Communication

Orbe's research does not lead to a very optimistic picture of American society. If we depict his results on a continuum, as in Figure 3-3, on one end are people who want to belong so much that they are willing to give up or suppress their own cultures, while on the opposite end are people who have decided that they cannot live in the dominant culture of the United States and have gone off on their own. In a country that prides itself on being a place where people from all cultures can live in harmony, nothing on the continuum is acceptable to our vision of what democracy should be.

Improving Intercultural Communication

Sometimes in an intercultural-communication situation with a person different from us, we may interpret the other person as *abnormal*, *weird*, or simply *different*. It is important to learn to control the human tendency to translate "different from me" into "less than me."[34] Rather, we need to raise questions. Are there effective ways of dealing with different kinds of people? Can I develop a repertoire of five or six approaches that will help me reach others in real and meaningful ways?[35]

Engage in mindfulness. Mindfulness means paying attention to what is going on in the present moment without judgment.[36] To do this, you must trust your direct and immediate experience. Second, you must show patience—a willingness to observe and describe (perhaps *intra*personally only) what is happening without bias. You simply

throw yourself into the present moment and glean wisdom through the trial and error of learning by direct experience. Third, you must accept "what is, as is," in other words, accept whatever it is that the universe serves up. It means accepting life on life's own terms, regardless of *your* feelings about it and (using SF) discovering effective strategies to cope with and eventually appreciate whatever is happening.

Few people live mindfully. They don't meet each moment of life as it presents itself, with full awareness, and allow their judgments to fall away. Not only do they churn out judgments about themselves and others, but they do a number of things at the same time (multitasking); get caught up in feelings about the past or future; avoid any uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, or situations; and disconnect from what is happening right in front of them. If this description fits the way they live, it is easy to see why mindfulness is seldom practiced and is so important. Its value is that because it is an instant of pure awareness *before* they conceptualize, identify, focus their eyes or mind on, objectify, clamp down on it mentally, segregate it from the rest of existence, or think about it in any way, it reminds them of what they should be doing, helps them see things as they really are, and assists them in seeing the deep nature of what it is they are about to examine.

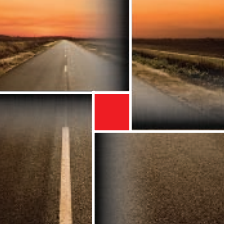
Pay attention to your words and actions. It is only through your thoughtful communication with others that you become aware of your own thinking patterns, assumptions, perceptions, prejudices, and biases.[37] When students come to Cruz-Janzen's classes expecting to learn how to communicate with nonwhites, she tells them they are first going to study themselves, their gender, racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and physical (ability, disability, and appearance) socialization. Cruz-Janzen has a very clear motive in this: "As long as whites continue expecting others to explain themselves, whites are setting themselves as the norm, the normal ones, against whom all others must be judged and measured."[38]

Control your assumptions. An **assumption** is a taking for granted or supposition that something is a fact. You can learn from generalizations about other cultures, but those generalizations turn sour when you use them to stereotype or oversimplify.[39]

- Don't assume that there is one right way (yours) to communicate. Question your assumptions about the "right way" to communicate.
- Don't assume that breakdowns in communication occur because others are on the wrong track. The point isn't "who is to blame for the breakdown?" it is "who can make the communication work?"[40] Remember, ineffective communication can occur for a variety of reasons:
  - You may not have transmitted your message in a way that can be understood.
  - Others may misinterpret what you say.[41]
- Don't assume that the preferred rules of interpersonal relationships you have learned in your culture apply universally across all cultures. They do not.
- Don't assume that your cultural definitions and successful criteria of conflict management apply universally across all cultures. They do not.[42]
- Don't assume because another's values and beliefs differ from your own that you are being challenged.
- Don't assume that you can learn about intercultural communication by staying in your comfort zone. Even if it is awkward at first, you need to expose yourself to different cultures.[43]
- Don't assume you know what is best for someone else.

STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY

To apply the steps of strategic flexibility may require that you ask questions that help you more accurately anticipate, assess, evaluate, select, and apply your abilities and skills. Questions can also help you demonstrate the care, concern, and attention that may reveal true sensitivity—opening the doors to effective intercultural communication.



ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW

In her speech, "Success Requires Imagination, the Right Business Plan and the Right Environment," Patricia Russo, chief executive officer of Alcatel-Lucent, claims that despite all the technical developments, successful innovation in business is only 1 percent technical and 99 percent human. Regarding intercultural communication, Russo writes:

> *Think about it. The Internet has enabled the small pottery maker in Tuscany to do business directly with the restaurateur in San Francisco. But while the technology can bridge the miles, only people can bridge cultures. As such, global competitiveness requires cross-cultural partnerships with a diverse set of customers, governments, regulators, universities and research institutes around the world. (p. 225)*

Questions

1. Russo says, "But while the technology can bridge the miles, only people can bridge cultures." What does she mean by this comment? Do you think her statistic that "truly successful innovation is only 1 percent technical and 99 percent human" (p. 224) is accurate?
2. If it is true that "only people can bridge cultures," what kind of burden does this place on the shoulders of those who plan to go into business and industry following college?

Source: P. Russo, "Success Requires Imagination, the Right Business Plan and the Right Environment: Building on the Telephony Network's Traditional Strengths," *Vital Speeches of the Day* LXXIII, no. 5 (May, 2007): 223–226.

Engage in transpection. Instead of assuming—a process most people begin quickly, naturally, and often subconsciously—take a moment to relax and reflect. **Transpection** is the process of empathizing across cultures.[44] "Achieving transpection, trying to see the world exactly as the other person sees it, is a difficult process. It often involves trying to learn foreign beliefs, foreign assumptions, foreign perspectives, and foreign feelings in a foreign context. Transpection, then, can only be achieved by practice and requires structured experience and self-reflection."[45]

Striving *toward* transpection can help you avoid assumptions and move you closer to tolerance, sensitivity, respect, empathic listening, and effective communication responses. Listen carefully to others, understand their feelings, be interested in what they have to say and sensitive to their needs, and try to understand their points of view.[46]

Gain knowledge. The greater your cultural and linguistic knowledge, and the more your beliefs overlap with those from other cultures, the less likelihood for misunderstandings.[47] You need to read, observe, ask questions, and visit places where there are people from different races and ethnic backgrounds.

When Madison found out her new roommate was from Saudi Arabia, she immediately worried because of what she'd heard in the media about Saudi terrorists. She went online to find out more about the country—customs, traditions, religion, and anything else she could discover. The words *Saudi Arabia* produced over 11 million Web sites. Using online resources such as The World Factbook, Saudi Arabia Information Resource, Saudi newspapers, and the Lonely Planet World Guide, Madison strove toward transpection to help herself avoid assumptions.

Gain experience. You cannot learn how to be a good communicator just by reading, observing, asking questions, or doing research on the Internet. But gaining experience doesn't require making actual visits to foreign countries or foreign cultures. Find an individual of another culture, and ask if the two of you could have a conversation about intercultural communication. With that as your focus, ask some pointed, specific questions designed to help you better understand him or her and

others of the same culture. The following 10 questions are designed to get your conversation started:

- How do you, or other members of your culture, cope with and adapt to unfamiliar cultural environments?
- How can members of other cultures begin to communicate with members of your culture?
- What factors can increase our effectiveness in communicating?
- If we had a conflict, what strategies would be successful for managing it?
- What important factors contribute to the development of interpersonal relationships with you or with members of your culture?
- What changes have you noticed in yourself as a consequence of your experiences in a new culture?
- How can I become more *intercultural* as a result of our contact and communication with members of your culture?
- Can we develop community with members of your culture?[48]
- What are some of the worst offenses people outside your culture make in communicating with you or with members of your culture?
- What do you feel are some of the worst offenses you have made as you have become acclimated into this culture?

There are other ways to gain experience in intercultural communication—to obtain a broader worldview. Frequent ethnic restaurants, watch world news in addition to local news, read books written by authors from other countries, learn another language, and when countries with which you are unfamiliar are mentioned, find them on a map. Listen to world music, rent foreign films, and travel—whether in person or through videos. Your local library has dozens of videos on foreign countries. But don't just observe. Converse with people of other cultures. Take part in cultural celebrations that differ from your own. Volunteer to serve on committees, teams, or groups in which members of other cultures will be serving. Listen, engage, and keep asking questions. Take time to understand what people believe about childrearing, educational opportunities, world politics, and life in general.

How you learn about intercultural communication will depend on your willingness to find it out. You will see that the knowledge and understanding you gain is well worth any effort you put forth.

The Internet and Intercultural Communication

One of the most important influences on intercultural communication is the Internet. We are increasingly linked together across the globe, and we can connect with people on the other side of the world as quickly as we do with friends and family at home.

Zaid Sabah, writer of an article entitled, "Parents disapprove, but Internet romance a big hit,"[49] offers a glimpse of how the Internet is viewed in a conservative society such as Iraq. "Layla Ahmad, retired teacher and mother of three," Sabah begins his essay, "considers the Internet among the most dangerous post-invasion developments in Iraq. . . . We don't accept that our daughters meet boys through the Internet.

It's dangerous, and you can't observe your children and what they are talking about."[50] This is an understandable point of view when you consider Iraq is a country where arranged marriages are common, premarital relations of any sort are frowned on, and the Internet represents a threat to the established order—Iraqi traditions. Perhaps it is just this point of view that makes it so popular: It gives young Iraqis a way to meet members of the opposite sex in a society that offers few such opportunities and to set up real dates. Arranging dates online is fine, but finding places to physically meet is difficult because most single Iraqis live with their parents, and it is dangerous to go out at night. University students can meet on campus where it is relatively safe and often walk around or sit together.

For students in the United States, the Internet serves as a vehicle not only for searching for common values and understanding, but also for hearing and seeing in real-time events that take place thousands of miles away. It can bridge the culture gap among nations of the world. For example, it has helped worldwide organizations function by bringing together people from different physical locations with common interests and goals.

Knowing about the Internet and having read about intercultural communication, you can see that the relationship between communication technologies and intercultural communication raises some interesting questions. In an article for *American Communication Journal*,[51] Randy Kluver poses some of them regarding the effect of the Internet when it comes to the distinction between high- and low-context cultures, discussed previously in this chapter. Can persons from high-context backgrounds rely on the same subtle nonverbal cues and situational variables when using the Internet? In what ways are messages from those in high-context cultures transformed when there is an absence of nonverbal cues, environment and situational variables, and imprecise indications of status and hierarchy? Does high-context communication become low context considering these circumstances? Is communication across cultures via the Internet easier when nonverbal cues are removed? Do new nonverbal cues arise in electronic communication? What constitutes communication competence in the Internet-intercultural context? Knowing about both the Internet *and* intercultural communication allows you to generate legitimate questions regarding both means to and ends of effective Internet intercultural communication.

Cultural Awareness Self-Assessment Form

For each statement circle the numerical score that best represents your performance, skill, or ability using the following scale: 7 = Outstanding; 6 = Excellent; 5 = Very good; 4 = Average (good); 3 = Fair; 2 = Poor; 1 = Minimal ability; 0 = No ability demonstrated.

1.	I listen to people from other cultures when they tell me how my culture affects them.	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
2.	I realize that people from other cultures have fresh ideas and different points of view to bring to my life and to the workplace.	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
3.	I give people from other cultures advice on how to succeed in my culture.	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
4.	I give people my support even when they are rejected by other members of my culture.	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
5.	I realize that people outside my culture could be offended by my behavior. I've asked people if I have offended them by things I have done or said and have apologized whenever necessary.	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
6.	I realize that when I am stressed I am likely to make myself and my culture right and another culture wrong.	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
7.	I respect my superiors (boss, teacher, supervisor, group leader, etc.) regardless of where they are from. I do not go over their heads to talk to someone from my culture to try to get my way.	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
8.	When I am in mixed company, I mix with everyone. I don't just stay with people from my culture, or only with people from the dominant culture.	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
9.	I go out of my way to work with, recruit, select, train, and promote people from outside the dominant culture.	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
10.	When people in my culture make jokes or talk negatively about other cultural groups, I let them know that I don't like it.	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

TOTAL POINTS: _____

Go to the Online Learning Center at **www.mhhe.com/hybels9e** to see your results and learn how to evaluate your attitudes and feelings.

www.mhhe.com/hybels9e >

Source: Adapted from *Cultural Awareness Self-Assessment Form 3,* I CANS (Integrated Curriculum for Achieving Necessary Skills), Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Washington State Employment Security, Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, Adult Basic and Literacy Educators, P.O. Box 42496, 711 Capitol Blvd., Olympia, WA 98504. Retrieved March 14, 2003, from **http://www.literacynet.org/icans/chapter05/cultural3.html**

Summary

Intercultural understanding increases both sending and receiving abilities, making communication between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds as constructive as possible. With broader experience, the care and concern you demonstrate will not just nourish intercultural communication but will encourage further communication efforts as well.

Culture is the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors (which can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, or religion).

To accept yourself as a cultural being means embracing a cultural identity composed of ethnicity, culture, gender, age, life stage, beliefs, values, and assumptions. A cultural identity is learned, varies in its strength, and varies in its content as well.

Five reasons for studying intercultural communication include (1) better understanding your own identity, (2) enhancing your personal and social interactions, (3) helping solve cultural misunderstandings, miscommunication, and mistrusts, (4) valuing the ways it enriches the quality of our civilization, and (5) becoming effective citizens of our national communities.

Intercultural communication influences the communication model first by its effect on the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview of senders and receivers; second, by its effect on verbal and nonverbal messages; and, third, by the influences it has on the historical setting, relational setting, and a person's position within a speech community.

Power distance relates to social inequality. Individualism versus collectivism relates to the degree of integration and orientation of individuals. Femininity versus masculinity pertains to the division of roles between women and men. Uncertainty avoidance describes the degree of tolerance for the unknown. Long-term orientation relates to tradeoffs between long-term and short-term gratification of needs. Finally, high versus low context refers to the amount of information already contained in the person or context versus the amount in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message.

The four barriers to intercultural communication include ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. To deal with barriers, nondominant-group members use one or more of three main strategies to get what they want from dominant-group members: assimilation, accommodation, or separation.

Five ways to improve intercultural communication are: (1) pay attention to your own words and actions; (2) control your assumptions; (3) engage in transpection—the process of empathizing across cultures; (4) gain knowledge; and (5) gain experience.

The Internet offers a vehicle for searching for common values, understandings, and approaches to managing a world of different cultures.

Key Terms and Concepts

Use the Online Learning Center at **www.mhhe.com/hybels9e** to further your understanding of the following terms.

Accommodation 70
Accommodation strategies 70
Assimilation 69
Assimilation strategies 69
Assumption 73
Co-culture 59
Context 60
Cultural identity 59
Culture 57
Discrimination 68
Dominant culture 68
Ethnocentrism 67
Femininity versus masculinity 65
High context versus low context 66
Individualism versus collectivism 64
Intercultural communication 60
Knowledge class 56
Long-term orientation 65
National communities 62
Nondominant culture 68
Power distance 64
Prejudice 68
Separation 71
Separation strategies 71
Stereotypes 67
Transpection 74
Uncertainty avoidance 65
Worldview 58

Questions to Review

1. What is the role intercultural communication plays in communicating effectively and in strategic flexibility?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the definition of *culture* offered in this textbook?
3. What does it mean to possess a cultural identity?
4. Can you make a case for the study of intercultural communication?
5. What are the likely components of a multicultural self?
6. How does intercultural communication relate to the model of communication?
7. What are the six dimensions that can be used as a framework for studying cultural differences?
8. What are four barriers to intercultural communication, and how do they work? Why are they considered barriers?
9. What are the three ways members of a nondominant group work to get what they want from dominant-group members?
10. What are some ways for improving intercultural communication?
11. What is the process of transpection, and why is it important?
12. What is the influence of the Internet on intercultural communication?

Go to the self-quizzes on the Online Learning Center at **www.mhhe.com/hybels9e** to test your knowledge of the chapter concepts.