CHAPTER

5

THE EFFECTS OF CULTURE ON SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

Central Message

The United States is a pluralistic culture comprising many different co-cultures. This, and the fact that American business is becoming increasingly transnational, means that members of small groups must recognize, accept, adjust to, and welcome cultural differences in communication.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

As a result of studying Chapter 5 you should be able to:

1. Define culture and explain why knowledge of cultural differences in communication is important for effective group discussion.
2. Explain the advantages that can come from diversity in groups and organizations.
3. Describe six major dimensions on which cultures differ.
4. Describe specific ways in which cultures differ in language use and nonverbal behavior.
5. Explain why race, socioeconomic class, and generational differences may be viewed as cultural differences, and describe the differences that have been observed.
6. Describe the ethical principles group members should use to address and embrace cultural differences.

Martha, who grew up and attended college in New York City, had always wanted to work in California. During spring semester of her senior year, with her degree in computer science almost in hand, Martha landed a job interview with a software development firm in Silicon Valley. The firm's software development team, a self-managed work group, was responsible for its own interviewing and hiring. Members wanted to have a strong sense of any person they were considering for a position—Would that person be a good "fit" with the rest of the team?—and they had a good track record. Martha would spend an entire day with the team, attending their meetings, shadowing various members, eating lunch with them, and so forth. The team wanted to see how she handled herself in the kinds of work situations that were everyday occurrences for them.

Martha prepared carefully for her interview. She read up on the company, knew the kinds of software it was known for, updated her portfolio of college projects, and selected her clothes for the interview very carefully—new navy blue suit, matching pumps, white shell, discreet jewelry. She was ready!

Martha's first inkling that something might go wrong occurred when team representative Jorge met her at her hotel. Jorge was wearing jeans, a San Francisco 49ers' cap, and a T-shirt with a fish tie handpainted on the front. When they got to the company's building, she noticed that all the workers were similarly dressed—casually, with a certain irreverent style. Team members asked her to talk a bit about her background before they started their meeting, and she relaxed a bit. After all, she had prepared for how to sell herself. About five minutes into her presentation, Jorge interrupted to suggest that he take her on a tour of the building before the next meeting. They left, and the other team members began to talk. "Thinks a lot of herself, doesn't she," said Akimi. "She talks so fast I couldn't follow half of what she said," complained Scott. "She's wired pretty tight," agreed Montana. The group concluded that Martha would probably not be a good fit with the culture of this particular team, in part because she didn't seem like a team player. Within a half hour of first meeting her, they decided not to extend her a job offer.

This story underscores three important points we make in this chapter. The first is that cultural diversity presents a tremendous challenge to small groups because it forces members to pay more careful attention to their communicative behavior and to give up preconceived stereotypes if the group is to succeed. The second point is that cultural differences can exist even among individuals from the same country, who speak the same language, and have similar educations, as Martha's failed job interview demonstrated. Finally, cultural diversity represents a potentially valuable resource and should be embraced, not eliminated.

Information about culture fills textbooks! We present cultural information, where relevant, throughout this text. In this chapter, our goal is to present you with a framework for understanding cultural differences, but we do not pretend to cover culture in depth. Instead, we hope this framework helps you appreciate the difficulty cultural and co-cultural differences create in small

groups. We also believe this offers you a tool for diagnosing what has gone wrong and how it can be repaired.

In this century, Americans of Asian, Hispanic, African, Middle-Eastern, and eastern European ancestry will outnumber Caucasians of western European ancestry. Called the "browning of America" by *Time* magazine,[1] this phenomenon will have a profound effect on *all* forms of communication. Transactions between people of different ethnic and racial groups require patience and attention to the communication process. You don't have to leave the U.S. for this phenomenon to affect you. The change, already well under way, will come to you; you will soon participate in groups with people whose backgrounds are markedly different from your own, if you haven't already.

> If you really believe in teamwork, then you're going to have to respect different viewpoints, because otherwise it's just going to be hollow.
>
> *J. T., CEO, Public Utility*

You may have heard discussions recently about the value of diversity in the workplace. The term *diversity* is often used in workplace contexts to refer primarily to gender and race, but we use the term to encompass a wide variety of differences, including ethnicity, race, age, social class, education, and sexual preference, among others.[2] Contemporary approaches to diversity go beyond tolerance of differences; they celebrate and capitalize on differences without necessarily trying to force assimilation into the dominant culture of the U.S.[3] These approaches demand sensitive and effective communication. Haslett and Ruebush, in their review of how individual and cultural differences can affect a group, conclude that without awareness and sensitivity, groups can experience highly differential rates of participation, poor management of conflict, and factionalism between in-groups and out-groups.[4] Good communication can reduce this so the potential benefits can be realized. Table 5.1 summarizes the potential competitive advantages that effective diversity management offers an organization.

Recent studies suggest that cultural diversity can be a real plus. Diversity can enhance a group's performance, assuming that the group's communication process allows members to integrate their diverse perspectives.[5] McLeod and her associates explicitly studied the effects of ethnic diversity on a brainstorming task.[6] They compared ethnically homogeneous (all-Anglo American) groups with ethnically diverse (Anglo, Asian, African, and Hispanic American) groups and found that the diverse groups came up with more creative solutions. However, they also found that the diverse groups had more negative feelings about their groups than the homogeneous groups. To us, these findings highlight the importance of studying the effects of culture; diversity can be an important source of energy and creativity in all areas of American work, but we must somehow learn to appreciate our differences so we can work together productively.

TABLE 5.1
Competitive advantages of effective diversity management.

Resource acquisition	Companies known for effective diversity management develop reputations as desirable places to work, and thus can recruit a highly skilled labor pool.
Marketing advantage	As markets become diverse, a diverse workforce provides increased awareness and competitive advantage.
System flexibility	Appreciation of varying viewpoints produces greater openness to ideas and helps a company handle challenges and changes.
Creativity	Diverse viewpoints enhance creativity, decision making, and performance.
Problem solving	Diverse viewpoints lead to better decisions because a wider range of perspectives is considered and issues are analyzed more thoroughly and critically.
Cost reduction	Failure to integrate all workers leads to higher turnover, absenteeism, and so forth; effective diversity management saves money.

Source: Information taken from T. H. Cox and S. Blake, "Managing Cultural Diversity: Implications for Organizational Competitiveness," *Academy of Management Executive* 5 (1991): 45–56; cited in Susan Kirby and Orlando C. Richard, "Impact of Marketing Work-Place Diversity on Employee Job Involvement and Organizational Commitment," *Journal of Social Psychology* 140 (June 2000).

Ethnocentric

The belief that one's own culture is inherently superior to all others; tendency to view other cultures through the viewpoint of one's own culture.

The culture in which a person is raised profoundly affects every aspect of that person's communication behavior, starting with the interpretation process we discussed in Chapter 3. Communication among people of diverse backgrounds (hence with diverse communication patterns) is challenging. Unfortunately, most people are **ethnocentric:** they believe their personal native culture is superior and judge everyone else's behavior by the norms of their own culture. But successful communication among culturally diverse individuals requires them to give up their ethnocentricity.[7] The software development team members who interviewed Martha couldn't get past her New York style, with its fast-paced talk and aggressive verbal pattern. In relaxed California, that style says "She thinks she's all that," but in New York, people are taught to promote their accomplishments and talents when given an opportunity. The team concluded, ethnocentrically, that Martha was not a team player because she promoted her accomplishments and spoke fast without pausing for others to jump in. They interpreted her actions through their own cultural filter.

The software development team isn't unusual. Many of us stereotype the behavior of cultural groups different from our own, then negatively evaluate that behavior. Speicher's analysis of a conflict between an African American male and a white female concluded that the participants' failures to recognize cultural differences contributed to the conflict and to the negative evaluation of the other person.[8] Leonard and Locke examined stereotypes held by African

Effective groups, more and more, require sensitivity to cultural differences.
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Americans about whites, and vice versa.[9] Each group evaluated the other negatively on the basis of the group's stereotypical communication behavior. African Americans had worse impressions of the whites than the other way around, but neither group's evaluations suggested a supportive climate for communication. Perhaps enhanced cultural understanding can begin to undo such negative assessments.

I love to have people of all stripes [on a team].

A. B., College Dean

In this chapter we try to sensitize you to ways in which other cultures and co-cultures differ from the "dominant culture" of the United States, thereby improving your sensitivity and your communication in groups. Instead of presenting a laundry list of cultures and the characteristics associated with each (a lengthy catalog!), we focus primarily on several broad dimensions on which cultures differ. We offer three important caveats. First, from the vast and growing field of intercultural communication, we present only information we believe to be most relevant to small group communication. Second, in many instances we are overgeneralizing. For example, when we say that "white, middle-class Americans prefer direct eye contact," we know there is a lot of variation in the preferences of white, middle-class Americans. We urge you to remember that sometimes there will be as much within-group as between-group variation, especially for pluralistic cultures such as the United States. Third, there has been relatively little research on intercultural communication *within small groups*. Although much is known about how Mexicans and Arabs behave within their own cultures, almost nothing is known about how Mexicans and Arabs behave when they work *together* in the same small group.

In many instances, we are making logical, best guesses about what happens when individuals of different cultures must interact within the same setting. We rely heavily on findings from studies of interpersonal intercultural communication, applying them to small group settings. We turn now to a definition of terms important to your understanding of the effects of culture on small group communication.

We have already used several terms in common usage, but now we define them according to our usage in this book. These terms are *culture, cultural identity, co-culture, intracultural*, and *intercultural communication*.

What Is Culture?

Culture

The patterns of values, beliefs, symbols, norms, procedures, and behaviors that have been historically transmitted to and are shared by a given group of persons.

Cultural Identity

The identification with and acceptance of a particular group's shared symbols, meanings, norms, and rules for conduct.

Culture refers to the pattern of values, beliefs, symbols (including language), norms, and behaviors shared by an identifiable group of individuals. During enculturation, or becoming part of a culture, you are taught how to perceive the world, to think, to communicate, and to behave. The teaching is done both formally and informally as you learn the lifestyle of the family and community. Small primary groups, starting with the family, are vital to this process and are the chief way individuals become enculturated. This process happens so gradually and automatically that, unless something happens to make us question our behavior, we rarely are aware of how culture affects us; our own culture's effect on us is invisible, unless we make a point of looking for it. **Cultural identity** refers to the degree to which a person learns, accepts, and identifies with the symbols, meanings, and standards of behavior common to a particular group.[10] Individuals are *taught* such things as language, how and when to speak, how to perceive the world, what is and is not appropriate behavior, and so forth. As with most of us, members of Martha's interview team were oblivious to how their cultural identities affected both their own communication behavior and their interpretation of Martha's behavior.

Our definition of *culture* is intentionally broad. *Culture* as we define it refers to *any* group of people with a shared identity. For example, a *cultural grouping* can refer to ethnicity (black, white, Hispanic, Greek), a professional grouping (college students, communication professors, nurses, accountants), an interest grouping (hunters, duplicate bridge players), or even socioeconomic class (working class, middle class). In short, any symbol system that is "bounded and salient" to individuals may be termed a culture.[11]

Sometimes a grouping that sees itself as distinct, but is part of a larger culture, is termed a **co-culture.** We use the term *co-culture* rather than the more common *subculture* because we agree with Orbe's argument that *subculture*, which simply refers to size—a smaller grouping within a larger culture—can also imply inferiority.[12] Co-culture, on the other hand, reminds us that the "United States is a country of many cultures, each of which exists simultaneously within, as well as apart from, other cultures . . . [and] no one culture is inherently superior over co-existing cultures,"[13] although one culture may dominate. Co-cultural groupings can form on the basis of any shared identity.

Co-culture

A grouping that sees itself as distinct but is also part of a larger grouping.

For example, your coauthors consider themselves to be part of the co-culture *professional educators*. We share certain values and beliefs with other professional educators that are very important to us: a belief in the value of education, similar ideas about what does and does not constitute a good education, a desire to place education high on a list of funding priorities, and so forth. When we interact with professional educators (at our universities, at professional conferences, during chance encounters on airplanes, etc.), we take these beliefs for granted—we accept them as "givens." Other examples of co-cultural groupings include rural and urban; white collar and blue collar; eastern, southern, western, and midwestern United States; Roman Catholic and Jewish; and many more.

Each of us belongs to several different co-cultures simultaneously. For example, Gloria is white, middle-class, Greek American; Kathy is white, middle-class, a military brat; Jack is white, middle-class, a shepherd. Whether a particular co-cultural identification is important in a given circumstance depends on the specific features of that circumstance. Gloria's identification as a Greek American is more salient when she attends festivals where there is Greek food and dancing than when she attends professional conferences. Kathy thinks of herself as a military brat when she talks about how much she has moved or when she attends high school reunions with those who went to Wagner High School on Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines.

It is important to understand your culture because it affects *everything* you do, particularly your communication behavior.[14] The behaviors and attitudes we adopt from our culture are learned, not innate, but they are lasting. Cultures do change, but slowly. During **intracultural communication** (among individuals from the same culture or co-culture), much of the communication behavior can be taken for granted. But during **intercultural communication** (among individuals from different cultures or co-cultures), participants must be alert to the added potential for misunderstanding.

> Know yourself more than anything else.
>
> *P. B., City Administrator*

Our opening story of Martha was chosen to emphasize that intercultural communication is not limited to encounters between people from different countries. An Anglo American manager talking to an Arabic counterpart certainly represents an instance of intercultural communication, but so does a native of Cupertino, California, talking to someone from New York City. In fact, a conversation between people from different countries can be more *intra-* than *inter*cultural (e.g., as between an Anglo American and an Anglo Canadian).

In a sense, *every* act of communication has intercultural elements because each individual is a *unique* blend of learned behaviors.[15] Intercultural communication is a continuum with *intercultural* communication at one end and *intracultural* communication at the other.[16] As is shown in Figure 5.1, all encounters are more or less intercultural, but none is purely one or the other. Thus, communication among members of an Inuit family living in a remote
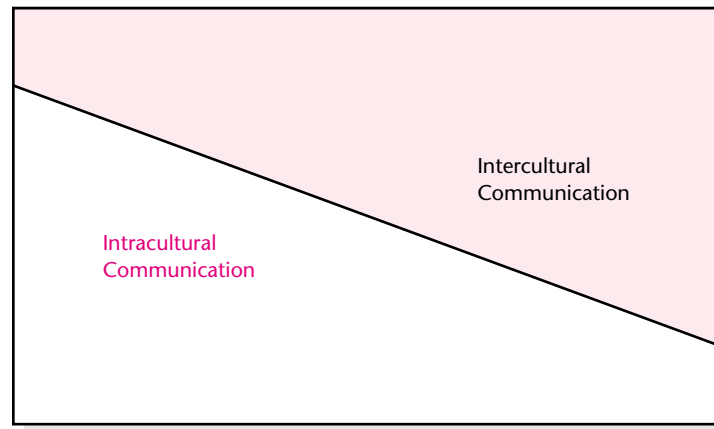
Intracultural Communication

Interaction between and among individuals from the same culture or subculture.

Intercultural Communication

Interaction between and among individuals from different cultures or co-cultures.

FIGURE 5.1
Degrees of
intercultural
communication.

area of Alaska will be almost purely *intra*cultural, whereas a conference of
Japanese and American legislators who do not speak each other's languages
would be extremely *inter*cultural. The more intercultural communication be-
comes, the greater the potential for communication malfunctions.

Now that we have introduced you to these important terms, we turn to a
discussion of six broad characteristics that differ from culture to culture and
significantly influence group members' communication behaviors. As men-
tioned earlier, this information is not a list of characteristics and the cultures
associated with them, although we provide cultural examples to illustrate. It is
a framework to help you understand where communication differences origi-
nate, diagnose misunderstandings, and decide how you will act.

Cultural Characteristics That Affect Communication

A number of researchers have investigated particular characteristics that dif-
fer across cultures.[17] We focus on six that are especially relevant for commu-
nication in small groups. These are *worldview; individualism versus collec-
tivism; power distance; uncertainty avoidance; masculinity versus
femininity;* and *high- versus low-context communication*. As with intra- and
intercultural communication, each dimension will be thought of as a contin-
uum. We describe each end of the continuum, but recognize that cultures do
not fall exclusively at one end or the other. Cultures are complex; they ex-
hibit the following characteristics in varying degrees. These characteristics
are summarized in Table 5.2.

Worldview

One's beliefs about
the nature of life, the
purpose of life, and
one's relation to the
cosmos.

Worldview

Worldview encompasses how we perceive the nature of the world around
us, our relationship to it, and the purpose of life. Every culture has a world-
view that serves to explain why things are the way they are and where hu-

mans fit into the grand scheme of life; this cultural characteristic is highly re-
sistant to change. For example, people from cultures that believe fate controls
all human events are more likely to "go with the flow" because they believe
their destinies are predetermined. They are not likely suddenly to become
"movers and shakers" of events. In contrast, people from cultures that believe
people control events will respond quite differently. Some Asian and many Na-
tive American cultures are much more likely to conceive of life as a river that
flows, making it more appropriate for individuals to flow with the river than to
try to navigate against it. North Americans and some western Europeans have
the opposite conception. They say things like, "If at first you don't succeed,
try, try again," indicating a worldview that hard work, with or against the
river, is valued. In terms of communication behavior in small groups, develop-
ing *patience* and allowing discussion to proceed at its own pace without forc-
ing it to a conclusion may be more natural in a go-with-the-flow culture, but
difficult for many Americans who want to get to the point in a hurry so they
can get things done. A culture's worldview is an all-emcompassing dimension,
like an umbrella, that affects that culture's activity orientation, values, cus-
toms, and beliefs.

Consider This 5.1

There is value to being patient and "going with the flow," *and* there is value to
"making things happen." How do you think a group could potentially benefit
from each worldview? How might a group's decisions be affected positively from
having both worldviews represented in the group?

Activity Orientation   **Activity orientation** refers to whether a culture em-
phasizes *being* or *doing*.[18] Some cultures (e.g., the Hopi) emphasize spontane-
ity, being "in the moment," and being in harmony with nature. In contrast, the
majority culture of the United States represents a *doing* orientation, where ac-
tivities that produce tangible accomplishments are highly valued. For instance,
Americans usually ask, "What do you do for a living?" when they first meet
someone. We tend to define people more by what they *do* or what they have
achieved than by what they *are*. When members from both *doing* and *being*
cultures meet in a group, communication may be difficult and consensus deci-
sions may be impossible.

Values   Worldview also affects values. The horrible events of September 11,
2001, brought to the forefront value differences between Americans and some
Middle Easterners, and aroused the curiosity of many Americans about Arabic
culture. The following story, highlighting differences between American and
Arab values, exemplifies the types of value differences that can create commu-
nication challenges in a small group. Imagine that a man is in a small boat with
his mother, wife, and child when it capsizes. Only he can swim, and he can

Activity Orientation

The extent to which
a culture emphasizes
doing or being,
taking charge or
going with the flow.

save only one of the other three people. Whom should he save? Rubenstein found that *all* the Arabs he asked would save the mother because a man can always get another wife and child, but he has only one mother. Of 100 American college freshmen, 60 said they would save the wife and 40 the child. They laughed at the idea of saving the mother.[19] Such fundamental differences in values may be impossible to resolve.

Customs and Beliefs   The customs, habits, and beliefs of a culture are also affected by that culture's worldview and values. Thus, in a culture where one's purpose in life is associated with bringing honor and good fortune to one's family, communication is likely to center on one's family. A Nigerian student told us how unfriendly he thought Americans were when he first came to the United States. His friends on campus said "Hello" to him and kept walking. In Nigeria, the friends would have stopped, inquired about his mother, father, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and so forth. They would have had a long conversation about their respective families. Imagine that Nigerian student in a group of focused, "get down to business" American students!

Individualism versus Collectivism

Individualistic Culture

Culture in which the needs and wishes of the individual predominate over the needs of the group.

Collectivist Culture

A culture in which the needs and wishes of the group predominate over the needs of any one individual.

Some cultures place higher value on individual goals, but others value group goals more. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey note that in **individualistic cultures** the development of the individual is foremost, even when this is at the expense of the group, whereas in **collectivist cultures** the needs of the group are more important, with individuals expected to conform to the group.[20] As is suggested by the terms, conformity is valued in collectivist cultures, but diversity and dissent are more esteemed in individualistic cultures. People in the United States admire the person who "marches to a different drummer." The identity of *I* takes precedence over *we*, so we give high priority to *self*-development, *self*-actualization, and individual initiative and achievement. We go so far as to encourage group members to leave a group if they feel their individual values, beliefs, and preferences are being compromised. In contrast to this are most Asian and Native American cultures. For example, a Chinese proverb states, "The nail that sticks up is pounded down." This means that if a member is standing out from the group, the group has the right—even the obligation—to force the individual to conform. In collectivist cultures, the goals, wishes, and opinions of the in-group (the dominant group) always prevail; such cultures value cooperation within the group and slow consensus building rather than direct confrontation in which individual opinions are debated.

This distinction between collectivist and individualistic cultures is important in mixed-culture small groups, primarily because of the effect on communication behaviors. For example, members of individualistic cultures, who see themselves as relatively more independent than interdependent, value verbal clarity more than members of collectivist cultures.[21] Recent research has found, in bargaining situations, the more collectivist the buyer and seller were,

the higher the joint profits they earned.[22] The seller's collectivism was the key factor. You may have noted that much of the advice we give in this text about speaking clearly, concisely, and to the point reflects our own enculturation into the mainstream, individualistic culture of the United States.

Consider This 5.2

Brislin et al. provide an example of the collectivist versus individualistic cross-cultural theme.[23] Native Hawaiian children come from a collective culture. A Caucasian teacher from the individualistic mainland found that her attempts to motivate the children by having them compete against each other for prizes were not working. How do you analyze this situation? What could you do to remedy it?

Power Distance

Cultures differ with respect to their preferred **power distance**, which is the degree to which power or status differences are minimized or maximized.[24] In low power-distance cultures, such as Austria, Israel, and New Zealand, people believe that power should be distributed equally. The United States is a relatively low power-distance culture. We prize equality under the law; our Declaration of Independence asserts that "all men are created equal." We regard it as unfair for some to receive privileges accorded to them only by accident of birth instead of being earned by hard work or merit. In contrast, high power-distance cultures, such as the Philippines, Mexico, Iraq, and India, generally have a rigid, hierarchical status system and prefer large power distances. In high power-distance cultures, people believe that each person has his or her rightful place, that leaders or others with power should have special privileges, and that the authority of those with power should not be questioned.

Hofstede noted that larger cultures usually develop higher power distances. Larger groups need more formalized leadership and communication structures to maintain themselves than smaller groups do. Power tends to be concentrated in the hands of a few people, with others accepting the fairly rigid hierarchy as normal and desirable.[25]

Lustig and Cassotta have summarized research that examines how power distance might affect small group communication.[26] They found that power distance is related to leadership styles and preferences, conformity, and discussion procedures. High power-distance cultures value authoritarian, directive leadership, whereas low power-distance cultures value participative, democratic leadership. We Americans tend to assume, ethnocentrically, that everyone wants a chance to participate in decisions that affect them. That reflects our deeply held cultural values stemming from our relatively low power-distance culture. However, an American group leader trying to use a participative leadership style in a group of Mexicans or Filipinos is likely to be seen as inept or incompetent. Power distance is also related to the discussion procedures members

Power Distance
The degree to which a culture emphasizes status and power differences among members of the culture; status differences are minimized in low power distance cultures and emphasized in high power-distance cultures.

prefer. Participation in group discussions and decisions is preferred by persons who believe their individual opinions should be valued regardless of status (i.e., low power-distance cultures), but decision making by the leader, with minimal participation from the group, is the norm in high power-distance cultures. People from high power-distance cultures believe it is appropriate for low-status group members to conform to the desires of high-status members; however, in low power-distance cultures, members will be less likely to conform.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty Avoidance

The degree to which members of a culture avoid or embrace uncertainty and ambiguity; cultures high in uncertainty avoidance prefer clear rules for interaction, whereas cultures low in uncertainty avoidance are comfortable without guidelines.

Uncertainty avoidance refers to how well people in a particular culture tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.[27] Does unpredictability make us anxious or eager? Low uncertainty avoidance cultures have a high tolerance for ambiguity, are more willing to take risks, have less rigid rules, and accept a certain amount of deviance and dissent. Great Britain, Sweden, and Hong Kong are such countries. At the other end of the continuum are countries such as Greece, Japan, and Belgium, where people prefer to avoid ambiguous situations. These cultures establish rules and clear-cut norms of behavior that help individuals feel secure. All members of the culture are expected to behave in accordance with the standards of behavior, and dissent is not appreciated. People from such cultures often have a strong internalized work ethic. The United States is a fairly low uncertainty avoidance culture.

When low and high uncertainty avoidance individuals come together, they may threaten or frighten each other.[28] Low uncertainty avoidance people, such as most Americans, are perceived as too unconventional by their high uncertainty avoidance counterparts. On the other hand, high uncertainty avoidance people are seen as too structured or uncompromising by the low uncertainty avoiders.

Uncertainty avoidance affects preferences for leadership styles, conformity, and discussion processes.[29] Cultures high in uncertainty avoidance rely on clear rules, consistently enforced, with the leader expected to structure the work of the group and behave autocratically. They prefer structure and clear procedures. In contrast, low uncertainty avoidance cultures prefer democratic leadership approaches. High uncertainty avoidance cultures value predictability and security; nonconformist behavior threatens this predictability. Conformity to the leader and group opinion is the norm for high avoidance cultures, whereas dissent and disagreement are tolerated, even encouraged, in low avoidance cultures. Lustig and Cassotta postulate that this should produce groups that are more task-oriented in high uncertainty avoidance cultures and more relationship-oriented in low uncertainty avoidance cultures.

Masculinity versus Femininity

Masculinity (as applied to culture)

The quality of cultures that value assertiveness and dominance.

Femininity (as applied to culture)

The quality of cultures that value nurturing and caring for others.

Masculinity refers to cultures that value stereotypical masculine behaviors such as assertiveness and dominance.[30] This is contrasted with **femininity**, referring to cultures that value behaviors such as nurturing and caring for others.

Masculine cultures, which include Japan, Austria, Mexico, and Venezuela, prize achievement, accumulation of wealth, aggressiveness, and what we would call "macho" behavior. Feminine cultures, which include the Scandinavian countries, The Netherlands, and Thailand, value interpersonal relationships, nurturing, service to and caring for others, particularly the poor and unfortunate. The United States is a moderately masculine culture.

Lustig and Cassotta observe that masculinity and femininity manifest in a number of preferences related to small groups.[31] With respect to leadership, masculine cultures are more comfortable with a controlling, directive style. Such cultures value objectivity and control, qualities exhibited by authoritarian leaders. Feminine cultures, which value relationships and subjectivity, prefer a more participative, democratic leadership style. Conformity is also likely related to the masculinity-femininity dimension. Stereotypical masculinity , with its emphasis on assertiveness and ambition, does not value conformity highly. In contrast, femininity, which stereotypically values cooperation and group-based decision making, expects and values conformity. Finally, social roles between men and women are more clearly differentiated in high masculine cultures. Males are more likely to undertake task-related roles and females socioemotional ones. This affects the roles performed in small groups. It also affects who will compete for the leadership role and whether women will be accepted in leadership and other high-status positions.

Low- versus High-Context Communication

The final cultural characteristic we will consider is what Hall termed low-versus high-context communication.[32] A culture with **low-context communication** is one where the primary meaning of a message is carried by the verbal, or explicit, part of the message, whereas in **high-context communication** the primary meaning is conveyed by certain features of the situation. In other words, in a high-context culture, what is *not* said may be more important in determining meaning than what *is* said. Typically, there is such a high degree of consensus that words aren't needed; members of the culture share the same understandings and can take much for granted. In low-context cultures, such as those of Germany, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries, and the United States, direct, clear, and unambiguous statements are valued. The suggestions we provided in Chapter 4 for conducting organized and effective group discussions are appropriate for low-context cultures such as ours. We expect people to state precisely what they mean so there can be little room for doubt, no matter what the situation (i.e., context) happens to be. The same verbal message given in different contexts means about the same thing. For example, "No, I don't agree with that idea" means much the same thing whether you are in a meeting of co-workers, at the family dinner table, or meeting with your church board. In contrast, high-context cultures such as China, Japan, and South Korea prefer ambiguity, with several shades of meaning possible, because this helps preserve harmony and allows people to save

Low-Context Communication

Communication wherein the primary meaning of a message is carried by the verbal or explicit part of the message.

High-Context Communication

Communication wherein the primary meaning of a message is conveyed by features of the situation or context instead of the verbal, explicit part of the message.

face. In China, instead of "No, I don't agree with that idea," you are more likely to hear, "Perhaps we could explore that option." You would have to be well versed in Chinese communication patterns to know whether that statement means "No, we don't like it" or "We like it very much, but we must build consensus slowly" or "We don't know whether we like it or not until we explore it more fully." Moreover, you would also have to be astute at reading clues in the situation—for instance, is this in reaction to the boss's suggestion, or to a younger co-worker's? Complicated, isn't it? To us, with our low-context bias, it seems as though the Chinese are beating around the bush.[33]

Low-context cultures also tend to be individualistic, and high-context cultures tend to be collectivist.[34] Collectivist cultures operate by consensus of the group; individuals try not to risk offending another member of the group as this might upset a delicate balance of agreement and harmony. Apparently, ambiguity allows individuals to express opinions tentatively rather than directly without the risk of affronting others and upsetting the balance. Because low-context cultures such as the United States display cultural diversity where little can be taken for granted, verbal skills are probably more necessary, and thus more valued.[35] In a high-context culture such as Japan, the high degree of cultural homogeneity means that more can be taken for granted (and thus remain unspoken) during the communication process. In fact, most Japanese value silence more than we do and are suspicious of displays of verbal skills.[36]

> Sometimes the best contribution is from the person you wouldn't have expected.
>
> *B. H., Director, State Award Program*

You can imagine how difficult group communication can be when members from a high-context culture try to interact with members from a low-context culture. Your author, Gloria, once observed a student group that included Qing-yu, who was from Taiwan. The American students were used to lively debate and accustomed to speaking out in favor of or in opposition to one another's ideas, but in Qing-yu's culture, disagreement is indicated very subtly. Qing-yu's quiet, subdued behavior in the group irritated the American students, who kept trying to get her to behave more like them. The harder the Americans tried to force her to take a stand, get to the point, and be direct, the more she retreated into her familiar orientation of ambiguity and indirectness. The misunderstanding was severe.

The six characteristics we have just discussed determine what is considered appropriate verbal and nonverbal communicative behavior in a particular culture. (See also Table 5.2.) In the previous chapter, we discussed several effects of cultural differences on nonverbal communication. Here, we focus on language issues related to cultural or co-cultural differences. Nonverbal signals are inherently ambiguous and readily subject to misinterpretation,

TABLE 5.2   Dimensions of culture and associated characteristics.

Worldview	"Being" Orientation	"Doing" Orientation
	Go with the flow. Fate controls human events.	Make things happen. People control events and are in charge of their own fates.
	Patience is valued.	Prefer getting to the point quickly.
Collectivism/Individualism	Collectivism	Individualism
	Group is standard of reference; group is valued over individual. Value harmony and conformity. Value slow consensus building.	Individual is standard of reference; individual is valued over group. Value dissent and diversity. Value debate and disagreement.
Power Distance	High-Power Distance	Low-Power Distance
	Status differences maximized. Status hierarchy based on birth/position in society is normal; people are not created equal. Prefer authoritarian, directive leadership.	Status differences minimized. Status hierarchy based on birth/position in society is unfair; people are created equal. Prefer democratic, participative leadership.
Uncertainty Avoidance	High Uncertainty Avoidance	Low Uncertainty Avoidance
	Uncomfortable with ambiguity. Prefer clear rules and norms, high structure. Prefer structured leadership.	High tolerance for ambiguity. Comfortable with loose, flexible rules. Prefer democratic leadership.
Masculinity/Femininity	Masculinity	Femininity
	Value assertive behaviors. Value achievement. Emphasize objectivity, control. Prefer autocratic leadership.	Value caring, nurturing behaviors. Value relationships with others. Emphasize subjectivity. Prefer participative leadership.
High/Low Context	High Context	Low Context
	Message carried by the context, nonverbal content. Culturally homogeneous; much meaning can be safely assumed. Prefer indirect communication.	Meaning carried by the words, verbal content. Culturally diverse; meaning cannot be taken for granted. Prefer clear, direct communication.

whether cultural differences exist or not. But language seems more precise. We may be tempted to assume that verbal language is less susceptible to cultural misunderstanding—but we would be wrong! The following section describes language issues related to cultural and co-cultural differences.

Language Issues Related to Cultural Differences

Our most important symbol system is our language, including both vocabulary and rules of usage. As we explained in Chapter 4, the fact that we use different symbol codes (i.e., languages) is not the only factor that makes communication difficult. Some researchers also believe that language in fact *determines* how we experience our world; although such deterministic views have been softened, it is clear that our language code helps shape what we perceive in several fundamental ways.[37] For example, several languages, including German and Spanish, have more than one form of the pronoun *you*. A formal or polite version is used to address people the speaker doesn't know very well; an informal or familiar form is used to address family members and friends. What does this say about the relative formality, display of respect, and egalitarianism in such cultures? Some Native American languages, such as that of the Hopi, have no past, present, or future verb tenses. These cultures are spontaneous and experience *time* as what happens in the present moment. Thus, language barriers are not limited to different word usages; they are also caused by *perceptual* differences that can be equally troublesome.

Not only are symbol systems and usages different, but preferred organizational patterns differ as well.[38] Consider what many of you have been taught by your English teachers, who suggest starting an essay with a main thesis, developing the thesis and supporting it with evidence, and presenting a clear conclusion that summarizes the main points. That linear presentation is the preferred organizational pattern for U.S. English. However, other cultures or co-cultures prefer different patterns. Many Eastern cultures, for instance, prefer a narrative approach to the topic and use a more inductive than deductive pattern. Sometimes students who complain about experiencing difficulty in courses taught by non-native teaching assistants or professors are reacting more negatively to organizational patterns than to the mispronunciation of some words. Individuals in the United States who live in generational poverty, where family members have lived in poverty for at least two generations, use a nonlinear narrative style as well.[39] Stories are not told sequentially, from beginning to end, but in a circular way, with the most emotional content provided first.

Inability to use the same language code (i.e., to speak the same language) presents significant obstacles to understanding. Consider how stressful it must be for the many international students in colleges and universities throughout the United States who must expend considerable energy listening and trying to decipher the content of messages; little energy is available for the nuances and subtleties of the interaction. Even something as simple as the word *yes* can cause problems. Koreans sometimes use *yes* when an American might say

no. "Didn't you go to school yesterday?" elicits the following Korean response: "Yes, I didn't."[40] Although *yes* sometimes means agreement, it can also acknowledge that the Korean listener has heard a question, or that the Korean fully understands what the speaker is saying and is encouraging him or her to continue. Koreans use *yes* to maintain harmony and the appearance of harmony by avoiding appearing negative.

Communication difficulties can occur even between native speakers of the same language. For example, one of our colleagues, a native-born Canadian, circulated a memo asking us to provide our yearly activity reports in "point form." Faculty members were confused until someone noted that *point form* to a Canadian means *outline form* to someone from the United States. Misunderstandings between native language speakers can be humorous and are usually cleared up quickly, but misunderstandings between non-native speakers can sometimes be deadly. Many air traffic controllers around the world issue their instructions in English. When a controller in Madagascar said, "Clipper 1736 report clear of runway" the American pilot interpreted that as clearance to take off. The controller had meant, "Report that you have cleared the runway." The result of this linguistic mistake was a crash where 600 people died.[41]

One final example illustrates pitfalls that can occur with the verbal aspects of intercultural communication. In graduate school, Gloria worked on a committee to analyze data by computer. Two Arab students were members of this committee. Responsible for writing the instructions for the computer analysis, Gloria named the file "BEGIN" to indicate "here's where to start." The Arab students, believing she had named the file *BEGIN* after Menachem Begin, prime minister of Israel, felt they had been deliberately insulted and protested vehemently to the course professor. They were focusing on cues most salient to them. Gloria was oblivious to the possible double meaning. It took a long time to unravel the source of the friction, but even though the mistake was innocent, trust among the group members was permanently impaired.

Communication Challenges Posed by Co-Cultures

Earlier we described cultural and co-cultural communication rules and patterns as things that are learned, expectations and behaviors that we absorb. The United States contains many co-cultures that exist, some of them more visible than others. In this next section, we examine differences in the characteristics, values, and communication based on race, age, and socioeconomic class.

Co-Cultural Differences Based on Race: African American Communication Patterns

In this section we discuss several of the communication differences observed between African Americans and Caucasian Americans. We do not intend to imply that relationships between Hispanics and European Americans, or

Asians and African Americans, are not equally important. In fact, in the near future, Hispanics will be the largest minority group in the United States, with profound implications for communication. However, we elected to discuss black-white communication because misunderstandings here appear to be among the most serious and volatile at this time. African Americans and Caucasian Americans perceive each other as threatening and have generally negative evaluations of each other,[42] so it seems especially important to help each group understand the other. We remind you again that even though we discuss African American communication patterns as though African Americans were a uniform group, this is not the case. We agree with Orbe, who notes that the considerable diversity *within* the African American community has been largely ignored by researchers.[43]

Foeman and Pressley have summarized research that describes "typical" (although we caution you again that there is no such thing as "typical") black communication, particularly in organizational settings.[44] Black culture in the United States is an oral culture, so verbal inventiveness and virtuosity of expression are highly valued. What many whites perceive as boastfulness Foeman and Pressley call *assertiveness*, which takes both verbal and nonverbal forms (for instance, trying to top someone else's boast, strutting across the street). Black managers are perceived as forthright or overly reactive. In a conflict, for instance, a black is more likely to confront an individual directly, whereas a white manager is more likely to approach the problem indirectly. Consequently, some blacks perceive whites as underreactive, but some whites see blacks as overreactive. Degree of responsiveness (expressiveness) differs; blacks are more likely to respond both verbally and physically (e.g., gesturing often with their hands), whereas whites tend to focus on verbal responses. Blacks make less direct eye contact, but they compensate by standing closer to their conversational partner than most whites. These differences in cultural communication patterns can create serious misunderstandings. For instance, a white expecting more eye contact may be likely to repeat or rephrase statements in order to get the expected signs of understanding (such as eye contact), whereas the black person feels the white person is being condescending.

The black culture is more collective than the more dominant white culture of the United States. According to Foeman and Pressley, this may lead to such strong black identification with blacks *as a group* that a black person may be unwilling or unable to work with people of different ethnic groups. However, the communal structure of the black culture helps offset the discrimination and prejudice blacks still receive in this culture.

African Americans and European Americans express themselves verbally in different ways. Blacks are more playful than most whites in their use of language and relish playing verbal games. Foeman and Pressley explain that blacks *signify* (or hint) at questions rather than asking them directly because they perceive disclosure of personal information to be voluntary; thus, questions are implied so that the person being asked will not feel vulnerable or obliged to an-

swer. In addition, blacks use the backchannel (or *call-response*) to indicate interest and involvement in the discussion. For example, in black churches the services resemble a dialogue, with congregation members freely calling *Amen, Go ahead, Preach* to the minister; such responses would be less frequent in most white churches. Differences in black-white uses of the backchannel, as we discussed earlier, can create misunderstandings and cause hurt feelings.

One of us noticed an illustration of these verbal differences. The week after John Kennedy, Jr., was killed in an airplane crash, Rev. Jesse Jackson was being interviewed by Cokie Roberts in a television tribute to Kennedy. In response to a question about Kennedy's work with the disadvantaged, Rev. Jackson began to speak movingly and at length about the young man. He was using the cadences and extended style of many black preachers and it was clear that he was just getting started when Cokie interrupted him to say, "So in other words, there was substance to [Kennedy]." In one short sentence, Cokie, who seemed a little frustrated at how long it was taking Rev. Jackson to answer her question, summarized concisely what he had been saying and went on to her next question. The "typical" white, to-the-point style bumped up against the "typical" flowery, elaborated style of black preachers in an interesting way.

Consider This 5.3

Assume you are the only African American (or Caucasian American) in a group of white (or black) students. How do you think you would feel? What thoughts would run through your mind? How, if at all, do you think your behavior would change?

In the United States, it is often difficult for someone from one co-culture to participate fully in a group dominated by members of a different co-culture. Many African Americans, including some of the most successful, say they must behave cautiously and carefully in groups of white Americans; they can never fully relax.[45] In many ways they have developed bicultural competencies—one set of behaviors for African American groups, another for primarily white groups. This balancing act can be exhausting, but many African Americans believe that if they do not conform to the communication rules of the dominant, European American culture, they will pay a high price.

Co-Cultural Differences Based on Age

Over our many years of teaching, we have noticed more "nontraditional" (i.e., older) students in our classes than was true 20 or 25 years ago. We have also noticed that events that have helped shape us as teachers, such as the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and Watergate, are things our students know only from their history books. Age and generational differences have

produced interesting challenges for us and for our students, who increasingly participate in multigenerational groups.

Orbe notes that co-cultural patterns come from the lived experiences of members of the co-culture.[46] The significant events people live through together contribute to formation of the worldview, values, and communication preferences co-cultural group members exhibit. Hicks and Hicks have examined such events with respect to the four generations that currently predominate in the United States, and have identified a number of key differences that make it difficult for members of different age groups to communicate effectively.[47] The following generational descriptions are, of course, overgeneralizations; however, significant happenings—political assassinations, the explosion of the Internet—have significantly influenced each generation's values and approach to life.

The **builder generation,** born from 1901 to 1945, lived through the Great Depression and World War II. They experienced the four-term presidency of Franklin Roosevelt, the polio epidemic, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. drop of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Red Scare fear of communism. Most were adults during the 1950s economic boom, when ordinary people could buy houses, appliances, cars. This generation tends to be cautious about money, defers gratification, and believes in discipline, self-sacrifice, and working toward the common good. Members tend to value conformity and traditional role relationships between the sexes; they can lack spontaneity.

The **boomer generation,** about which much has been written, grew up when television became widely available. Born from 1946 to 1964, boomers experienced the divisiveness of the Vietnam War, political assassinations in the United States, the civil rights movement, the advent of the birth control pill, and the massive mistrust of government precipitated by Watergate. This is a confident generation, willing to challenge authority and tackle big causes. Their sheer size—for a long time this was the largest generation—means that they have been catered to by marketers and producers. Thus, boomers believe they are right all the time, are self-absorbed, and feel free to break rules when they think that's best for them. They also are willing to work hard and expect to be fulfilled in their work.

The **X generation,** born from 1965 to 1976, are sandwiched between two very large generations. They were the first to experience divorce on a massive scale and many became latchkey children. They feel abandoned or emotionally neglected, and have a higher suicide rate than the other generations. They believe they are entitled to the good life, and they don't want to wait for it. They want to prove themselves, but feel the boomers aren't giving them a chance to do so. They are flexible, are comfortable with pluralistic points of view, and are used to change. X-ers display commitment to diversity, which they value more than conformity.

Builder Generation

Individuals born before 1945; key experiences include the Great Depression and World War II.

Boomer Generation

Individuals born from 1946 to 1964; key experiences include the Vietnam war, the civil rights movement, and Watergate.

X Generation

Individuals born from 1965 to 1976; key experience includes divorce on a massive scale.

The final generation, the **net generation,** was born between 1977 and 1997. This is the largest generation in terms of numbers, but they are too young yet to have made their influence fully felt. Net-geners are the first fully wired generation—they grew up with computers, e-mail, answering machines, cell phones, voice mail, CDs, and DVDs. They have never known a world without AIDS. Major influences include the Internet and the death of Princess Diana. Members of this generation are in touch with their friends constantly through electronics, even though their friends may be widely scattered. Net-geners have been doing collaborative work ever since their elementary school days; they are comfortable in group settings, are open minded and tolerant, and are nonlinear thinkers. But they also don't like to conform to bureaucracy and organizational rules.

> I think differently about the world than someone who is a grandparent. And then the person straight out of college thinks differently. So I really like to have those people with sort of differing life stages [on a team].
>
> *B. H., Director, State Program*

Generational differences can severely tax the resources of a group if members aren't sensitive to them. When e-mail was just becoming widely used at her university, Gloria chaired a university committee that included builders, boomers, and a Net-gen student representative. The boomers had become used to using computers and e-mail; the student had grown up with computers. One builder refused to use e-mail for communication; he preferred written memos. Because he was a valuable group member in every other way, Gloria chose to accommodate him by printing out hard copies of all e-mail messages and sending them to him via campus mail. Today, years later, everyone uses e-mail, although some builders and boomers have not learned to navigate the net with the ease of the X-ers and Net-geners.

One of us observed a classroom group with difficulties caused in part by generational value differences. The boomer member, who was the age of the Net-geners' mothers, attempted to organize the work of the group, to establish regular meeting times, and to coordinate the library research of the group. In her journal, one of the Net-gen students lamented that she felt "ordered around" by her mother and was having a hard time accepting this boomer student as a peer. She wanted to disagree and to suggest alternative ways of finding information—such as using the Internet for research—but felt uncomfortable about contradicting somebody who reminded her of her mother. Eventually, partly because of the sensitivity of the boomer member, this group was able to talk and joke about their generational differences and to learn from one another. One particularly interesting difference in this group was that the Net-gen students thought of the Internet *first* as a way to research a topic, whereas the boomer thought first of print sources.

Net Generation

Individuals born from 1977 to 1997; the first truly "wired" generation, comfortable with technology in all forms.

Age or generational differences in small groups have not been investigated much. Two recent studies of media use found generational differences. Kuo found that X-ers in Taiwan used electronic media significantly more than others.[48] Shah, et al. found different patterns of media usage for informational purposes, with builders using newspapers, boomers using television, and X-ers using the Internet.[49] Timmerman, in his study of age and racial diversity of baseball and basketball teams, found both age and racial diversity related to impaired performance on basketball teams.[50] This negative relationship between diversity and performance seems to be a relatively recent phenomenon of the last 20 years. Timmerman speculates that diversity is likely to be more challenging for teams where task interdependence is high, as in basketball. These results support further study into the effects of generation-related co-cultural differences.

Co-Cultural Differences Based on Socioeconomic Class

As with generational differences, the effects of socioeconomic class differences in small groups likewise have not been widely investigated. However, numerous studies attest to differences in communication patterns based on socioeconomic class. We like to think we belong to a classless society, but we don't. Socioeconomic class is not based solely on income. Jackman found that class distinctions are also determined by education, job authority, and skill.[51] In addition, people are readily able to classify others by socioeconomic class. Jackman's research participants showed a high degree of consensus when they were asked about the social class into which particular occupations fit. Furthermore, class differences produce differences in values and communication patterns. Ellis and Armstrong examined television depictions of middle-class and non-middle-class (lower-class and poor) families and found implicit messages about how people of difference classes communicate.[52] For instance, middle-class males used longer sentences and generally more complex speaking patterns than non-middle-class males. Middle-class people of both sexes used more adverbs. The word *ain't*, never used by middle-class speakers, served to mark someone as non-middle class.

Communication within the family exhibits class-based communication patterns. Ritchie discovered that families of parents whose jobs entailed a high degree of openness and autonomy in the workplace—in other words, parents of higher socioeconomic class—demonstrated greater conversational orientation within the family, and less conformity.[53] The families that Jordan observed showed relationships among social class, perceptions of time, and media usage.[54] Parents in middle- and upper-class families socialized their children to observe deadlines and structure their time. They used a linear, sequential structure for activities in the home by encouraging their children to do one thing at a time and to complete one task before going on to another. They planned their schedules in advance and adhered to them. The working-class

families used looser organizational patterns and tended to do several things at once, such as watch television, eat dinner, and talk to each other at the same time. Schedules were not planned in advance or were changed spontaneously. Jordan speculates that a family's use of time may be related to the perception of time as a resource, which itself may be class based. For instance, middle- and upper-class families perceived time as a scarce commodity that should be managed well and not wasted, and taught their children to perceive time in the same way. In such families, media usage, particularly watching television, was not seen as a particularly good use of time. Working-class parents did not perceive media use as either a good or bad use of time. Interestingly, working-class parents were more concerned about the content of media usage than upper- or middle-class parents. These preferences can produce subtle differences in what individuals from different socioeconomic classes accept as normal or appropriate in a group.

We could find no studies that looked at the effect of class differences within small groups. However, in our own teaching, we have observed the effects (usually bad ones) of communication differences that are class based. A recent book by Payne describes several of the key communication patterns, related to the co-cultures of class, that can cause problems.[55] Payne, a teacher and principal, has been successful in working with both children and adults from backgrounds of what she calls *generational poverty*, in which a family has experienced socioeconomic poverty for at least two generations. Payne notes that the communicative and daily living rules differ greatly for people from poor, middle, and wealthy classes. Each class experiences its own ethnocentricity, assuming that its rules are both known and appropriate. Middle-class individuals, who include many of the teachers, managers, and professionals in the United States, assume that "everyone knows the rules" for how to do things. But the poor and the wealthy have different values and communicative rules! What are some of those differences?

Middle-classes value achievement and believe they can affect the future with the choices they make in the present. Individuals in generational poverty focus on the present. They believe the future is controlled by fate and they cannot do much to change it. Wealthy classes respect the past; they make decisions based on tradition and history. They prize social connections.

Payne notes that different classes use discourse in different ways. Individuals from backgrounds of generational poverty use discourse as a form of entertainment. For all discourse, they use the casual register—an informal meandering conversational style the middle class uses between friends. It is characterized by vague word choice, incomplete sentences, reliance on nonverbal signals to complete thoughts, and a limited vocabulary of 400 to 800 words. The narrative pattern is circular, where the speaker talks around an issue before getting to the point. This contrasts significantly with the formal register style middle-class and wealthy speakers use for most conversations. Formal register uses complete sentences, standard sentence construction and

syntax, a more extensive vocabulary, specific words, and the speaker gets right to the point. In Table 5.3, the story of Cinderella, told in both casual and formal discourse, illustrates some of these differences.

The formal register version is told in chronological order, from beginning to end, and demonstrates cause, effect, and conclusion. It follows the typical problem-solving pattern of sequential logic—first one thing happens, then the next, then the next. The casual register version it more entertaining and relies on audience participation. The narrator expects others to jump in and help tell the story. For middle-class readers, the story will appear disorganized. However, and this is an important point to remember, the story has its own logic, an emotionally based one, where the most important emotional elements are highlighted first.

These differences are interesting, but their point here is to highlight the potential challenges of diverse groups. Imagine how frustrating it can be if you think it's important for a speaker to get right to the point, and you encounter someone in your group with a wandering narrative style. Similarly, can you envision how rude and boring it must seem to someone with a colorful, spiraling narrative style to be paired with a sequential, get to-the-point partner? That is why we think it is important for group members to understand each other's rules and assumptions.

Challenges for Co-Cultural Group Members

This discussion of race, age, and social class has only scratched the surface, and is not intended to be exhaustive. It is intended to encourage you to think about your own behavior with an eye toward sensitizing you to ethnocentric behavior that may cause problems in a group. Orbe suggests that members of co-cultures that are not part of the dominant culture can become marginalized in groups and organizations.[56] If they want their views represented, they must expend energy thinking about how their communication affects and is received by members of the dominant culture. There are a number of strategies they use, but they may or may not be successful in being heard.

Consider This 5.4

Would you like to know how well a group you belong to is managing its diversity? Linda Larkey has developed a brief scale to assess individuals' perception of their interactions in a culturally diverse environment. In Chapter 15, Figure 15.9, we will present the four dimensions of this scale that specifically assess aspects of diversity: inclusion (whether everyone feels included), ideation (whether diverse ideas are welcomed), understanding (how well diverse members understand one another), and treatment (are members of co-cultural groupings treated the same as majority members). Have the members of your group answer the questions on this instrument and discuss the results.[57]

TABLE 5.3
Cinderella, in formal
and casual register.

Formal Register Version (abbreviated because of familiarity)

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Cinderella. She was very happy, and she lived with her father. Her father remarried a woman who had three daughters. When Cinderella's father died, her stepmother treated Cinderella very badly and, in fact, made her the maid for herself and her three daughters. At the same time in this land, the King decided that it was time for the Prince to get married. So, he sent a summons to all the people in the kingdom to come to a ball. Cinderella was not allowed to go, but she was forced to help her stepsisters and stepmother get ready for the ball. After they left for the ball, and as Cinderella was crying on the hearth, her fairy godmother came and, with her magic wand, gave Cinderella a beautiful dress, glass slippers, and a stagecoach made from pumpkins and mice. She then sent Cinderella to the ball in style. There was one stipulation. She had to be home by midnight.

At the ball, the Prince was completely taken with Cinderella and danced with her all evening. As the clock began striking midnight, Cinderella remembered what the fairy godmother had said and fled from the dance. All she left was one of her glass slippers.

The Prince held a big search, using the glass slipper as a way to identify the missing woman. He finally found Cinderella; she could wear the glass slipper. He married her, and they lived happily ever after.

Casual Register Version (bold type indicates the narrator; plain type indicates audience participation)

Well, you know Cinderella married the Prince, in spite of that nasty old stepmother. Pointy eyes, that one. Old hag! **Good thing she had a fairy godmother or she never would've made it to the ball.** Lucky thing! God bless her ragged tail! Wish I had me a fairy godmother. **And to think she nearly messed up big time by staying 'til the clock was striking 12. After all the fairy godmother had done for her.** Um, um. She shoulda known better. Eyes too full of the Prince, they were. They didn't call him the Prince for no reason. **When she got to the ball, her stepsisters and stepmother didn't even recognize her she was so beautiful without those rags.** Served 'em right, no-good jealous hags. **The Prince just couldn't quit dancing with her, just couldn't take his eyes off her. He had finally found his woman.** Lucky her! Lucky him! Sure wish life was a fairy tale. Kind like the way I met Charlie. Ha ha. **The way she arrived was something else—a coach and horseman—really fancy. Too bad that when she ran out of there as the clock struck 12 all that was left was a pumpkin rolling away and four mice!** What a surprise for the mice! **Well, he has to find her because his heart is broken. So he takes the glass slipper and hunts for her—and her old wicked stepmother, of course, is hiding her.** What a prize! Aren't they all? **But he finds her and marries her. Somebody as good as Cinderella deserved that.** Sure hope she never invited that stepmother to her castle. Should make her the maid!!

Source: Ruby K. Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc., 2001, 47–48 (Reprinted by permission).

Two recent studies by Kirchmeyer indicate that minority members of groups are often the lowest contributors.[58] Two plausible explanations for this are that minorities may lack a sense of belonging to the group and that, although they may be skilled in communication within their own culture, they may lack the skills to communicate effectively in groups composed primarily of whites. Kirchmeyer found that minority status affected contribution levels, and she cautions that multicultural groups may not be encompassing the multiple perspectives of all their members in the final products. This view is supported by Teboul's study of minority hires in organizations.[59] He notes that minority new hires encounter more setbacks in becoming truly part of their organizations, experience more relational isolation, and learn that certain relational doors are closed to them. This represents a significant loss to all of us. Whether we are black or white, young or old, middle class or poor, Protestant or Jewish, urban or rural, we must begin to recognize that differences are just that—differences!

> Things work or don't work based on whether the relationship you establish . . . works. So I need people who are able to get along with other people, but in a way to get the work done, not just get along.
>
> *P. T., University Director of Planning and Development*

In the film *The Color of Fear*, eight men of different races discuss their pesonal experiences with racism. Communication scholar Tadasu Imahori, who is Japanese American, discusses his reaction to watching the European American in the film deny that racism is a problem in this country.[60] He observes that he can easily relate with the other men who had experienced racism, but were unable to convince the white man of the validity of their experiences. This illustrates a main point we want to convey in this chapter: it is imperative in small groups to invite and acknowledge the experiences, perceptions, and viewpoints of all members. Someone's perspective may be different, but does not make it invalid, wrong, uneducated, or stupid. We must learn to manage diversity effectively. Failure to do so has hurt members' feelings, demonized individuals who represent the dominant culture of the United States, fostered reverse discrimination, pinpointed certain groups or individuals as being responsible for all diversity-based problems, reinforced stereotypes, and demoralized everyone.[61] When we don't embrace and encourage group diversity, we deprive groups of the ideas, creativity, and problem-solving efforts of *all* members.

Behaving Ethically in Intercultural Interactions

By now, you know that what is considered rhetorically sensitive and appropriate communication depends on the culture. If communication rules differ in each individual culture, are there any universal or overarching principles that

preserve the integrity of individual cultures, yet let members of those cultures work together? Kale suggests two broad principles that should govern intercultural interactions: we should protect the worth and dignity of all human beings, and we should act in such a way as to promote peace among all people.[62] The following ethical guidelines follow from these broad principles:

1. **Communicate in a way that extends empathy and respect to all members of the group.**
    Similar to the ethical principle described in Chapter 1, this principle requires that you work to understand others as they want to be understood. This is more challenging between group members of different cultures because there are fewer "givens," but there are things you can do. First, remember that all discussions are to some extent intercultural; be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences and view them as potential strengths for a group, not liabilities. Resist making judgments about the intelligence or motives of others. Encourage all members to get to know each other beyond the task demands of the group. Finally, initiate discussion of the differences. You will help group members move toward greater understanding and empathy if you explicitly acknowledge differences and willingly discuss them, not in a judgmental way but as an opportunity to learn more about your fellow group members and yourself.

2. **Work to incorporate the key cultural values of all members into the group's procedures and outputs.**
    Of course this is easier said than done, but failure to do this denigrates the cultural values of those members who are ignored. This also means that all members must adjust their normal ways of interacting to accommodate differences. Bantz's work with an intercultural research team provides several specific suggestions for managing cultural diversity.[63] In that team, explicitly establishing common goals and deadlines addressed the needs of members high in uncertainty avoidance, and differences in power distance norms were handled by segregating tasks and varying the leadership styles accordingly. Differing needs for cohesion were addressed by alternating task and social aspects of the work. Notice that these ways of handling the diversity recognized the legitimacy of the differing cultural norms, showed the members' ability to adapt, and demonstrated respect for all concerned—all ethical goals.

    Specific suggestions to help you put these ethical principles into effect in your small groups are summarized in Figure 5.2.

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FIGURE 5.2
Guidelines for
ethical intercultural
interaction.

In intercultural small group communication,

Remember that every discussion is intercultural to some extent. Because we each have unique backgrounds, we do not use verbal and nonverbal signals to mean exactly the same things.

Recognize and accept differences; view them as strengths of the group, not liabilities. Instead of judging others as wrong for behaving in ways different from yours, recognize that each of us is the product of our culture. Resolve to learn from each other, not to try change each other.

Resist making attributions of stupidity or ill intent; ask yourself whether the other member's behavior could have cultural origin. When another member's behavior seems rude, inconsiderate, our unusual, ask yourself whether you could be observing a cultural difference in what is considered appropriate behavior before you decide the other member is worthless to the group.

Be willing to discuss intercultural differences openly and initiate discussion of differences you observe. Instead of being uncomfortable or pretending that differences do not exist, be willing to ask for and share information about cultural norms and rules. When you observe differences, you can enrich everyone's understanding by pointing them out and initiating a discussion about how cultures vary.

Be willing to adapt to differences. Instead of insisting that others follow the prescriptions of your culture, be willing to adapt your behavior to different cultural practices when appropriate. Try to incorporate the key values and needs of each culture into the group's procedures and outputs.

SUMMARY

1. All interactions are to some extent intercultural, but some much more than others. Being able to work effectively in intercultural small groups will be increasingly necessary in the next decades. Everyone must abandon ethnocentricity and learn to appreciate, rather than denigrate, diversity.

2. Cultures vary along several key dimensions, including worldview, or beliefs about the nature and purpose of life, which help determine our values, activity orientation, customs, and beliefs; the degree of individualism; the degree of power distance; the extent to which people avoid uncertainty; whether a culture values stereotypically masculine or feminine behavior; and the extent to which people rely more on the words or the context to determine the meaning of something.

3. Language differences between cultures or co-cultures can also cause major misunderstandings.

4. Race, age, and social class differences can be viewed as cultural differences. Different races, generational groupings, and social classes have different rules for behaving.

5. Two ethical principles should guide intercultural interactions in groups: the worth and dignity of humans should be protected, and peace among all people should be promoted.

KEY TERMS

Test your knowledge of these key terms by visiting the Online Learning Center website at mhhe.com/galanes11

Activity orientation	Ethnocentric	Masculinity (as applied to culture)
Boomer generation	Femininity (as applied to culture)	Net generation
Builder generation	High-context communication	Power distance
Co-culture	Individualistic cultures	Uncertainty avoidance
Collectivist cultures	Intercultural communication	Worldview
Cultural identity	Intracultural communication	X generation
Culture	Low-context communication	

EXERCISES

Go to self-quizzes on the Online Learning Center at mhhe.com/galanes11 to test your knowledge of the chapter concepts

1. List all the cultures and co-cultures with which you feel a strong identification. Form groups of five or six; share and discuss your lists. What do you think are the most salient characteristics of the cultures or co-cultures on your list? How do the members of each one expect you to behave? Do the features of any of the cultures contradict each other? If so, how? How do you handle it when you experience conflict between the expectations of two co-cultures to which you belong?

2. One important co-cultural grouping is your family. Form groups of five or six and have each person discuss what the communication norms are in his/her family. (You may want to narrow this to focus on only one kind of situation, such as having dinner with your family.) Are there norms that might surprise family members? Are there norms your family follows that differ from the norms of your classmates' families? Are there norms governing what you should *not* talk about?

3. As a class, look at movies that depict intercultural encounters of various kinds, including male-female encounters. For example, *Witness, My Big Fat Greek Wedding, The Four Seasons, When Harry Met Sally, The Joy Luck Club, Gandhi*, *The Color of Fear*, and *A Stranger Among Us* depict international or intercultural encounters. As a class, address the following questions:

How did the two cultures in the movie differ? (Be sure to discuss the characteristics of worldview, collectivism versus individualism, low versus high power distance, low versus high uncertainty avoidance, and low versus high context.)

What communication problems did the differences create?

Were the communication difficulties resolved? If so, how?

How were the people from the two cultures changed by the encounters?

How realistic were the portrayals of the two cultures?

4. Ask several international students to visit your class and describe communication customs and behaviors in their home countries. Ask them what they found most different or hardest to adjust to in conversations in the United States. How do they think their communicative behaviors have changed as a result of encounters with Americans?

5. Ask native-born American students who have either traveled extensively or lived for long periods of time in other places to talk about their experiences adjusting to other cultures. What did they find most different or hardest to adjust to about the communication behavior of the people in the other cultures? How has their behavior changed as a result of their travels?

6. Use one or more of the intercultural "critical incidents" described in *Intercultural Interactions: A Practical Guide* (listed in the Bibliography below) to create a role-play or skit for the class. Discuss what each individual in the role-play or skit might do to repair the interpersonal damage that may have occurred and to prevent such "mistakes" in the future.

7. Go to a public place (e.g., airport, restaurant, or museum) and observe the differences between how men and women behave. Take note of such things as how they sit and stand, how they seem to use personal space, their facial expressions and gestures, and so forth. What generalizations are you comfortable making from your observations? Share your findings with the class.

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