Chapter 1: Broadening Horizons

Learning objectives for this chapter

Successful interaction with this and associated course content will enable students to…

- ✓ Recognize the need for IC competence in today's increasingly diverse communities
- ✓ Develop balanced and informed views on the concepts of culture and communication
- ✓ Perceive patterns in cultural traditions/values but be alert to over-simplifications
- ✓ Recognize the ethical issues in IC and the need for global citizenship
- ✓ Understand the role of media in framing cultural values

Topics covered…

I. Introducing intercultural communication

- What is intercultural communication?
- The need for intercultural communication today
- Culture: Central to our lives
- Culture from the perspective of complexity theory
- Communication: A human necessity

II. Cultures under study and in the media

- Intercultural Communication as an academic discipline
- Cultural taxonomies and their dangers
- Ethics & intercultural communication
- Countering the media echo chamber
- Technically speaking: Information literacy

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In this initial chapter we will be discussing some of the fundamental aspects of intercultural communication, including its importance in today's world, its history as an academic discipline, and the typical approaches to its instruction. There will also be discussion of the role of media in intercultural communication as well as its relationship to ethics. This chapter, as do each in this text, concludes with a section related to technology (entitled "Technically Speaking"); in this case, dealing with the importance of digital and information literacy for intercultural communicative competence.

What is intercultural communication?

Intercultural communication refers to the process of interacting with people who are different from oneself in fundamental ways related to appearance, language, **worldviews**[1], or a number of other categories. For many people this phenomenon is part of their everyday lives, for example, in multilingual, multicultural communities or in culturally diverse families. The majority of human societies deal with multiple cultures and multiple languages. The USA has traditionally been one of the few countries in which it is possible to be successful even if one speaks only one language, English (Nieto, 2010). The USA, however, is shifting demographically in ways that are likely to change dramatically attitudes towards language and culture. By the year 2042, demographers tell us, non-Hispanic whites will be in the minority (Roberts, 2008).

The USA is by no means unique in undergoing this process. The means of communication and transportation available today result in more mixing of cultures than ever before. This coincides with trends in commerce and trade in recent decades which have facilitated growing internationalization in all areas of business and economic activity. This process of **globalization** is facilitated by social media activities of people around the world. Communicating with others who are physically remote is possible through social networks such as *Facebook* or through online conversations via *Skype* or *WhatsApp*. At the same time, political and economic forces are causing large numbers of people to become asylum-seekers or economic refugees, creating more diverse cities and countries throughout the world. This process can also create conflict, sometimes due to concerns of foreigners taking jobs away or changing the character of a region, and sometimes due to fear arising from willful ignorance and **xenophobia** – the fear of foreigners.

In fact, globalization is by no means, as often portrayed, a benign process, benefiting humanity universally. While many in developed countries enjoy international travel, increasing prosperity, and safe communities, those in other parts of the

[1] Bolded items in the text are defined in the Key Concepts section at the end of each chapter.

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world continue to experience severe deprivations (food, water, housing), mass unemployment, and violent communities. The coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has revealed in dramatic form how economic inequality within countries and across the world translates into health care disparities, higher death rates, and human deprivation of all kinds. The adverse living conditions in economically disadvantaged regions, along with unequal access to education and healthcare, are often accompanied by corruption and political powerlessness. This has led to mass migrations and social instability. Within developed countries, there are sharp divisions based on geography, social class, and income. These disparities, along with changes in the global economy, have propelled populist and nationalistic leaders in many parts of the world to power. It remains to be seen whether the economic and social upheavals resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic will reinforce trends towards isolation or will demonstrate the need for countries to work together to solve global problems like pandemics or climate change that ignore national borders.

The need for intercultural communication today

Given the demographical and globalizing trends of recent decades, in today’s world one is likely to have more encounters (online or in person) with people from different cultures. Technological advances have played a major role in bringing people together. The Internet has reached the remotest corners of the world, as has satellite and online entertainment. People are able to see and appreciate differences in culture, way of life, and ways of interpreting the world at the click of a button. We need to be aware, however, of the fact that access to online resources is by no means universal or automatic; in many countries and regions connectivity may be limited by cost, cultural factors, and/or government controls. Another development of recent times that has brought increased contact with those from other cultures is the increasing ease of travel to different parts of the world for both work and pleasure (for the privileged).

UK International Development Secretary, Justine Greening, talking with Syrian children in the Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan

These developments have resulted in an increased need to be interculturally aware and competent, as encounters with cultural "others" is on the rise. From that perspective, there is certainly a personal incentive for being interculturally sensitive. The openness and flexibility needed for successful cross-cultural exchanges offer benefits in personal and professional interactions of all kinds. Becoming knowledgeable about other cultures is also invaluable in gaining deeper insight into one's own culture. An experience living abroad or in close contact with those from another culture can lead to dramatically changed perspectives on the values and behavior patterns of one's native country.

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There is in addition a practical, utilitarian benefit, as companies are increasingly looking for employees who are flexible, tolerant, and able to work with others different from themselves. In virtually every business today, what happens in other countries can have a serious impact on its operations and viability. Communities and societies benefit as well, as understanding and tolerance reduce animosity and conflict. This is of increasing importance today, as we see a rise in nationalistic movements in many countries, often accompanied by growing calls for political isolation, economic nationalism, and stricter immigration controls. In part, this is a response to the fact that the forces of globalization have resulted in disadvantages for particular local populations in terms of job opportunities and economic well-being. These tendencies have unfortunate byproducts, namely the rise of prejudicial attitudes towards members of minority groups and a closing-off of minds and feelings towards those who act or look different.

It is of particular importance for future leaders to gain insight and empathy into other cultures. National or regional officeholders, heads of political parties, and others in the public eye (entertainers, writers, activists) function as role models. Their views, opinions, and behaviors can have a substantial public influence. Figures like Pope Francis, Malala Yousafzai, or Greta Thunberg have exerted positive influence, respectively, on views of minority rights, educational opportunities for girls, and the need for immediate action on global warming. Unfortunately, we have seen in recent years public figures advocating for ideas and policies which divide and inflame communities, such as white supremacy or rejection of equal rights for LBGTQ individuals. Messages of this kind — of hatred and bigotry— can fall on receptive ears, particularly if an individual or a community has not often encountered individuals different in ethnic background, religious belief, or language:

> Many societies are deeply divided: the anger of rural and deindustrialised communities cut adrift by neoliberal globalisation is readily harnessed against the more concrete scapegoat of minorities, particularly if people have little experience with diversity. Against this context, opportunities for everyday mundane connections that allow people to engage beyond the stereotypes can become a crucial means to overcoming division and exclusion (Piller, 2017, p. 203).

Studies have shown that the geographical regions with the lowest number of immigrants or members of a minority tend to have the highest level of negative views of those groups. This is a clear indication that these views are not based on experience or evidence but on uninformed opinions based on slanted media or anecdotal information from friends or family. Piller (2017) provides a hopeful counterexample, namely Sudanese immigrants in a virtually all-white Australian community becoming socially accepted by individuals and community leaders who reach out beyond stereotypes and their in-group bubbles.

Intercultural understanding is essential in gaining an informed and balanced appreciation of media, whether that be television reports focusing on other countries

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or blog posts from abroad. Today there is a vast amount of information freely available, through media channels and the Internet. Understanding the perspective from which others view the world can be very helpful in becoming informed consumers of news stories and social media. Given the importance of this topic, it will form a thread through many of the discussions in this textbook.

Culture: Central to our lives

Embedded in the term intercultural communication is the word **culture**. Culture is a slippery concept. In English, it has a number of different uses. Already in the 1950's, one article cited over 150 definitions of culture (Kluckhohn & Kroeber, 1952), while a more recent study analyzed over 300 definitions (Baldwin et al., 2006). One of those concepts is culture with a capital C, or high culture, namely literature and the arts. When we say in English that someone is cultured, this is the kind of culture we mean, someone with a good education, who perhaps goes on a regular basis to the theater or concerts, and reads books. We won't be talking much here about that kind of culture. Rather what's important for intercultural communication is the concept of culture related to the everyday pattern of life. Neuliep defines culture as "an accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors, shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol systems" (2012, p. 19). We will use this as our initial working definition, refining it subsequently to embrace other concepts beyond that of national cultures, implied in this view. In this traditional description of culture, several ideas emerge as being of importance:

- *An accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors…*
  Individual cultural identities develop over time, with handed-down concepts and actions being reinforced through repetition in a gradual socialization process. Culture references a number of aspects of normal human existence, from weighty issues such as our worldview and ethical–moral standards to more mundane matters such as how we greet each other or the kinds of food we like to eat.

- *…shared by an identifiable group of people…*
  These cultural norms represent fundamental, default values for individuals identified with that cultural group. That group may be small or large, fixed in a single location or dispersed

Sushma Swaraj, External Affairs Minister of India at an Indian Diaspora event in London. Great Britain is home to many families originating in India or Pakistan

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among different **diaspora** communities (geographically separated). However, no matter where they may be, they share particular characteristics that make them a distinct group.

- *…with a common history…*
  How important historical memory is to members of a culture may vary. In some cases, as with Native Americans, or for other groups having been displaced or suffered acute social injustice, their history is likely to be well known and to play a significant role in determining cultural values as well as in shaping interactions with other groups. According to Rogers and Steinfatt (1999), "collective cultural consciousness," the embedded memories of historical events important to a particular cultural group, can act as a kind of "message filter", affecting significantly communication dynamics (p. 3).

- *…and (common) verbal and nonverbal symbol systems*.
  Language plays an oversized role in social cohesion and is the most important vehicle for transmission of cultural values. Nonverbal communication patterns are also a prominent constituent part of a group's identity and an easily identifiable marker for group membership. Both systems are based on symbols. Some see the use of symbols as the essence of a culture. For anthropologist Clifford Geertz, culture is a complex set of symbols used to create order and sense in our lives. According to Geertz, cultures "denote an historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols" (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). As we saw from the example at the beginning of this chapter, while symbols may sometimes seem arbitrary (i.e., no inherent connection to their meaning), they nevertheless can be powerful, embodying deeply-held values and beliefs.

Culture is not something we are born with, but rather it is learned, starting with our families, then moving on to our school experiences and friends. We often are not aware of the cultural values we embrace, even though many of those values and behaviors determine important aspects of our lives. They may only come to the surface when we encounter people who come from different cultures. In that sense, culture is often described as hidden (Hall, 1966). Culture is not fixed and immutable; culture does not exist in a vacuum, but is influenced by historical, social, political, and economic conditions. Cultural values are constructed from social dynamics in the countries or groups represented. Those values are not necessarily universally embraced.

In everyday life, cultures are often associated with nation-states, as assumed in Neuliep's definition. This can be traced back to the work of early 19th-century German scholar Wilhelm von Humboldt, who was one of the first to equate nations with cultures (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). We often hear about French culture or Chinese

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culture. But within political boundaries, cultures are rarely monolithic. There tend to be many regional differences, as well as differences based on ethnicity, age, profession, social class, and other categories. National cultures change, whether it's a consequence of catastrophic events such as wars, epidemics, or natural disasters, or simply through contact with a foreign culture. One could point to the spread of U.S. culture, for example, through the popularity of American movies and music, as well as through military interventions. In recent years we're seen South Korean popular culture develop a large following outside of Korea. K-pop, as it's called, has many fans worldwide, some of whom adapt aspects of the K-pop sub-culture such as dress, hair style, or mannerisms (Kim, 2013). The fact is that as individuals we don't necessarily fit the mold of the national culture in which we were raised. Some scholars speak of culture as something often contested (see Jackson, 2010; Pillar, 2017). Hippies in the 1960's, for example, saw themselves in opposition to the cultural mainstream of many Western countries, in political views, in dress, and in attitudes towards work and leisure. In the end, culture is personal and fluid.

Korean group Girls' Generation, popular world-

With these perspectives on culture, we can return to our initial working definition and add some qualifiers. This traditional view of culture implies a static state, not the fluidity described above. A dynamic vision of culture embraces the idea that cultures can be built on the fly, through individuals coming together due to commonalities of one kind or another, possibly even for a short duration of time. Another conventional conception of culture is a common history, but in reality within national cultures there may be groups whose history is quite different from mainstream groups, such as African-Americans in the US. Finally sharing values, behaviors and languages may be true only in a restricted sense. Sub-groups within a national culture (based on ethnicity, age, education, profession, gender, citizenship status, etc.) may exhibit quite different social norms as well as language practices. It is useful to have knowledge of the traditional conception of culture, but at the same time understand new and different perspectives on what "culture" is. That is further explored in the next section.

Culture from the perspective of complexity theory

We live in a world that has become increasingly complex, with a host of problems both global and intractable:

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> Economic instability, the widening gap between rich and poor, climate change and the environmental crisis, the unstoppable transnational flow of refugees despite increasingly harsh regimes of border control, the threat of terrorist movements, rising geopolitical tensions as the hegemony of the West declines, urban gridlock and conflict in our hyper-diverse cities, the unsustainable costs of health care in times of population ageing, and the unsettling impact of rapid technological change – these are only a few of the large conundrums facing our globalized, interconnected world today (Ang, 2011, p. 779).

One could easily add to this list issues surrounding the Internet, from cyber security to the loss of privacy and addiction to social media. Additionally, there is the constant threat of global pandemics, which are unpredictable, and potentially devastating. These problems are long-term and have a variety of causes. They have repercussions in human lives, both local and global. In recent years, the forces of globalization, mechanization, and mass migration have led to social divisions and political upheaval. Economic uncertainty and resentment towards immigrants have led to the growth of economic nationalism, populism, and isolationism across the globe. Common to these developments are ubiquity and complexity – the problems are interwoven in local and global contexts and evince multiple causes and unpredictable outcomes:

> In short, everywhere in the world complexity is staring us in the face; its overwhelming impact – socially, economically, ecologically – is increasingly undeniable and inescapable. That the world is terribly complex is now a vital part of global cultural experience, a structure of feeling which has grown more pervasive in the twenty-first century (Ang, 2011, p. 779).

One way of dealing with this increasingly complex world is to pretend the problems do not exist, to engage in willful ignorance, by, for example, disbelieving scientific evidence. Another option is to ignore what happens beyond one's neighborhood. Yet in the 21st-century it is virtually impossible in any part of the world to withdraw completely from interconnections and interdependencies which may be global in scale, but often local in effect. That was clearly demonstrated by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. One approach to solving complex problems is to choose short-term or partial measures. The danger in that approach is that it tends to lead to simplistic solutions, that may be popular, but in reality misrepresent both the issue and its complexity, and prove not to be viable longer-term. Complex problems are not solved by single, simple cause-and-effect explanations. There are typically multiple, changing variables at play, so that any problem-solving is likely to be both complicated and provisional. As conditions change, problem-solving approaches must adapt.

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The first step is to recognize and accept the complexity of a problem and seek to understand its origins and developmental path. An approach that has gained currency in both natural and social sciences is **complexity theory** (CT), an ecological approach which stresses nonlinearity, unpredictability, and self-organization in how systems work. An expanded version of chaos theory, complexity theory looks to uncover a system's beginning (its "initial conditions") and to trace development as variables and subsystems are added to combine and shape outcomes in ways that are unpredictable. Studies have shown the extent to which language and language learning can be understood as complex systems, given the variability of language use and the multiple factors which affect learning a second language (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). That approach has recently been used as well to analyze the dynamics of informal language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2018). In chapters three and four we will look at that topic in more detail. Another area within intercultural communication that invites a CT analysis is personal identity, a topic we will address in the next chapter.

Viewing culture and intercultural communication from a CT perspective can help us understand that reducing culture to national origin is a simplistic misrepresentation of the dynamics of identity formation today, in which multiple influences – in person, online, and in the media – combine in unique ways that are varied and unforeseeable. Holliday (1999) uses the term "networked individual" to point to the myriad influences on individuals in our time. Culture from this perspective is fluid and dynamic, impacted by diverse, intersecting factors and not reducible to a single point of origin. The complexity of culture can also lead us to realign the typical approach in intercultural communication studies of focusing on similarities or differences. There are too many variables in play for contact between cultures to be understood in such binary terms. It is preferable to imagine instead a sliding scale, with both context and individual affecting interactions. Given that individuals have increasingly complex identities, that means that when individuals come together in conversation, that interaction is characterized by complexity as well.

Communication: A human necessity

Communication occurs in many different contexts, and conversations will have different characteristics depending on who is speaking, where the exchange takes place, and what the purpose of the encounter is. Human conversation is highly contextual and infinitely variable. The linguist Noam Chomsky has made us aware of the fact that virtually every sentence we speak is something brand-new, combining a basic set of elements into endless combinations, a phenomenon known as **digital infinity** (Chomsky, 2005).

According to the popular conception of human speech, language is used primarily for the transmission of information. This familiar transmission model breaks

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communication down into a transmitter and a receiver, whose roles may be reversed in the course of a dialogue, but whose purpose in talking is to send a message of some kind. This is a concept derived from early work in electronic communication, such as that done by Bell Labs in the US in the 1040's and 1950s (see Shannon, 1948). In 1960, Berlo expanded the communication model to include factors such as the purpose and objectives of the message being transmitted, as well as nonverbal communication. His "SMCR" model breaks down communication into the Sender, Message, Channel, and Receiver, each of which is affected by a variety of factors. One of the important modifications in the model is emphasis on the channel's influence on message transmission. This was later popularized in the phrase, "the medium is the message," by Marshall McLuhan (1964), meaning that a message is tightly tied to the means of transmission. This is of particular relevance today, as digital media have provided multiple channels of communication — texting, email, *Facebook* messaging, tweets, *Instagram* posts, etc. – all of which have a shaping influence on how a message is received.

In the traditional model of communication, the major emphasis is on the message transmitted and how that process takes place. Yet linguists, from observing and studying actual conversations, have learned that rarely does a conversation have only a **semantic** purpose, i.e., used to convey meaning. Instead, talking is often a social action, used to maintain relationships and convey feelings and emotions. Sometimes conversations are shaped by social status and function as a way to affirm or contest a hierarchical status quo (see Sorrells, 2013). Humans are social animals and the need to communicate is fundamental to our nature. Communication is what builds and maintains communities. Historically, the worst kind of human punishment has been exclusion from a community and enforced verbal isolation (see sidebar). Like culture, we take human communication for granted, and feel its importance only when it is lost.

Conversing is often less about information transmission and more about building relationships

No communication = no community

Throughout history, when societies wanted to severely punish someone for a social transgression, the harshest punishment was excommunication — banishment from the community. In Catholicism this means to cast out someone from the church. In ancient Rome the process was called ostracism, a ritual in which citizens used clay shards (ostraca) to vote for someone to be sent away from the community for 10 years. In modern Amish communities the practice is called shunning. The shunned person is allowed to physically remain in the community but is prohibited from any social interaction with others

Remland et al., 2014, p. 9

Another issue with the traditional communication model of sender-receiver is its Western orientation which prioritizes message transmission (and therefore heavier importance placed on the sender) than the relationship among conversants. Non-

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Western models tend to take into consideration other aspects of the communication process, such as group harmony and asymmetrical power relationships. The *Sadharanikaran* communication model from India (from Sanskrit meaning universalization or commonality) stresses the importance of the communication parties reaching *saharidayata* (commonness or oneness) through reciprocal consideration of context, the inclusion of physical/non-verbal factors, and the need of respect for the spiritual dimension in human interactions (Adhikary, 2008). The model "offers an explanation of how successful communication is possible in Hindu society where complex hierarchies of castes, languages, cultures and religious practices are prevalent" (Adhikary, 2008, p. 67). Similarly, an *anthropocosmic* communication model, based on Confucian principles of the essential unity of self, community, and cosmos, seeks to de-emphasize the individual and recognize humanity's interconnectedness and interdependence through dialogic negotiation (Yuxin & Xuelai, 2016).

The nature of human speech affects intercultural communication. If talking is essentially a socialization process, holding conversations has the potential to build relationships. But that also means that the language we need for engaging in normal conversation is not simply vocabulary useful for expressing meaning. We need, importantly, to know about the social dimensions of language, i.e. the appropriate way to greet others, how to express gratitude, or what topics are appropriate to introduce in a conversation. Communication is fundamentally cultural. To be effective, conversation partners need to be sensitive to a range of factors beyond verbal communication. That includes nonverbal actions, such as how close to stand to the other person or whether to maintain eye contact (see Hall, 1966).

Those kinds of considerations we need not think about if the conversation is with a person or a group with whom we are familiar (Hall, 1959). When we speak of intercultural communication, we are moving away from that comfort zone, engaging in exchanges with people representing different cultures, that is to say different sets of values, beliefs, and behaviors; a different historical memory; quite possibly a different language (or dialect). The individual may not, in fact, represent the mainstream culture. That type of communication can be very different from encounters with those with whom we share a culture, in which the context is familiar. As a result, intra-cultural conversations tend to be more comfortable and routine. Even so, depending on the situation or context, we may experience conflict or **communication apprehension**. Speaking in front of a group, for example, can produce anxiety for many people. Conversing with strangers can bring on even more apprehension. This comes in large part from uncertainty. The less we know about the other person's background and intentions, the more uncertain and apprehensive we may be. We can combat these feelings through approaching encounters in a spirit of openness and discovery. That lessens the likelihood of misunderstanding and conflict.

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Intercultural Communication as an academic discipline

There are a variety of approaches to study and research intercultural communication (see Leeds-Hurwitz, 2010; Rogers & Hart, 2002). As an academic discipline, it is often traced back to anthropologist Edward T. Hall and his book *The Silent Language* (1959). Hall was above all concerned with creating greater cultural awareness among employees of the US Department of State. He was striving to improve the ability of US technicians and diplomats to interact effectively with their foreign counterparts. Given that perspective, his approach was understandably more practical than theory-based. That pragmatism continues to be important in the field, as a central goal is to provide individuals with practical information that can be used in everyday encounters (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999).

Much of the early development of intercultural communication occurred in North America, and North American scholars represented the principal contributors to scholarly activity in intercultural communication through most of the 20th century. However, beginning in the 1990s, the field became increasingly internationalized. European scholars have contributed important new insights and approaches to intercultural communication (Byram, 1997; Holliday, 2010; Hua, 2013; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009), as have Australian and New Zealand scholars (Piller, 2017; Schirato & Yell, 2002). These scholars tend to focus more centrally on language issues than is the case for IC research in North America.

Through the contributions of researchers from Africa, China, Latin America, and India, there has been a growing recognition that Western approaches to intercultural communication need to be supplemented – and in some cases corrected – through the different life experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives offered by non-Western scholars. One example is the anthropocosmic perspective presented in a recent Chinese textbook on intercultural communication (Jia & Li, 2019), which is based on the concepts of *dao* (道, "the path", the way to enlightenment through cosmic harmony) and *ren* (仁, "benevolence", empathy and responsibility for fellow humans). There have been in recent years more calls for indigenous perspectives on intercultural communication (Miike, 2007). Particularly welcome would be more insights from African scholars (Miller, 2005). In the latter part of the 20th century, there has been considerable interest in **critical intercultural communication**, which views intercultural communication within the context of power structures (see Jackson, 2010; Piller, 2017). That perspective will inform much of the discussion of IC in this textbook.

Since Hall's time, a great variety of disciplines have contributed to the field, including applied linguistics, business communication, social psychology, behavioral economics, and international studies. In fact, intercultural communication is taught within a variety of academic units. Given the practical usefulness of easing communication among those representing different cultures and languages, it is logical

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that intercultural communication figures prominently in areas where such interactions are common and expected. In many countries, that will include tourism, medical care, and/or education. In the US, intercultural communication is taught most commonly within programs in communication studies, while in other Anglophone countries, it is considered a subdivision of applied linguistics. Professional organizations often bring together scholars from a variety of disciplines. Indeed, that is one of the enriching characteristics of the field, that it draws on knowledge and experience representing many different academic fields. This textbook will incorporate aspects of research in intercultural communication as represented in a variety of disciplines. The disciplines use different research methodologies, have differing goals, and address issues from a variety of perspectives. Some use primarily quantitative data, others are more qualitatively oriented. In the end, these different approaches complement each other and together provide a more complete picture then would reliance on a single discipline (see Kotthoff & Spencer-Oatey, 2007).

What it means to be a confident intercultural communicator differs depending on the disciplinary orientation. However, as an overall set of common denominators, we might break down the competencies in the following categories, following the rubric on *intercultural knowledge and competence* from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Rhodes, 2010):

Knowledge	**Skills**	**Attitudes**
Cultural self-awareness	*Empathy*	*Curiosity*
Knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks	*Verbal and nonverbal communication*	*Openness*

The more *knowledge* we have about other cultures the more likely it is that we will base initial judgments about representatives of those cultures on reliable information, rather than on stereotypes gleaned through popular culture or media reports. That knowledge may be in a variety of areas ranging from geography to religious beliefs. Having informed views of other cultures is likely to make encounters more successful. In learning about other cultures we inevitably *learn about ourselves*, as we draw comparisons between the values and behaviors of the target culture and our own.

A primary enabler of insights into another culture is *verbal language*. Language enables us to understand and express phenomena we may have found unfamiliar and for which we may not have had the vocabulary. Learning a new language on the one hand, widens our worldview, and on the other, opens a window of famil-

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iarity into the worlds of others who may have seemed unfamiliar earlier, thereby affording an opportunity for both to connect with each other. Depending on the context, the ability to converse in another language can be of central importance, determining whether effective communication is possible. *Nonverbal* clues – smiling, nodding, bowing — can send important messages, but will only take a conversation so far. It's also the case that learning a second language provides deeper and more complete access to the other culture. Language takes you into the heart of a culture, offering an **emic** (from inside the group) perspective, rather than an **etic** view (from outside). The possibility of participation in the target culture, rather than just observation, is likely to lead to greater understanding and appreciation of its values and behaviors, resulting in greater ***empathy***. That in turn is likely to lead to *curiosity* and a desire to learn more about that culture. For communication to be effective, both parties need to be motivated to communicate. If we go into an encounter with pre-formed negative views of the group we assume the other person represents, it's not likely that there will be a positive outcome. On the other hand, refraining from judgment and maintaining a spirit of openness create a positive atmosphere, making effective communication much more likely.

Some would argue that empathy, tolerance, and openness are helpful in personal encounters, but that a further aspect of intercultural competence beyond skills, knowledge, and attitudes, should be added: civic action. Given the widening socioeconomic inequities, the growth of nationalism, and the mounting distrust and mistreatment of minorities, collective action is needed beyond the individual. The concept of **global citizenship** points in that direction. This concept entails a call for action in the form of active civil engagement in society, starting with local action and service to the community (O'Dowd, 2019). Another framework in accord with this vision is **critical cosmopolitanism**, described as "a deep appreciation for difference, the willingness to engage with cultural Others and be transformed by such experiences, kindness towards strangers, and the labour of the imagination to envision a world that aspires towards peace, possibilities and intercultural respect for those near and far" (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan, 2013, p. 7). Cosmopolitanism, originating in the field of sociology, has emerged as complementary to the concept of intercultural competence (Kennedy, Díaz, & Dasli, 2017). Along the same lines is the concept of *co-humanity*, deriving from Confucian ideas of the interconnectedness of self, humanity, and nature, and calling for mutual respect, mutual concern and mutual responsibility: "Co-humanity presupposes that different and opposite forces are complementary and therefore they are communicative, dialogical, and mutually beneficial" (Yuxin & Xuelai, 2016, p. 34).

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Cultural taxonomies

In the academic study of intercultural communication, cultures are often characterized as belonging to particular categories, often referred to as taxonomies (i.e., a type of classification scheme). Many of the characteristics used go back to work done by Geert Hofstede in the 1970's, who studied the cultural dimensions of workers for IBM in a variety of countries (1980). The salient category often used to characterize and contrast cultures is **individualism** versus **collectivism**. Cultures labeled as individualistic (most often Western countries including those in North America and Northern Europe) are seen as emphasizing the rights of the individual to self-determination, with children being brought up to be assertive and distinctive. In contrast, collectivistic cultures (seen as prevalent in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East) emphasize group identity and conformity, with children expected to be obedient and respectful. While such distinctions can be useful in describing general cultural traditions and patterns of behavior, they are problematic when applied to individuals. Individual identities in today's world tend to be complex, constructed from a variety of sources. Individuals may belong to an ethnic group, whose worldview, values, and behavior are quite different from those represented by the mainstream culture. Political boundaries do not define who we are. One might consider in that regard groups which cross political boundaries, such as the Kurds, Romani, or Basques. In fact, in today's world the coherence of nation-states is increasingly porous, given changing demographics, widespread immigration, and the growth of social media.

Representatives of the Yi Minority in China

There are a number of other cultural dimensions often used in the field of intercultural communication, most of which derive from the work of Hall and Hofstede. The concept of **power distance** describes the importance attributed to hierarchies in a given culture, the extent to which individuals are grouped according to birth, status or position of power. This involves as well the perception within a culture regarding how easy one feels it is to communicate with or approach a person higher in hierarchy. The higher the power distance, the less more reluctant one may feel in approaching a person senior in the hierarchy. Individualistic cultures are typically seen as having a small power distance, meaning that they strive for equality in society and within families. In contrast, in countries with a large power distance, inequality among people is seen as expected and desired.

Time orientation is another category often used. **Polychronic** ("P-time") cultures tend to be less concerned with being on time for events, and individuals deal

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comfortably with more than one task or person at a time. A **monochronic** orientation ("M-time"), on the other hand, shows a preference for being punctual and not having more than one task or person to focus on at a time. A fourth concept is **uncertainty avoidance**, the idea that some cultures are more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty than others. Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which members of a particular culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. Those with a strong uncertainty avoidance prefer predictability and tend to have clear rules of behavior.

The danger of cultural taxonomies

Contemporary scholars of intercultural communication urge caution in using these categories, as they tend to "present people's individual behavior as entirely defined and constrained by the culture in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are" (Holliday, 2010, p. 4). Critics like Holliday describe the use of Hofstede's categories as **essentialism**, that is, assuming that people and things have 'natural' characteristics that are inherent and unchanging. That may translate into defining the essence of individuals in terms of their national origins. If one is from Mexico (a culture designated as polychronic), for example, an essentialist view would be to assume that person will be late for meetings all the time, no matter the context. Inherent in such an assumption is that individuals are unable to adapt to others' norms of behavior. The term **reductionism** is used in similar fashion, referring to the tendency to explain an object by reducing it to a different, usually simpler, level. When dealing with people this means that identities are being reduced to a predetermined set of characteristics, associated with ethnic or cultural stereotypes. Defining individual characteristics through associations with national cultures denies individual free will. It assumes that we don't develop unique individual personalities as we grow. Many people living in a "monochronic" society are often habitually late. Entrepreneurs (and others) in China (a "high uncertainty avoidance" culture) often take risks to make their businesses successful. No matter what kind of culture we live in, we can probably all point to individuals in our culture who have the characteristics of "individualism" and others who tend towards "collectivism".

Holliday and others have pointed out that most of the cultural categories used in intercultural communication were created from a Western perspective and tend to skew accordingly the values attached to the different labels (Holliday, 1999; Piller, 2017). Individualism, for example, is seen as inherently positive, with attributes attributed to it which are valued in Western cultures, namely initiative, assertiveness, and ambition. Similarly, cultures with a large power distance are seen as undemocratic, hence inferior, and those with high uncertainty avoidance are regarded as adverse to risk-taking and, therefore, inhospitable to creativity and personal initiative. Holliday emphasizes the importance of allowing other cultures to

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define themselves, advocating a **decentered** perspective. One should be aware of conventional cultural descriptions, but in encountering someone put them aside to the extent possible and focus on the other as an individual, whose identity may be quite complex, derived from a variety of influences. He emphasizes "bracketing" away the cultural stereotypes, removing *a priori* assumptions, in order to be able to judge others individually. Of course, this necessitates on the one hand, being aware of one's own preconceptions. On the other hand, it contradicts a basic human tendency of putting unknowns into familiar categories.

Holliday advocates moving away from the traditional concept of "culture", identified with largely homogeneous nation-states to that of **small cultures**. He argues, as do others, that the commonly used characterizations of national cultures are a product of 19th century nationalism; as such, the concept is associated with colonialism and the devaluing of non-European cultures (see Jackson, 2010). Holiday also maintains that the "large culture" paradigm makes less sense in a world that is "becoming an increasingly cosmopolitan, multi-cultural place where cultures are less likely to appear as large coherent geographical entities" (1999, p. 244). Instead of the fixed and timeless concept of culture related to nation-states, small cultures are often formed on the fly, by organized or impromptu social groupings or work-related groups. They can easily cut across national borders.

Small cultures can arise from impromptu gatherings, as groups coalesce around common interests or values

In contrast to large cultures which are often presented as behavior-defining, small cultures represent only one aspect of an individual's identity. People align themselves to different cultures at different times (see sidebar). The small culture concept is similar to the idea of "community of interest" or "affinity spaces". It is clear that if we envision culture from the perspective of small cultures, the kind of broad-stroke comparison of differences among cultures, as often emphasized in undergraduate courses on intercultural communication, is problematic.

Small cultures form dynamically

Small culture is thus a dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and operate meaningfully within those circumstances. When a researcher looks at an unfamiliar social grouping, it can be said to have a small culture when there is a discernible set of behaviours and understandings connected with group cohesion. The dynamic aspect of small culture is central to its nature, having the capacity to exist, form and change as required.

Kullman, Holliday & Hyde (2004), p. 64

One of the reasons identities are complex today is the pervasive influence of modern media, which crosses cultural and linguistic boundaries. Participation in social media can be such a central aspect of one's life as to have a determining effect on worldview, values, and behaviors. Individuals can become members of online com-

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munities which acquire over time more importance than national characteristics, religious affiliations, or even families. Such relationships may be virtual, but they are just as real – and can be just as strong – as in-person relationships.

Ethics and intercultural communication

When we reference the widespread use of social media, we need to keep in mind the very real nature of the **digital divide** between those (predominately in developed countries) with easy access to *Facebook* and other online services and those (predominately in developing countries) who have no Internet connectivity, and possibly even no access to electricity. In fact, for many of our co-denizens of the 21st-century, daily routines do not involve reading *tweets*, posting *Facebook* updates, or checking *Instagram*, but rather seeking to fill basic human needs — food, water, shelter. About 50% of the world's population lives below the internationally recognized poverty line, living on less than $2.50 a day. The forces of globalization, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, have indeed brought the world closer together in terms of communication and commerce, but large numbers of people have been left out. That includes not only individuals from countries in Africa, Latin America or Southeast Asia, but also factory workers and others holding blue-collar jobs who have lost their livelihoods to outsourcing or to companies moving factories to lower wage economies. There has been in recent years a growing recognition of the inequality in the distribution of wealth, leading to phenomena such as the "Occupy" movement of 2011-2012, protesting against the elite 1% of the population, or the election of Donald Trump in the United States in 2016, who was elected in large part due to votes from those who feel left out of the 21st-century US economy.

Oakland (California) Occupy general strike in 2011

To be truly interculturally competent means not only being responsible and empathetic in our personal encounters, but extending that process more broadly. We need engaged global citizens, knowledgeable and caring about people and events outside our own backyards. Part of that process is being cognizant of the privileged position many of us enjoy. Important in that process is a willingness to break out of our regular routines of communication and information retrieval, occasionally stepping outside our social media bubble to encounter different voices and points of view. In that way, we are likely to be better informed about the complexities and fragmentations of global communities. This can lead to an enhanced recognition of the need for **social justice**, i.e. the struggle to confront discrimination and challenge inequities. We are both consumers and producers of culture and we all

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have a role in shaping the nature of the world in which we live. From that perspective, it is important not to think of culture as a fixed entity with a controlling influence on our lives. Cultures, as are all human affairs, are not immutable, but rather subject to change through a variety of forces.

There is a natural human tendency to want to be among those similar to ourselves, known as **homophily**. It takes some effort to overcome this normal human instinct. Part of that phenomenon makes us leery of those who look different, belong to different ethnic groups, or profess other worldviews. Those who seem different become the "**other**", rejected for being dissimilar and therefore considered inferior (see Scollon, Scollon & Jones, 2011). This rejection of others who have different ethnic backgrounds or practice other religions has in human history led to multiple instances of civil strife and war, including in recent times conflicts in many parts of the world from Northern Ireland to South Sudan. In extreme cases, the result can be ethnic cleansing and genocide, as we have experienced in the 20th century in Armenia, Germany, and Rwanda. That process of **othering** is intensified if we feel threatened in our livelihood or security by new arrivals. This has been one of the unfortunate byproducts of the large wave of refugees beginning in 2015, principally to Europe, from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and north Africa.

Refugees from Syria on their way to Europe

As the number of immigrants has increased in countries like Great Britain, France, Germany, some feel that not only are jobs and security at risk, but also the very existence of their cultures. This has led to the rise of a number of new movements and political parties in Europe which promote xenophobia and economic nationalism. The vote in Great Britain in 2016 to leave the European Union was not just an assertion of national independence, but also a rejection of the influx of foreigners. We have witnessed similar shifts towards greater nationalism in a variety of countries including Turkey, Russia, India, and the United States. Unfortunately, the patriotism evident in these developments often translates into a kind of free license to discriminate against minorities, whether that be Muslims in India or Hispanics in the US. Political leaders play a crucial role here in setting the tone, thereby influencing followers in terms not only of attitudes but also of behavior. This is one of the strongest reasons we need today worldwide more intercultural understanding, so that future leaders are acculturated to accept diversity and practice tolerance.

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Countering the media echo chamber

The popular image of the "the world is flat" (Friedman, 2005) is that modern communication and transportation are leveling opportunities and bringing people together, breaking down barriers, and creating what Marshall McLuhan called the "global village" (McLuhan, 1962). The reality can be quite different. We may think that on the net we are all equal, but the major Internet companies – *Facebook* and *Google*, for instance – don't just serve up information in a neutral way. Rather they use an **algorithm** – a procedure or formula – to filter information or links depending on what they know about us. What that can mean in practice is that we are served up information that the algorithm has determined we want to have, based on the personal profile the system has built. That derives from the **filter bubble** created by what the system thinks our likes and preferences are. This is built on links we tend to click on in searching with *Google*, the people we follow on *Twitter*, or the interests represented by the friends we have in *Facebook*. The assumption is that we want information only on our expressed interests and established friends. That means we may have less opportunity to have contact with people outside our circle of friends and family. If we want to be competent intercultural communicators, we need to step outside of that comfort zone.

We all have a personal narrative, a way we put the puzzle pieces of our lives together to make a coherent story out of the sometimes disparate elements and events. McAdams and Pals (2006) describe that process as creating an "integrative life narrative", helping people to make sense of their lives through creating an individual narrative identity. That narrative is built from our interpretations of personal experiences including family dynamics, religious practices, interactions with friends, or major life events. When we encounter new ideas, new people, new situations, we try to fit them into that narrative. Chimamanda Adichie, the Nigerian novelist, talks about the power of the single story. It's a natural human tendency to make order out of complexity by simplifying. We feel more comfortable if we can put people and ideas into already established categories.

Chimamanda Adichie

In dealing with people, this can lead to stereotyping. We may not have enough knowledge of a person or of that person's culture to create an informed picture. In such cases we fall back on the little information we might have. If I've been to Africa or have learned about Africa, for example, I can distinguish between Nigerians, Ivoirians, Kenyans, South Africans, etc. But if I don't have that knowledge, I fall back on clichés and stereotypes. If I am a US citizen, I may make associations with Ebola, HIV, hunger, or refugees. Where do these impressions come from? It may be from our friends or family, or from school,

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but most likely it's from media reports. In most of the Western world, news is reported from Africa only if there are natural disasters, wars, epidemics, or other catastrophic events. This is why it is so important to be critical consumers of media, to find ways to enlarge not shrink our views. Traditional print media such as the *Economist*, the *New York Times*, or the *Guardian* (just to name a sampling of English-speaking media) often run substantial stories on international events, in contrast to most local television stations and newspapers. Many alternative new sources have become available online in recent years, such as Global Voices or Vice News.

Online media can also be a great source of information, but it doesn't come easily or automatically. Hearing directly from Africans, for example, has the potential for exploding our stereotypes and providing varied perspectives. That can be invaluable in maintaining open and receptive attitudes. We can't become experts in all parts of the world, but we can take advantage of opportunities that may arrive to gather first-hand knowledge from natives. Online media can supply those contacts. But it takes a willingness to move outside our regular social circle, to remain open and curious, and to seek out opportunities to encounter people different from ourselves.

One of the developments in recent years which has changed the media landscape has been the growth of **citizen journalism**. Individuals around the world are taking advantage of the ease of posting stories and sharing media – photos and videos – to report on stories or issues important to them. These are not trained, professional journalists, but rather everyday citizens who use their cell phones and social media to report on stories traditional media outlets have ignored. That may be due to the absence of media correspondents in that location or because events have occurred suddenly. Citizen journalists have been particularly important in reporting events from natural disorders, sites of political upheaval, and war zones. Examples of events for which citizen journalism through social media, especially *Twitter*, has been important in getting information spread widely include the Cedar Revolution in 2005 (Lebanon), the Tunisian uprisings in 2010-11, or the Arab Spring in 2011. As with all media consumption, it is important to view citizen journalism also from a critical perspective. Citizen reporters may have a political agenda in their news accounts, leading to slanted perspectives. There may as well be technical or linguistic issues which interfere with this kind of public reporting. In some cases that has involved those holding political power shutting down the online services used by citizen journalists.

Citizen journalist Ryan Boyette, interviewing a Nuban refugee in the Yida camp, South Sudan

In reporting and writing of all kinds, knowing something about the writer and the purpose or context for the text can be important in being able to evaluate trust-

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worthiness and objectivity. That can be of particular importance for reports not associated with a trusted media source or news provider, especially relevant in reporting about contentious social or political issues. One approach which aims to supply an objective analysis of both a prominent social problem and an implemented response is **solutions journalism**. Central to this type of reporting is the use of credible evidence, backed by reliable data, to explain an issue and profile a response that is working — or one that been tried and has proven ineffective. The Fixes column of the *New York Times* provides an example of this approach. Having carefully fact-checked stories about concrete projects to solve important social issues (education, poverty, unemployment) provides renewed credibility to news media, while enabling investigative reporting to contribute to the public good.

Technically speaking: Information literacy

One of the prerequisites for effective communication is information about our conversant. The knowledge we bring to a conversation about the other person's background and identity can be valuable in avoiding misplaced assumptions and false information, leading to possible miscommunication or potential conflict. Knowledge about the other's religious beliefs or worldviews may provide practical information about aspects of everyday life, such as greeting rituals, eating habits, or clothing choice. A Muslim woman, for example, may not choose to shake hands, may be skipping lunch because of Ramadan, and may be wearing a headscarf due to social and religious customs. Knowledge about important historical events, minority groups, social hierarchies, or the geo-political situation of the other person's home culture, all may be helpful in determining appropriate and inappropriate conversation topics.

We can't be knowledgeable about all cultures, but we can inform ourselves about particular cultures or groups in which we have a special interest or are likely to encounter. That might include countries in which the language spoken is one we are learning, or it might be cultures represented in one's living community, working environment, or university. Most people today are likely to search and find information on the Internet. That holds true as well for reading the news and keeping up with world affairs. As discussed in this chapter, online searches do not provide neutral, unbiased results. It's also not the case that all search results point to sites with accurate information. With the glut of information on the Internet today, it's more important than ever to be informed consumers of technology tools and services.

Being an informed consumer of Internet services

In assessing search results, there are a few important considerations. Typically, the sites linked first in a search (using *Google*) are "sponsored links", sites that have paid to have their links first in line. The next hits listed are those which *Google's* algorithm has determined are the most popular related to the topic searched. These sites, however, may be linked higher not due to real popularity –

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or to the usefulness of their information – but because of the effectiveness of their **search engine optimization** (SEO). SEO involves modifying a site's HTML code (Hypertext Markup Language – the underlying code of web pages) in order to include terms most likely to be used in particular searches. In some cases dummy websites are set up with back links to the main page to try to enhance the indexing process used by *Google* and other search engines. It's important for sites to be ranked high in search results, as online advertising income is based on the number of visitors to that site. So-called "clickbait" sites are set up to generate advertising revenue by relying on sensationalist headlines to attract click-throughs. Often, the destination site will have minimal information and will require additional click-throughs to try to find the information advertised.

In such an environment, it's important to be able to evaluate search results, to ascertain the likely reliability of the information provided. One indication is the nature of the website. Institutional sites associated with a university, research institute, professional organization, or institution of some kind (such as a museum) are likely to be more objective than personal sites or blogs. Most countries have government websites providing a wealth of information; sites for government agencies can be informative as well. Of particular trustworthiness are sites with resources which are curated, peer-reviewed, or annotated. *Merlot*, for example, is a curated collection of free online learning and teaching materials. Crowd-sourced sites such as *Wikipedia* can be good starting points for information gathering, particularly as they point to further resources and authoritative sources. The same cautions recommended here for written resources hold as well for video sites such as *YouTube*.

Digital literacy also means becoming an informed user of other kinds of online tools and services. There are, for example, a great number of options available today for working in other languages. That includes a variety of dual-language dictionaries, thesauri, and spellcheckers. There are also a number of services which offer online machine translation. Most of those, such as *Google Translate*, rely principally on dual-language corpora – collections of translated texts. This means that they are most accurate when there is a large number of texts available, as there are between English and other major European languages. It's likely that there are far fewer texts for other language combinations, say Arabic to Estonian, forcing the translation engine to rely on built-in grammar/language models. It's always good practice to back-translate machine translations, particularly using a different translation service. Such tools are especially useful for deciphering websites or other texts but less so for writing, as they do not have the flexibility to adjust for language register (i.e., degree of formality) or tone.

Cultures-of-use

In participating in online discussions, it's important to be aware of **netiquette** practices – that is, the social conventions attached to the use of particular forms of electronic communication. One should, for example, avoid writing in all

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capital letters, as that is perceived as shouting. In writing text messages and other short form electronic messaging, the convention is to ignore spelling and grammar rules, including capitalization and punctuation, while making rich use of abbreviations. The potential for miscommunication in written online communication is increased by the absence of facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language, constraining interpretation of communicative intent exclusively to the written language. Depending on the particular medium of communication, there may be as well a particular "**culture-of-use**", that is, a set of historically developed, socially accepted norms and behavior for participation. Steve Thorne discusses, as an example, French language learners participating in an Internet discussion forum for readers of the French newspaper *Le Monde* – see sidebar. Not being aware of localized cultures of use, such as exist in this case, can lead to miscommunication and frustration on all sides. Developing an awareness of the appropriate genres of language use and styles of communication can enable full engagement in multicultural online activities.

A practical lesson in cultures-of-use

In a recent study examining foreign language learning in open Internet environments, Hanna and de Nooy reported on the interactional and identity related activity of four students of French who participated in public Internet discussion fora associated with the Parisian newspaper *Le Monde*. Hanna and de Nooy's rationale for opting to use a public discussion forum was to move students entirely outside of the relative safety of explicitly educational interactions where participants occupy the institutionally bounded subject position of student or learner. *Le Monde* discussion fora, by contrast, exist to support argumentaton and debate about mostly contemporary political and cultural issues. Hanna and de Nooy followed four students, two of whom opened with stand-alone messages that requested help to improe their French. They received a few cordial as well as abrupt replies, each of which suggested the need to take a position in the ongoing discussion. Neither did and both disappeared from the forum. In contrast, the other two students opened with a response to an existing message, directly entering the ongoing debates. One student primarily used English in his posts but still engaged members of the forum and garnered numerous responses to his contributions. With coaching and support from other participants, he was able to fully participate in the discussions, suggesting that "neither politeness nor linguistic accuracy is the measure of intercultural competence here" (Hanna and de Nooy 2003, p. 78). Rather, in the circumstances of this *Le Monde* discussion forum participation in the genre of debate was the minimum threshold for continued participation.

Thorne, 2013, pp. 200-201

Such conventions as illustrated here exist for most forms of Internet-based social activities such as multiplayer gaming. Many of these activities are likely to be global, with participation from users representing a variety of cultures and languages. New modes of online communication will inevitably develop new cultures-of-use. These will be learned informally, on the fly, through participating and observing. As in most areas of culture, here too we are socialized into acceptable norms and behaviors. Given the pace of development of services and activities on the Internet, this kind of socialization is not likely to take place in institutional settings, as John Seely Brown comments: "The unrelenting velocity of change means that many of our skills have a shorter shelf life, suggesting that much of our learn-

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ing will need to take place outside of traditional school and university environments." (2008, p. xi). This translates into both a need for ongoing digital literacy and, as well, a high degree of learner autonomy, to be able to gain the necessary skills and knowledge in a self-directed environment.

For discussion and reflection...

1. Using the discussion of culture presented in this unit, how would you describe your culture? Why are so many people afraid to communicate with people from cultures different from their own? Do you agree with the greater need for intercultural communication competence today? Why or why not?

2. Does the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 demonstrate that it is better for countries to cut themselves off as much as possible from others and, to the extent feasible, develop resources that make the economy self-reliant? What are the upsides and downsides?

3. To what extent have you experienced the media echo chamber and the filter bubble? What methods can help overcome the restrictions on connecting with others? How can greater digital literacy help?

4. *After watching the Chimamanda Adichie TED talk* ("The dangers of a single story"): What does she mean by a "single story"? What would be other ways to describe this phenomenon? Have you had personal experiences that parallel those of Adichie?

5. *After watching the Alisa Miller TED talk* ("How the news distorts our worldview"): Imagine a map which would represent the geographical areas that you read, hear, or talk about the most? What would the map look like? What are areas of the world you hardly ever hear about?

From theory to practice…

– *Strive to encounter others in an attitude of openness and a spirit of curiosity*. Seek to understand rather than to predict. To the extent possible, suspend judgment for as long as you can, forming an image of the other person gradually through conversing. **Active listening** helps, i.e., focusing intently on the words and body language of the other person.

Active listening aids in fostering understanding and in developing empathy

– *Don't apply culturally differentiating labels to individuals*. Generalizations about norms of behavior are misplaced when we are dealing one-on-one with an individual. Because they are widespread, it's good to know about the categories (i.e. "individualism" vs. "collectivism") used to differentiate national cultures, but

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it's important to keep in mind that they represent broadstroke generalizations, which can in no way be applicable to every individual from that culture.

– *Beware of unexamined assumptions*. You are likely to have gleaned information about different cultures from local new sources or from friends or family or from what you may have learned in school. You should be cautious with such "received wisdom", which may rely on stereotypes and outdated information. It's important to learn what sources to trust – both in person and online. Equally important is a willingness to be open to different points of view.

– *Be alert to your personal filter bubble*. You should not assume that you are receiving neutral results from search requests or getting balanced views from online news providers. They may be feeding you what they assume you want, namely more of the same. Try using a different web browser or logging out of your Google or other accounts, to see if suggested links change.

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