Chapter 2 Culture and Interpersonal Communication

2.1 Define culture, enculturation, and acculturation and explain the relevance of culture to interpersonal communication.

2.2 Explain the seven cultural differences identified here and how these impact on interpersonal communication.

2.3 Define intercultural communication and explain and use the guidelines for making intercultural communication more effective.

This chapter discusses one of the foundation concepts of interpersonal communication, culture—an often misunderstood concept. More specifically, this chapter explains the nature of culture and its relationship to interpersonal communication, the major differences among cultures and how these differences affect interpersonal communication, and the ways you can improve your own intercultural communication.

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Culture 2.1 Define culture, enculturation, and acculturation and explain the relevance of culture to interpersonal communication.

Culture may be defined as (1) the relatively specialized lifestyle of a group of people (2) that is passed on from one generation to the next through communication, not through genes.

(1) Included in a social group’s “culture” is everything that members of that group have produced and developed—their values, beliefs, artifacts, and language; their ways of behaving; their art, laws, religion, and, of course, communication theories, styles, and attitudes.

(2) Culture is passed from one generation to the next through communication, not through genes. Culture is not synonymous with race or nationality. The term culture does not refer to skin color or the shape of one’s eyes because these characteristics are passed on through genes, not communication. Of course, because members of a particular ethnic or national group are often taught similar beliefs, attitudes, and values, it’s possible to speak of “Hispanic culture” or “African American culture.” It’s important to realize, however, that within any large group—especially a group based on race or nationality—there will be enormous differences. The Kansas farmer and the Wall Street executive may both be, say, German American, but they may differ widely in their attitudes, beliefs, and lifestyles. In some ways, the Kansas farmer may be closer in attitudes and values to a Chinese farmer than to the New York financier.

An interesting perspective on culture can be gained by looking at some of the popular metaphors for culture; seven of these metaphors are identified in

Table 2.1. **Cultural Evolution and Cultural Relativism**

The nature of culture can be further explained by looking at two opposing views: cultural evolution and cultural relativism. The cultural evolution approach (often called social Darwinism) holds that much as the human species evolved from

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earlier life forms to Homo sapiens, cultures also evolve. Under this view, some cultures may be considered advanced and others primitive. Most contemporary scholars reject this view, however, because the judgments that distinguish one culture from another have no basis in science and are instead based on individual values and preferences.

Cultural relativism theory, on the other hand, holds that all cultures are different but that no culture is either superior or inferior to any other (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992; Mosteller, 2008). As you read this chapter, consider your own culture, what you learned, how it was taught, and how it currently influences your thinking and behavior.

**Sex and Gender**

In ordinary conversation, sex and gender are often used synonymously. In academic discussions of culture, however, they’re more often distinguished. Sex refers to the biological distinction between male and female; sex is determined by genes, by biology. Gender, on the other hand, refers to the “social construction of masculinity and femininity within a culture” (Stewart, Cooper, & Stewart, 2003). Gender (masculinity and femininity) is what boys and girls learn from their culture; it’s the attitudes, beliefs, values, and ways of communicating and relating to one another that boys and girls learn as they grow up. Although sex is transmitted genetically and not by communication, gender may be considered a cultural variable—largely because cultures teach boys and girls different attitudes, beliefs, values, and ways of communicating and relating to others. Thus, you act like a man or a woman in part because of what your culture has taught you about how men and women should act. This does not, of course, deny that biological differences also play a role in the differences between male and female behavior. In fact, research continues to uncover biological roots of male/female differences we once thought were entirely learned (McCroskey, 1998).

**The Transmission of Culture**

Culture is transmitted from one generation to another through enculturation, the process by which you learn the culture into which you’re born (your native culture) and develop an ethnic identify (an identification and adoption of the beliefs and customs of the culture). Parents, peer groups, schools, religious institutions, and government agencies are the main teachers of culture. A somewhat different process of learning culture is acculturation, the process by which you learn the rules and norms of a culture different from your native culture. In acculturation, your original or native culture is modified through direct contact with or exposure to a new and different “host” culture. For example, when immigrants settle in the United States (the host culture), their own culture becomes influenced by U.S. culture. Gradually, the values, ways of behaving, and beliefs of the host culture become more and more part of the immigrants’ culture, a process known as assimilation; the immigrant assimilates into the dominant culture’s values, beliefs, and language, for example. At the same time, of course, the host culture also changes as it interacts with the immigrants’ culture. Generally, however, the culture of the immigrant changes more. The reasons for this are that the host country’s members far outnumber the immigrant group and that the media are largely dominated by and reflect the values and customs of the host culture (Kim, 1988). New citizens’ acceptance of the new culture depends on many factors. Immigrants who come.

from cultures similar to the host culture will become acculturated more easily. Similarly, those who are younger and better educated become acculturated more quickly than do older and less well-educated people. Personality factors also play a part. Persons who are risk takers and open-minded, for example, have greater acculturation potential. Also, persons who are familiar with the host culture before immigration—through interpersonal contact or through media exposure—will be acculturated more readily than those who lack this familiarity.

**The Importance of Culture**

Because of (1) demographic changes, (2) increased sensitivity to cultural differences, (3) economic and political interdependence, (4) advances in communication technology, and (5) the culture specific nature of interpersonal communication (what works in one culture does not necessarily work in another), it’s impossible to communicate effectively without being aware of how culture influences human communication. Demographic Changes Most obvious, perhaps, are the vast demographic changes taking place throughout the United States. At one time, the United States was a country largely populated by Europeans, but it’s now a country greatly influenced by the enormous number of new citizens from Latin and South America, Africa, and Asia. The same demographic shift is noticeable on college campuses. These changes have brought different interpersonal customs and the need to understand and adapt to new ways of communicating. Internet dating encourages dating diversity, largely because of the ease in meeting people and because of the enormous number of people with whom you might interact (Dean, 2010b). And not surprisingly, interracial and interethnic marriages are increasing. In 1980, there were fewer than 6.7 percent interracial marriages; in 2010, 14.6 percent of the marriages were interracial (Passel, Wang, & Taylor, 2010). People still prefer to interact with those who are similar to them in race and religion, although intercultural relationships are increasing. Corporations are recognizing that a culturally diverse workforce is beneficial to their bottom line and are moving in the direction of greater diversity. Understanding the role of culture in interpersonal communication will enable you to function more effectively in this newly diverse environment (Hewlett, Marshall, & Sherbin, 2013). Sensitivity to Cultural Differences As a people, we’ve become increasingly sensitive to cultural differences. American society has moved from an assimilationist attitude (people should leave their native culture behind and adapt to their new culture) to a perspective that values cultural diversity (people should retain their native cultural ways). We have moved from the metaphor of the melting pot, in which different cultures blended into one, to a metaphor of a spaghetti bowl or tossed salad, in which there is some blending but specific and different tastes and flavors still remain. In this diverse society, and with some notable exceptions—hate speech, racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism come quickly to mind—we are more concerned with saying the right thing and ultimately with developing a society where all cultures coexist and enrich one another. As a bonus, the ability to interact effectively with members of other cultures often translates into financial gain and increased employment opportunities and advancement prospects as well. economic and political interdependence Today, most countries are economically dependent on one another. Our economic lives depend on our ability

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cultures. Similarly, our political well-being depends in great part on that of other cultures. Political unrest in any place in the world—South Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, to take a few examples—affects our own security. Intercultural communication and understanding seem more crucial now than ever before advances in Communication technology The rapid spread of technology has made intercultural communication as easy as it is inevitable. News from foreign countries is commonplace. You see nightly—in vivid detail—what is going on in remote countries, just as you see what’s happening in your own city and state. Of course, the Internet has made intercultural communication as easy as writing a note on your computer. You can now communicate just as easily by e-mail or any social network site with someone in Asia or Europe, for example, as you can with someone living a few blocks away or in the next dorm room. Culture-Specific nature of interpersonal Communication Still another reason why culture is so important is that interpersonal competence is culture-specific; what proves effective in one culture may prove ineffective in another. Many Asians, for example, often find that the values they were taught— values that promote cooperation and face-saving but discourage competitiveness and assertiveness—work against them in cultures that value competition and outspokenness (Cho, 2000). The same would be true for executives from the United States working in Asia. An example of these differences can be seen in business meetings. In the United States, corporate executives get down to business during the first several minutes of a meeting. In Japan, business executives interact socially for an extended period and try to find out something about one another. Thus, the communication principle influenced by U.S. culture would advise participants to get down to the meeting’s agenda during the first five minutes. The principle influenced by Japanese culture would advise participants to avoid dealing with business until everyone has socialized sufficiently and feels well enough acquainted to begin negotiations. Another example involves cultural differences based on religious beliefs. Giving a birthday gift to a close friend would be appreciated by many, but Jehovah’s Witnesses would frown on this act because they don’t celebrate birthdays (Dresser, 2005). Neither principle is right, neither is wrong. Each is effective within its own culture and ineffective outside its own culture.

**The Aim of a Cultural Perspective**

Because culture permeates all forms of communication, it’s necessary to understand its influences if you’re to understand how communication works and master its skills. As illustrated throughout this text, culture influences communications of all types (Jandt, 2007; Moon, 1996). It influences what you say to yourself and how you talk with friends, lovers, and family in everyday conversation (for example, Shibazaki & Brennan, 1998). It influences how you interact in groups and how much importance you place on the group versus the individual. It influences the topics you talk about and the strategies you use in communicating information or in persuading. It influences how you use the media and the credibility you attribute to them.

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probably grew up with a youth bias (young is good, old is not so good)—an attitude the media reinforce daily—and might well assume that this preference for youth would be universal across all cultures. But this preference isn’t universal, and if you assume it is, you may be in for intercultural difficulties. A good example is the case of the American journalist in China who remarked that the government official he was talking with was probably too young to remember a particular event—a comment that would be taken as a compliment by most youth-oriented Americans. But to the Chinese official, the comment appeared to be an insult, a suggestion that the official was too young to deserve respect (Smith, 2002). You need cultural understanding to communicate effectively in a wide variety of intercultural situations. Success in interpersonal communication—at your job and in your social and personal life—depends in great part on your understanding of and your ability to communicate effectively with persons who are culturally different from yourself. The media bombard you daily with evidence of racial tensions, religious disagreements, sexual bias, and the problems caused when intercultural communication fails. This emphasis on culture does not imply that you should accept all cultural practices or that all cultural practices will necessarily be equal in terms of your own values and beliefs (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996). Nor does it imply that you have to accept or follow all of the practices of your own culture. For example, even if the majority of the people in your culture find cockfighting acceptable, you need not agree with or follow the practice. Nor need you consider this practice equal to a cultural practice in which animals are treated kindly. You can reject capitalism or communism or socialism regardless of the culture in which you were raised. Of course, going against your culture’s traditions and values is often very difficult. But it’s important to realize that culture influences, it does not determine, your values or behavior. Often personality factors (your degree of assertiveness, extroversion, or optimism, for example) will prove more influential than culture (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996). As demonstrated throughout this text, cultural differences exist throughout the interpersonal communication spectrum—from the way you use eye contact to the way you develop or dissolve a relationship (Chang & Holt, 1996). Culture even influences your level of happiness, which in turn influences your attitudes and the positivity and negativity of your messages (Kirn, 2005). But these differences should not blind you to the great number of similarities existing among even the most widely separated cultures. When discussing differences, remember that they are usually matters of degree rather than all-or-nothing situations. For example, most cultures value honesty, but some cultures give it greater emphasis than others. In addition, advances in media and technology and the widespread use of the Internet are influencing cultures and cultural change, and they are perhaps homogenizing different cultures to some extent, lessening differences and increasing similarities.

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Cultural Differences 2.2 explain the seven cultural differences identified here and how these impact on interpersonal communication. For effective interpersonal communication to take place in a global world, goodwill and good intentions are helpful—but they are not enough. If you want to be an effective communicator, you need to know how cultures differ and how these differences influence communication. Research supports several major cultural distinctions that have an impact on communication: (1) individualist or collectivist orientation, (2) emphasis on context (whether high or low), (3) power structure, (4) masculinity–femininity, (5) tolerance for ambiguity, (6) long- and short-term orientation, and (7) indulgence and restraint. Each of these dimensions of difference has a significant impact on all forms of communication (Gudykunst, 1994; Hall & Hall, 1987; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Following the major researchers in this area, these differences are discussed in terms of countries, even though in many cases different nations have very similar cultures (and so we often speak of Hispanic culture, which would include a variety of countries). In other cases, the same country includes various cultures (for example, Hong Kong, although a part of China, is considered separately because it has a somewhat different culture) (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Before reading about these dimensions, respond to the following questions. It will help you think about your cultural orientation and will personalize the text discussion and make it more meaningful. For each of the items below, select either a or b. In some cases, you may feel that neither a nor b describes yourself accurately; in these cases, simply select the one that is closer to your feeling. As you’ll see when you read this next section, these are not either/or preferences, but more-or-less preferences. 1. Success, to my way of thinking, is better measured by a. the extent to which I surpass others. b. my contribution to the group effort.

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2. My heroes are generally a. people who stand out from the crowd. b. team players. 3. If I were a manager, I would likely a. reprimand a worker in public if the occasion warranted. b. always reprimand in private regardless of the situation. 4. In communicating, it’s generally more important to be a. polite rather than accurate or direct. b. accurate and direct rather than polite. 5. As a student (and if I feel well informed), I feel a. comfortable challenging a professor. b. uncomfortable challenging a professor. 6. In choosing a life partner or even close friends, I feel more comfortable a. with just about anyone, not necessarily one from my own culture and class. b. with those from my own culture and class. 7. In a conflict situation, I’d be more likely to a. confront conflicts directly and seek to win. b. confront conflicts with the aim of compromise. 8. If I were a manager of an organization, I would stress a. competition and aggressiveness. b. worker satisfaction. 9. As a student, I’m more comfortable with assignments in which a. there is freedom for interpretation. b. there are clearly defined instructions. 10. Generally, when approaching an undertaking with which I’ve had no experience, I feel a. comfortable. b. uncomfortable. 11. Generally, a. I save money for the future. b. I spend what I have. 12. My general belief about child rearing is that a. children should be cared for by their mothers. b. children can be cared for by others. 13. For the most part, a. I believe I’m in control of my own life. b. I believe my life is largely determined by forces out of my control. 14. In general, a. I have leisure time to do what I find fun. b. I have little leisure time. • Items 1–2 refer to the individualist–collectivist orientation; a responses indicate an individualist orientation, and b responses indicate a collectivist orientation. • Items 3–4 refer to the high- and low-context characteristics; a responses indicate a high-context focus, and b responses indicate a low-context focus. • Items 5–6 refer to the power distance dimension; a responses indicate greater comfort with a low power distance, and b responses indicate comfort with a high power distance. • Items 7–8 refer to the masculine–feminine dimension; a responses indicate a masculine orientation; b responses indicate a feminine orientation. • Items 9–10 refer to the tolerance for ambiguity or uncertainty; a responses indicate a high tolerance, and b responses indicate a low tolerance.

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• Items 11–12 refer to a long- or short-term orientation; a responses indicate a long-term orientation, and b responses indicate a short-term orientation. • Items 13–14 refer to indulgent and restraint orientation; a responses indicate indulgent, and b responses indicate restraint. Understanding your preferences in a wide variety of situations as culturally influenced (at least in part) is a first step to controlling them and to changing them should you wish to do so. This understanding also helps you modify your behavior as appropriate for greater effectiveness in certain situations. The remaining discussion in this section further explains these orientations and their implications.

**Individual and Collective Orientation**

Cultures differ in the way in which they promote individualist versus collectivist thinking and behaving (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Singh & Pereira, 2005). An individualist culture teaches members the importance of individual values such as power, achievement, hedonism, and stimulation. Examples include the cultures of the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, and Sweden. A collectivist culture, on the other hand, teaches members the importance of group values such as benevolence, tradition, and conformity. Examples of such cultures include Guatemala, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, Colombia, Indonesia, Pakistan, China, Costa Rica, and Peru. One of the major differences between these two orientations is the extent to which an individual’s goals or the group’s goals are given greater importance. Of course, these goals are not mutually exclusive—you probably have both individualist and collectivist tendencies. For example, you may compete with other members of your basketball team for the most baskets or most valuable player award (and thus emphasize individual goals). In a game, however, you act in a way that benefits the entire team (and thus emphasize group goals). In actual practice, both individual and collective tendencies help you and your team each achieve your goals. Yet most people and most cultures have a dominant orientation. In an individualist culture, members are responsible for themselves and perhaps their immediate family. In a collectivist culture, members are responsible for the entire group. Success in an individualist culture is measured by the extent to which you surpass other members of your group; you take pride in standing out from the crowd. And your heroes—in the media, for example—are likely to be those who are unique and who stand apart. In a collectivist culture, success is measured by your contribution to the achievements of the group as a whole, and you take pride in your similarity to other members of your group. Your heroes are more likely to be team players who don’t stand out from the rest of the group’s members. Distinctions between in-group members and out-group members are extremely important in collectivist cultures. In individualistic cultures, which prize each person’s individuality, the distinction is likely to be less important. In fact, closely related to individualism and collectivism is universalism and exclusionism (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). A universalist culture (highly correlated with individualism) is one in which people are treated as individuals rather than in terms of the groups (racial, sexual, national, for example) to which they belong. A universalist orientation teaches a respect for other cultures, other beliefs, and other ways of doing things. An exclusionist orientation (highly correlated with collectivism) fosters a strong in-group affiliation with much less respect for out-group members. Special privileges are reserved for in-group members, while indifference, impoliteness, and in some cases even hostility are directed at members of other cultures.

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**High- and Low-Context Cultures**

Cultures also differ in the extent to which information is made explicit, on the one hand, or is assumed to be in the context or in the persons communicating, on the other. In a high-context culture, much of the information in communication is in the context or in the person—for example, information that was shared through previous communications, through assumptions about each other, and through shared experiences. The information is thus known by all participants, but it is not explicitly stated in the verbal message. In a low-context culture, most of the information is explicitly stated in the verbal message; in formal transactions, it will be stated in written (or contract) form. High-context cultures are also collectivist cultures (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992; Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988). These cultures place great emphasis on personal relationships and oral agreements (Victor, 1992). Examples of high-context cultures include Japanese, Arabic, Latin American, Thai, Korean, Apache, and Mexican. Low-context cultures are also individualist cultures. These cultures place less emphasis on personal relationships and more emphasis on verbalized, explicit explanation—for example, on written contracts in business transactions. Examples of low-context cultures include German, Swedish, Norwegian, and American. A frequent source of intercultural misunderstanding that can be traced to the distinction between high- and low-context cultures is seen in face-saving (Hall & Hall, 1987). People in high-context cultures place a great deal more emphasis on facesaving, on avoiding one’s own or another’s possible embarrassment. For example, they’re more likely to avoid argument for fear of causing others to lose face, whereas people in low-context cultures (with their individualist orientation) are more likely to use argument to make a point. Similarly, in high-context cultures criticism should take place only in private. Low-context cultures may not make this public–private distinction. Low-context managers who criticize high-context workers in public will find that their criticism causes interpersonal problems—and does little to resolve the difficulty that led to the criticism in the first place (Victor, 1992). Members of high-context cultures are reluctant to say no for fear of offending and causing the other person to lose face. For example, it’s necessary to understand when the Japanese executive’s yes means yes and when it means no. The difference is not in the words used but in the way in which they’re used. It’s easy to see how the low-context individual may interpret this reluctance to be direct—to say no when you mean no—as a weakness or as an unwillingness to confront reality.

**Power Distance**

Power distance refers to how power is distributed in a society. In some cultures, power is concentrated in the hands of a few, and there’s a great difference between the power held by these people and the power of the ordinary citizen. These are called high-power-distance cultures. The ten countries with the highest power distance are Malaysia, Slovakia, Guatemala, Panama, the Philippines, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Suriname, and Mexico (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Singh & Pereira, 2005). In low-power-distance cultures, power is more evenly distributed throughout the citizenry. The ten countries with the lowest power distance are Austria, Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, Switzerland, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Great Britain (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Singh & Pereira, 2005). In a list of 76 countries, the United States ranks 59th (58 nations are higher in power distance). These differences affect communication in numerous ways. For example, in high-power-distance cultures, there’s a great power distance between students and teachers; students are expected to be modest, polite, and totally respectful. In low-power-distance cultures (and you can see this clearly in U.S. college classrooms), students are expected to demonstrate their knowledge and command of the subject matter, participate in discussions with the teacher, and even challenge the teacher—something many highpower-distance culture members wouldn’t even think of doing. Friendship and dating relationships are also influenced by the power distance between groups (Andersen, 1991). In India, for example, such relationships are expected to take place within your cultural class. In Sweden, a person is expected to select friends and romantic partners not on the basis of class or culture but on the basis of individual factors such as personality, appearance, and the like. Low-power-distance cultures expect you to confront a friend, partner, or supervisor assertively; in these cultures, there is a general feeling of equality that is consistent with assertive behavior (Borden, 1991). High-power-distance cultures, on the other hand, view direct confrontation and assertiveness negatively, especially if directed at a superior.

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**Masculine and Feminine** **Cultures**

Especially important for self-concept is the culture’s attitude about gender roles, that is, about how a man or woman should act. In fact, a popular classification of cultures is in terms of their masculinity and femininity (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). When denoting cultural orientations, the terms masculine and feminine should not be interpreted as perpetuating stereotypes but as reflecting some of the commonly held assumptions of a sizable number of people throughout the world. Some intercultural theorists note that equivalent terms would be achievement and nurturance, but because research is conducted under the terms masculine and feminine and because these are the terms you’d use to search the electronic databases, we use these terms here (Lustig & Koester, 2010). A highly masculine culture values aggressiveness, material success, and strength. A highly feminine culture values modesty, concern for relationships and the quality of life, and tenderness. The 10 countries with the highest masculinity score are (beginning with the highest) Japan, Austria, Venezuela, Italy, Switzerland, Mexico, Ireland, Jamaica, Great Britain, and Germany. The 10 countries with the highest femininity score are (beginning with the highest) Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Costa Rica, Yugoslavia, Finland, Chile, Portugal, and Thailand. Of the 53 countries ranked, the United States ranks 15th most masculine (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Masculine cultures emphasize success and so socialize their members to be assertive, ambitious, and competitive. For example, members of masculine cultures are more likely to confront conflicts directly and to fight out any differences competitively; they’re more likely to emphasize conflict strategies that enable them to win and ensure that the other side loses (win–lose strategies). Feminine cultures emphasize the quality of life and so socialize their members to be modest and to highlight close interpersonal relationships. Feminine cultures, for example, are more likely to utilize compromise and negotiation in resolving conflicts; they’re more likely to seek solutions in which both sides win (win–win strategies).

**High-Ambiguity-Tolerant and Low-Ambiguity-Tolerant Cultures**

Levels of ambiguity tolerance vary widely among cultures. In some cultures, people do little to avoid uncertainty, and they have little anxiety about not knowing what will happen next. In some other cultures, however, uncertainty is strongly avoided and there is much anxiety about uncertainty. high-ambiguity-tolerant Cultures Members of high-ambiguity-tolerant cultures don’t feel threatened by unknown situations: uncertainty is a normal part of life, and people accept it as it comes. The 10 countries with highest tolerance for ambiguity are Singapore, Jamaica, Denmark, Sweden, Hong Kong, Ireland, Great Britain, Malaysia, India, and the Philippines; the United States ranks 11th. Because high-ambiguity-tolerant culture members are comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty, they minimize the importance of rules governing communication and relationships (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov,

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2010; Lustig & Koester, 2010). People in these cultures readily tolerate individuals who don’t follow the same rules as the cultural majority, and may even encourage different approaches and perspectives. Students from high-ambiguity-tolerant cultures appreciate freedom in education and prefer vague assignments without specific timetables. These students want to be rewarded for creativity and readily accept an instructor’s lack of knowledge. low-ambiguity-tolerant Cultures Members of low-ambiguity-tolerant cultures do much to avoid uncertainty and have a great deal of anxiety about not knowing what will happen next; they see uncertainty as threatening and as something that must be counteracted. The 10 countries with the lowest tolerance for ambiguity are Greece, Portugal, Guatemala, Uruguay, Belgium, Malta, Russia, El Salvador, Poland, and Japan (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Low-ambiguity-tolerant cultures create clear-cut rules for communication that must not be broken. For example, students from strong-uncertainty-avoidance cultures prefer highly structured experiences with little ambiguity; they prefer specific objectives, detailed instructions, and definite timetables. An assignment to write a term paper on “anything” would be cause for alarm; it would not be clear or specific enough. These students expect to be judged on the basis of the right answers and expect the instructor to have all the answers all the time (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

**Long- and Short-Term Orientation**

Another interesting distinction is the one between long- and short-term orientation. Some cultures teach a long-term orientation, an orientation that promotes the importance of future rewards; members of these cultures are more apt to save for the future and to prepare for the future academically (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). The most long-term oriented countries are South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, China, Ukraine, Germany, Estonia, Belgium, Lithuania, and Russia. The United States ranks 69th out of 93 countries, making it less long-term than most countries. In these cultures, marriage is a practical arrangement rather than one based on sexual or emotional arousal, and living with extended family (for example, in-laws) is common and considered quite normal. These cultures believe that mothers should be at home with their children, that humility is a virtue for both men and women, and that old age should be a happy time of life. Cultures fostering a short-term orientation (Puerto Rico, Ghana, Egypt, Trinidad, Nigeria, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Iran, Morocco, and Zimbabwe are the top 10) look more to the past and the present. Instead of saving for the future, members of this culture spend their resources for the present and want quick results from their efforts. These cultures believe and teach that marriage is a moral arrangement, living with in-laws causes problems, children do not have to be cared for by their mothers (others can do that), humility is a virtue only for women (not men), and old age is an unpleasant time of life. These cultures also differ in their view of the workplace. Organizations in longterm-oriented cultures look to profits in the future. Managers or owners and workers in such cultures share the same values and work together to achieve a common good. Organizations in short-term-oriented cultures, on the other hand, look to more immediate rewards. Managers and workers are very different in their thinking and in their attitudes about work. Even in educational outlook there are significant differences. Students in longterm cultures will attribute their success or failure in school to their own efforts, while students in short-term cultures will attribute their success or failure to luck or chance. Another perspective on this difference is offered by a study that asked Asian (long-term cultures) and American (short-term culture) executives to rank-order those values they considered most important in the workplace. The top six responses are presented in Table 2.2 and show a dramatic difference between the two cultural groups.

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**Indulgence and Restraint**

Cultures also differ in their emphasis on indulgence or restraint (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Cultures high in indulgence emphasize the gratification of desires; they focus on having fun and enjoying life. Venezuela, Mexico, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Nigeria, Colombia, Trinidad, Sweden, New Zealand, and Ghana are the top 10 in indulgence; the United States ranks 15th out of 93 countries, making it considerably more indulgent than most countries. These cultures have more people who are happy, which depends on two major factors: • Life control. This is the feeling that you may do as you please (at least to a significant degree), that you have freedom of choice to do or not do what you want. • Leisure. This is the feeling that you have leisure time to do what you find fun. In addition, members of indulgent cultures have more positive attitudes, greater optimism, and are more likely to remember positive emotions. They also have a more satisfying family life and loose gender roles (for example, household tasks are shared by both partners). Cultures high in restraint (Pakistan, Egypt, Latvia, Ukraine, Albania, Belarus, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Iraq are the top 10), on the other hand, are those that foster the curbing of such gratification and its regulation by social norms. Restraint cultures have more people who are unhappy: people who see themselves as lacking control of their own lives and with little or no leisure time to engage in fun activities. In contrast to indulgent cultures, members of cultures high in restraint are more cynical, pessimistic, and less likely to remember positive emotions. They have less satisfying family lives, rigid gender roles, and an unequal distribution of household tasks. As you might expect, indulgent cultures do not place great value on thrift; instead the value is on spending to gratify one’s needs. Restrained cultures place a great value on thrift. Also predictable is the finding that indulgent cultures place great importance on friendship and having lots of friends, whereas restrained cultures place less importance on friendships. Although there are no studies offering evidence, it’s likely that the Facebook pages of indulgent culture members have a lot more friends than do those of members of restrained cultures.

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**Principles for Effective Intercultural Communication**

2.3 Define intercultural communication and explain and use the guidelines for making intercultural communication more effective. intercultural communication refers to communication between persons who have different cultural beliefs, values, or ways of behaving. The model in Figure 2.1 illustrates this concept. The circles represent the cultures of the individual communicators. The inner circles identify the communicators (the sources and receivers). In this model, each communicator is a member of a different culture. In some instances, the cultural differences are relatively slight—say, between persons from Toronto and New York. In other instances, the cultural differences are great—say, between persons from Borneo and Germany, or between persons from rural Nigeria and industrialized England. Regardless of your own cultural background, you will surely come into close contact with people from a variety of other cultures—people who speak different languages, eat different foods, practice different religions, and approach work and relationships in very different ways. It doesn’t matter whether you’re a longtime resident or a newly arrived immigrant: you are or soon will be living, going to school, working, and forming relationships with people who are from very different cultures. Your day-to-day interpersonal interactions on social media have become increasingly intercultural as have your face-to-face interactions. Drawing on the work of numerous intercultural researchers, let’s consider several guidelines designed to increase the chances for effective intercultural communication (Barna, 1997; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Ruben, 1985; Spitzberg, 1991).

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attitudes or beliefs or perhaps even reject you as a person. Conversely, you may fear negative reactions from members of your own group. For example, they might disapprove of your socializing with people who are culturally different. Some fears, of course, are reasonable. In many cases, however, such concerns are groundless. Either way, they need to be assessed logically and their consequences weighed carefully. Then you’ll be able to make informed choices about your communications. Research shows that Internet daters typically develop more intercultural relationships than do those who meet face-to-face, though the preference for most people is to stick with members of their own race, nationality, and religion (Dean, 2010b). Internet dating is growing, so it is likely that more and more people will be dating interculturally. Here is an example of where your interactions will help educate both members. And the same is true for developing online friendships. Most of you very likely have friends or followers from different cultures on Facebook, Google+, Twitter, or Pinterest. Invariably your interactions will prove educational. Still another way to educate yourself is to understand and anticipate culture shock, a topic considered in the accompanying Understanding Interpersonal Theory & Research box.

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Recognize Differences To communicate interculturally, you need to recognize the differences between yourself and people from other cultures; the differences within the other cultural group; and the numerous differences in meaning, and in dialect and accent. DifferenCeS between yourSelf anD the Culturally Different A common barrier to intercultural communication occurs when you assume that similarities exist and that differences do not. This is especially true of values, attitudes, and beliefs. You might easily accept different hairstyles, clothing, and foods. In basic values and beliefs, however, you may assume that deep down all people are really alike. They aren’t. When you assume similarities and ignore differences, you’ll fail to notice important distinctions; when communicating, you will convey to others that your ways are the right ways and that their ways are not important to you. Consider this example. An American invites a Filipino coworker to dinner. The Filipino politely refuses. The American is hurt and feels that the Filipino does not want to be friendly. The Filipino is hurt and concludes that the invitation was not extended sincerely. Here, it seems, both the American and the Filipino assume that their customs for inviting people to dinner are the same when, in fact, they aren’t. A Filipino expects to be invited several times before accepting a dinner invitation. When an invitation is given only once, it’s viewed as insincere. DifferenCeS within the Culturally Different Group Within every cultural group there are vast and important differences. As all Americans are not alike, neither are all Indonesians, Greeks, Mexicans, and so on. When you ignore these differences—when you assume that all persons covered by the same label (in this case, a national or racial label) are the same—you’re guilty of stereotyping. A good example of this is seen in the use of the term African American. The term stresses the unity of Africa and of those who are of African descent, and is analogous to Asian American or European American. At the same time, it ignores the great diversity within the African continent when, for example, it’s used as analogous to German American or Japanese American. More analogous terms would be Nigerian American or Ethiopian American. Within each culture there are smaller cultures that differ greatly from each other and from the larger culture. DifferenCeS in meaninG Meaning exists not in words but in people. Consider, for example, the differences in meaning that exist for words such as religion to a bornagain Christian and an atheist, and lunch to a Chinese rice farmer and a Madison Avenue advertising executive. Even though the same word is used, its meanings will vary greatly depending on the listeners’ cultural definitions. The same is true of nonverbal messages. For example, a child who avoids eye contact with an adult may be seen in one culture as deferent (the child is showing respect for the older person) and in another as disrespectful or even defiant (the child is indicating a lack of concern for what the older person is saying). DifferenCeS in DialeCt anD aCCent. Dialects are variations in a language, mainly in grammar and semantics. The difference between language and dialect—at least as viewed by most linguists—is that different languages are mutually unintelligible; different dialects are mutually intelligible. For example, a person who grew up with only the English language would not be able to understand Russian, and vice versa. But people speaking different dialects of English (say, Southern and Northern) would be able to understand each other. It’s interesting to note that the Southerner, for example, will perceive the New Englander to speak with an accent but will not perceive another Southerner to have an accent. Similarly, the New Englander will perceive the Southerner to have an accent but not another New Englander. Actually, linguists would argue that everyone speaks a dialect; it’s just that we don’t perceive speech like ours to be a dialect. We only think of speech different from ours as being a dialect. Some dialects are popularly (but not scientifically) labeled standard and some are labeled nonstandard. Standard dialect would be the language that is recommended by dictionaries and that is covered in the English handbooks you’ve likely already

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experienced. A nonstandard dialect would be any variation from this. This concept of dialect can be extended easily and logically to texting and social media language. Today, the abbreviated texting style would be considered nonstandard; tomorrow, attitudes may be different. Linguistically, all dialects are equal. Although no one dialect is linguistically superior to any other dialect, it is equally true that judgments are made on the basis of dialect. For example, you would be advised to use standard dialect in applying to the traditional conservative law firm and to write your e-mails to them in Standard English, the kind recommended by the English handbooks. On the other hand, when you’re out with friends or texting, you may feel more comfortable using nonstandard forms. When differences in speech are differences in pronunciation, we refer to them as accents, the emphasis or stress you place on various syllables. Just as everyone speaks with a particular dialect, everyone also speaks with a particular accent. Again, we notice accents that are different from our own and, in fact, don’t think of speech that sounds like ours as having any accent at all. But all speakers speak with an accent. The “accents” that we probably notice most often are those that occur in speakers who learned the language in their teens or later. The second language is spoken through a kind of filter created by the original language. Linguistically, everyone speaks with an accent; it’s simply a fact of life. In terms of communication, however, we need to recognize that accents are often used by people to pigeonhole and stereotype others; for example, in some people’s minds, certain accents are associated with lower class and others with upper class. Some accents are perceived as more credible, more knowledgeable, and more educated than others.

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Confront Your Stereotypes Stereotypes, especially when they operate below the level of conscious awareness, can create serious communication problems (Lyons & Kashima, 2003). Originally, the word stereotype was a printing term that referred to the plate that printed the same image over and over. A sociological or psychological stereotype is a fixed impression of a group of people. Everyone has attitudinal stereotypes—images of national groups, religious groups, or racial groups or perhaps of criminals, prostitutes, teachers, or plumbers. Consider, for example, if you have any stereotypes of, say, bodybuilders, the opposite sex, a racial group different from your own, members of a religion very different from your own, hard drug users, or college professors. It is very likely that you have stereotypes of several or perhaps even all of these groups. Although we often think of stereotypes as negative (“They’re lazy, dirty, and only interested in getting high”), stereotypes also may be positive (“They’re smart, hardworking, and extremely loyal”). One researcher has pointed out that stereotypes have enabled criminals to escape or delay capture (Desar, 2013). For example, Boston mobster James Bulger likely escaped detection when on the run because he was significantly older than what stereotypes tell us about the age of mobsters. And Frank Abagnale (portrayed in Catch Me If You Can) likely escaped capture because he presented himself as a high-status person, and our stereotypes of high-status people is that they are honest. If you have these fixed impressions, you may, on meeting a member of a particular group, see that person primarily as a member of that group. Initially this may provide you with some helpful orientation. However, it creates problems when you apply to that person all the characteristics you assign to members of that group without examining the unique individual. If you meet a politician, for example, you may have a host of characteristics for politicians that you can readily apply to this person. To complicate matters further, you may see in the person’s behavior the manifestation of various characteristics that you would not see if you did not know that the person was a politician. Because there are few visual and auditory cues in

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online communications, it’s not surprising to find that people form impressions of online communication partners with a heavy reliance on stereotypes (Jacobson, 1999). Consider, however, another kind of stereotype: you’re driving along a dark road and are stopped at a stop sign. A car pulls up beside you and three teenagers jump out and rap on your window. There may be a variety of possible explanations. Perhaps they need help or they want to ask directions. Or they may be about to engage in carjacking. Your self-protective stereotype may help you decide on “carjacking” and lead you to pull away and drive to the safety of a busy service station. In doing that, of course, you may have escaped being carjacked—or you may have failed to help people who needed assistance. Stereotyping can lead to two major barriers. The tendency to group a person into a class and to respond to that person primarily as a member of that class can lead you to perceive that a person possesses certain qualities (usually negative) that you believe characterize the group to which he or she belongs. Then you will fail to appreciate the multifaceted nature of all people and all groups. For example, consider your stereotype of someone who is deeply into computers. Very likely your image is quite different from the research findings on such individuals, which show that in fact they are as often female as male and are as sociable, popular, and self-assured as their peers who are not into heavy computer use (Schott & Selwyn, 2000). Stereotyping can also lead you to ignore the unique characteristics of an individual. In this instance, you may fail to benefit from the special contributions each person can bring to an encounter.

**Reduce Your Ethnocentrism**

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to see others and their behaviors through your own cultural filters, often as distortions of your own behaviors. It’s the tendency to evaluate the values, beliefs, and behaviors of your own culture as superior—as more positive, logical, and natural than those of other cultures. For example, highly ethnocentric individuals think that other cultures should be more like theirs, that people from other cultures often don’t know what’s good for them, that the lifestyles of people in other countries are not as good as theirs, and that people from other cultures are not as smart or trustworthy as people from their own culture (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). To achieve effective interpersonal communication, you need to see yourself and others as different but as neither inferior nor superior. You need to become aware of the potential blinders that ethnocentrism might impose—admittedly, not a very easily accomplished task. Ethnocentrism exists on a continuum (see Figure 2.2). People aren’t either ethnocentric or not ethnocentric; rather, most are somewhere between these polar opposites. Of course, your degree of ethnocentrism varies, depending on the group on which you focus. For example, if you’re Greek American, you may have a low degree of ethnocentrism when dealing with Italian Americans but a high degree when dealing with Turkish Americans or Japanese Americans. Most important for our purposes is that your degree of ethnocentrism (and we are all ethnocentric to at least some degree) will influence your interpersonal interactions.

**Adjust Your Communication**

Intercultural communication (in fact, all interpersonal communication) takes place only to the extent that one person can understand the meanings of the words and nonverbal cues of the other—that is, only to the extent that the two individuals share the same system of symbols. Because no two people share the identical meaning system for symbols, each person needs to

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