OBJECTIVES

After you have read this chapter, you should be able to answer these questions:

- What is a culture?
- What is intracultural communication?
- What is intercultural communication?
- How do we form our cultural identities?
- What is a dominant culture?
- What are co-cultures?
- What cultural norms and values affect intercultural communication?
- What barriers commonly prevent intercultural communication from succeeding?
- How can barriers to intercultural communication be overcome?
Jack, I don’t think we’d better take this flight,” Alicia said. “Why don’t we wait and take the next one?”

“What are you talking about, Alicia,” Jack replied. “Our reservations are confirmed, our bags are probably on board by now, and why would we want to sit around here for hours anyway? Cuba awaits.”

“But Jack, over there,” Alicia muttered behind her hand while nodding inconspicuously to her far right.

Jacked turned his head. There on the end of the long bench sat a large bearded man in a turban.

“Jack, I’m afraid,” Alicia whispered urgently. “He could be a terrorist!”

“Relax, Alicia,” Jack said. “He’s a Sikh, not a Muslim. There’s nothing to worry about.”

“Tell that to the people who were on that Air India plane,” Alicia snapped. “I don’t think they’d appreciate the difference.”
How should we evaluate Alicia’s assumptions in this situation? Are the inferences underlying Jack’s response more accurate or well founded? In both cases, their judgments are based on their perceptions of people who are culturally different from themselves.

As we have observed repeatedly in the preceding chapters of this book, culture has a profound impact on our communication behaviour. We have seen, for example, that our self-perceptions, our perceptions of others, our use of verbal and nonverbal signs to encode messages or to decode the messages of others, our approaches to conversation, our willingness to self-disclose, and our readiness to assert ourselves are communication variables that can be influenced by our cultural background and conditioning. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at some basic concepts of culture, identify important values and norms which set cultural groups apart, assess communication barriers that arise from such cultural differences, and suggest measures that we can take to overcome those barriers and achieve intercultural communication competence.
Culture and Communication

How often have we heard people observe that the world is getting smaller and smaller and the people in it increasingly similar; that we now live, to use Marshall McLuhan’s famous phrase, in a “global village” (1962, p. 31). Some people celebrate this trend as a step toward world unity while others mourn the loss of local cultures, traditions, and controls. Regardless of how we feel about it, however, we must accept that the trend appears to be irreversible. McLuhan coined the phrase “global village” more than 40 years ago to describe how radio had changed the world of the 1920’s (McLuhan, E., 1996); he could not have imagined the degree to which more recent developments such as the globalization of trade and the development of the Internet and the World Wide Web would shrink the planet even further. Today, our lives are affected by the decisions and actions of people in other parts of the world, and we can make instant personal contact with people around the globe with the click of a mouse.

Many Canadians enjoy travel, both real and virtual, but as we have already observed, we do not have to journey to other countries to discover people of different cultures. As we noted in Chapter 1, Canada is a multicultural society, including immigrants from all parts of the world, the descendants of earlier immigrants, and people of many culturally distinct indigenous groups. Table 9.1 gives a sense of just how culturally diverse the Canadian population has become.

So what, exactly, is a culture? Over the past half century, scholars have created and debated hundreds of different definitions. Barnett and Lee (2001) summarize the main features of several widely accepted definitions when they define culture as “a group’s shared collective meaning system through which the group’s collective values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and thoughts are understood” (p. 277).

Intracultural Communication

As Barnett and Lee’s definition makes clear, communication and culture are closely related. It is because of our shared meaning system that we are able to understand the verbal and nonverbal messages sent by members of our own culture. For instance, nearly all Canadians know that the boast “We’re going to win the cup for sure this year!” refers to hockey supremacy and the Stanley Cup, or that the complaint “Ottawa is not paying its fair share of the health care budget” is directed to the federal government. The meanings of these verbal symbols are agreed to by the society as a whole and therefore facilitate intracultural communication, the exchange of meaningful messages between members of the same cultural group.
## Table 9.1 Population by Selected Ethnic Origins, Canada, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethic origin</th>
<th>Total responses</th>
<th>Single responses</th>
<th>Multiple responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total population</strong></td>
<td>29,639,035</td>
<td>18,307,545</td>
<td>11,331,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>11,682,680</td>
<td>6,748,135</td>
<td>4,934,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>5,978,875</td>
<td>1,479,525</td>
<td>4,499,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>4,668,410</td>
<td>1,060,760</td>
<td>3,607,655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>4,157,210</td>
<td>607,235</td>
<td>3,549,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>3,822,660</td>
<td>496,865</td>
<td>3,325,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>2,742,765</td>
<td>705,600</td>
<td>2,037,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>1,270,370</td>
<td>726,275</td>
<td>544,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1,094,700</td>
<td>936,210</td>
<td>158,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>1,071,060</td>
<td>326,195</td>
<td>744,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North American Indian</td>
<td>1,000,890</td>
<td>455,805</td>
<td>545,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch (Netherlands)</td>
<td>923,310</td>
<td>316,220</td>
<td>607,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>817,085</td>
<td>260,415</td>
<td>556,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Indian</td>
<td>713,330</td>
<td>581,665</td>
<td>131,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian</td>
<td>363,760</td>
<td>47,230</td>
<td>316,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>357,690</td>
<td>252,835</td>
<td>104,855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>350,365</td>
<td>28,445</td>
<td>321,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>348,605</td>
<td>186,475</td>
<td>162,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>337,960</td>
<td>70,895</td>
<td>267,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>327,550</td>
<td>266,140</td>
<td>61,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>307,845</td>
<td>72,210</td>
<td>235,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>282,760</td>
<td>30,440</td>
<td>252,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungarian (Magyar)</td>
<td>267,255</td>
<td>91,800</td>
<td>175,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American (USA)</td>
<td>250,005</td>
<td>25,205</td>
<td>224,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>215,105</td>
<td>143,785</td>
<td>71,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>213,105</td>
<td>66,545</td>
<td>146,555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaican</td>
<td>211,720</td>
<td>138,180</td>
<td>73,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>170,780</td>
<td>33,795</td>
<td>136,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>151,410</td>
<td>119,120</td>
<td>32,290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Adapted from the Statistics Canada Web site <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/demo28a.htm>.
Intercultural Communication

Not all Canadians can easily exchange messages about all subjects, however. Some are restricted by cultural rules from discussing certain topics; some lack necessary vocabulary; some lack experience; some lack knowledge; some lack interest. In other words, with regard to these subjects, the people do not share “a collective meaning system.” Glenn, a Calgary tourist visiting Montréal, might be confused, annoyed, even angered when the concierge at his hotel casually asks him whether he plans to be in town for the Fête nationale du Québec. Likewise, Rida, a Muslim student, might feel embarrassed, offended, even threatened when her high-school physical education teacher directs her to join a group of male and female students to work on a presentation on safe sex. In both of these examples, the discomfort experienced by the respondent, an experience known as culture shock, is caused by an absence of shared meaning between him or her and the other person involved in the interaction. Their values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and thoughts are not the same. In other words, they are culturally distinct—they are communicating across cultural boundaries. Intercultural communication, then, can be simply defined as “the exchange of cultural information” between people “with significantly different cultures” (Barnett & Lee, 2001, p. 276).

It is important to recognize that not every exchange between persons of different cultures exemplifies intercultural communication. If the concierge had asked Glenn whether he planned to visit the Musée des beaux-arts while he was in town, or if the physical education teacher had asked Rida to work on a presentation on the circulatory system, no differences in values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, or thoughts would have arisen. The messages sent would easily have been decoded and accommodated by the respondents’ meaning systems because no “cultural information” was being exchanged. In other words, these interactions would pose no threat to Glenn or Rida’s cultural identity.

Cultural Identity

As we saw in Chapter 2, our self-concept is the mental image that we have of ourselves, and that image is negotiated and reinforced through our communication with others. According to social identity theory, our self-concept includes both social and personal identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Our personal identity is based on the characteristics that we perceive to be unique to us as individuals, while our social identity is determined by the groups to which we belong and the meanings we associate with those groups.

Membership in a particular cultural group can contribute to our cultural identity, but it need not do so. Research has shown that cultural identity is determined by the importance which we assign to our membership in those cultural groups (Ting-Tooney et al., 2000). Angus, a tenth-generation Scottish Canadian, attends the International Gathering of the Clans every summer, wears his clan tartan on formal occasions, and celebrates Robbie Burns Day.
with haggis, piping, highland dancing, and fine scotch whisky. He clearly considers his ancestry to be important, and it would play a major role in determining his cultural identity. On the other hand, James, whose ancestors immigrated to Canada at about the same time, is only vaguely aware that his surname is Scottish and takes no interest in the culture of his forebears. His membership in the group Scottish Canadians would not be a significant factor in forming his cultural identity.

Dominant Cultures and Co-cultures

For more than 30 years, recognition of Canada as a multicultural society and support for the maintenance and promotion of minority cultures through arts and community groups have been official policies of the Government of Canada. As a result, many Canadians think immediately of visible minority groups whenever the word *culture* is mentioned. However, despite our cultural diversity, there are many values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and thoughts that a majority of citizens hold in common. This shared collective meaning system comprises our dominant culture, and like the dominant culture of any country, ours has evolved over time.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the dominant Canadian culture would have reflected the values of white, western European, English-speaking, Protestant, heterosexual men, but as the country has become more culturally diverse, the dominant culture has slowly evolved to reflect those changes.

At all times in our history, of course, some groups within Canadian society did not share some or all of the values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and thoughts of the dominant culture, and this condition continues today. These groups, called co-cultures, live within the dominant culture, but draw some or all of their cultural identity from their membership in other cultural groups that are not dominant. Again, it is important to stress that a person’s being a member of an identifiable group does not mean that he or she necessarily participates in the co-culture usually associated with that group: it is only when membership in the group is judged by the person to be important that it contributes to his or her cultural identity.

The following are some of the major contributors to co-cultures in Canadian society today:

**Gender** Men and women have different cultural identities because they are biologically different and because they are differently socialized throughout their lives (through clothes, games, toys, education, roles, etc.) As we have seen in earlier chapters, women and men communicate differently in a number of ways because of these cultural differences.

**Language** Naming and classifying are language-based social activities that allow us to exert social control over the things and people around us (Schippers, 2001). As an officially bilingual country, Canada has had more experience than most countries with this struggle for control.
As the language of the majority, English has always been regarded as a threat by the French-speaking minority. In Québec, linguistic control is strongly associated with economic control (Lenden, 1995) because for many decades, members of that province’s French-speaking majority were barred from social and professional advancement because of their inability to function in the English-speaking commercial milieu of, first, the British Empire and, later, the modern North American market. In other parts of Canada, cultural survival is a constant preoccupation of francophone minorities which, because of their small numbers, face the constant threat of assimilation.

Though French and English are Canada’s official languages, they are by no means the only languages spoken here. Many indigenous groups and many immigrants and descendants of immigrants contribute to their cultural identity through the daily use of the language of their ancestors and involvement in language-based social groups. Table 9.2 shows Canada’s major unofficial language groups.

**Colour (or race)** Traditionally, the term *race* has been used to classify members of the human race in terms of biological characteristics, such as skin and eye colour, hair texture, and body shape. However, scientific justification for such divisions has proved elusive, and the classification system has itself changed drastically over time (Hotz, 1995). For instance, the Irish and Mexican *races*, among others, have disappeared altogether, and many groups have been differently categorized at different times: Indians, for example, have over the years been classified as Hindu, Caucasian, nonwhite, and Asian Indian. Such changes more often reflect the prevailing prejudices of a particular time in history than any actual advancement in our understanding of humankind or its origins.

Nevertheless, racial characteristics, particularly colour, can be an important cultural signifier for many people. Though people of colour are not a homogeneous group, research (Vanaja, 2000) shows that, in Canada, they have a shared

**Table 9.2 Population by Mother Tongue, Other than French or English**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>853,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>469,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>438,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>208,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>245,495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>213,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>271,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>148,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>199,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>128,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagalog</td>
<td>174,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>120,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>122,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cree</td>
<td>72,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inuktitut</td>
<td>29,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-official languages</td>
<td>1,506,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,202,245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Adapted from the Statistics Canada publication “Detailed Mother Tongue (160), Sex (3) and Age Groups (15) for Population, for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 1996 and 2001 Censuses—20%, Sample Data (Language Composition of Canada, 2001 Census)” Catalogue 97F0007, December 10, 2002.
experience: “they are racialised on the basis of skin colour, devalued as persons, and their histories and cultures are distorted and stigmatised” (p. 166). The shared experience of such discrimination has itself become a powerful cultural value for many people of colour.

**Ethnicity**  Like race, ethnicity is an inexact designation. Ethnicity refers to a classification of people based on combinations of shared characteristics such as nationality, geographic origin, language, religion, and ancestral customs and traditions. People vary greatly in terms of the importance they attach to their ethnic heritage and, therefore, the degree to which it determines their cultural identity. In Canada, however, ethnicity appears to be a more important determinant of cultural identity for recent immigrants than for descendants of long-ago immigrants. Census data show, for example, that members of the former group are more likely to classify themselves as ethnic, while members of the latter group are more likely to classify themselves more generally as Canadian. Some people will classify themselves both ways, suggesting that both their ethnic and Canadian identities are important to them.

**Sexual orientation**  Though heterosexual people tend to think little about their sexual orientation, for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, it can be an important component of their cultural identity. Until very recently, many people, including even some educated people, regarded homosexual and bisexual people as immoral or mentally ill. A homosexual or bisexual person would have paid a heavy price, including loss of employment, loss of family connections, and social isolation, for publicly revealing his or her sexual orientation. Gays and lesbians faced both persecution and prosecution for sexually expressing feelings for their loved ones in ways that heterosexual people took for granted.

Since 1992, discrimination based on sexual orientation has been illegal in Canada (Hurley, 2003), but that legal protection has not shielded gays and lesbians from violence at the hands of ignorant and bigoted people. Research shows that hate crimes against gays and lesbians, including 85 homicides, continued through the 1990’s (Meadahl, 2000). The popular belief that gay bashing is limited to small rural centres with conservative values is wrong. The evidence shows that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation occurs throughout the country in communities of all sizes. As it may for people of colour, the shared experience of this discrimination may form a cultural bond between members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community.

**Religion**  A religion is a system of beliefs that is shared by a group and that supplies the group with an object (or objects) of devotion, a ritual of worship, and a code of ethics. Table 9.3 gives an overview of Canadians’ religious affiliations today. Religious faith and religious observance have declined steadily in Canada since the middle of the twentieth century (Clark, 1998). Statistics Canada data show that weekly attendance at worship services has dropped
from 67 percent in 1946 to 20 percent in 1996, and the number of Canadians who claim to have no religion has climbed sharply, from less than 1 percent in 1961 to 16.5 percent in 2001. Not surprisingly, older Canadians are most devoted to their religious faith. In 1996, 34 percent of those aged 65 or older attended church regularly, while only 12 percent of 15- to 24-year-olds did, and 42 percent of adults attended once or twice a year or less.

Despite this decline, however, religion remains an important element in the cultural identity of many Canadians, and for those who actively practise their faith, it can be influential in determining their behaviour. For example, people who attend church regularly tend to be more forgiving in marital conflicts, to hold more traditional family values, to place a greater importance on children in the family and the nurturing role of women, and to live happier, less stressful lives (Clark, 1998).

Social class Social class is an indicator a person’s position in a social hierarchy, as determined by income, education, occupation, and social habits. Though class structures are much less rigid in Canada than in many other countries, and mobility between classes is less restricted, a person’s class status still can be a significant cultural determinant. Social class often determines where people live and in what kind of housing, how they dress, what methods of transportation they use, what they eat, and what kinds of entertainment and leisure activities they have access to.

Social class can be particularly influential in determining opportunities for children. For example, research by Human Resources Development Canada (2002) suggests that a number of developmental problems occur more frequently in children raised in economically disadvantaged families: low birth weight, emotional and behavioural problems, physically aggressive behaviour, and lower vocabulary and math skills. However the same research reveals that good parenting can compensate for the disadvantages experienced by these children.

A 2003 survey commissioned by the Association for Canadian Studies (Jedwab, 2003) revealed that social class is the least influential of six major factors in determining Canadians’ cultural identity. Thirty-three percent of respondents

Table 9.3 Religion in Canada, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>29,639,035</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>12,936,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>8,654,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Orthodox</td>
<td>479,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian not included elsewhere</td>
<td>780,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>579,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>329,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>300,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>297,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>278,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern religions</td>
<td>37,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religions</td>
<td>63,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religious affiliation</td>
<td>4,900,090</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from the Statistics Canada publication “Religion (13) and Age Groups (8) for Population, for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2001 Censuses—20%, Sample Data,” Catalogue 95F050, May 13, 2003.

OBSERVE & ANALYZE
Journal Activity

Cultural Identity

How closely do you identify with the dominant Canadian culture? Of which co-cultures do you feel a part? How influential are those memberships in forming your world-view? Respond to these questions in a short personal essay entitled My Cultural Identity.
(including 61 percent of francophones) rated language most important; 25 percent, ethnic origin and ancestry; 11 percent, religion; 11 percent, political ideology; 9 percent, gender; and only 7 percent social class.

Age  None of us gets to choose our age, but the time in which we are born and raised can have a very definite formative influence on us. Generations of people who grew up during the Great Depression, World War II, the 1960’s Counterculture, or the Information Age were each formed by different events, and as a result learned to react to different stimuli, to live according to different norms, and to value different things. In the 1940’s, for example, a young couple who kissed on a first date would have been considered highly immoral. During the sexual revolution of the 1960’s, in contrast, nearly all rules governing sexual behaviour were cast aside, and young people lived by the creed “If it feels good, do it.” That freedom was sharply curtailed by the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic in the early 1980’s, however, after which sexual behaviour became and has remained much more restrained.

It is not unusual for people of the same age to share a special affinity for the cultural markers of their time, particularly those which they associate with their adolescence. Adolescence and early adulthood is the time during which most of us assert ourselves, form our personal identities, and develop our social networks. It is therefore not surprising that, in forming our cultural identities, we would draw heavily from that period of our lives.

Other factors such as mental or physical ability, political affiliation or ideology, educational background, occupation, leisure activities, style of dress, and even artistic and culinary tastes, to name just a few, can also be significant factors in setting co-cultural boundaries.

**IN BRIEF**

**Culture and Communication**

A culture is a group’s shared collective meaning system, through which its collective values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and thoughts are understood.

- A dominant culture reflects the values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and thoughts that a majority of a country’s citizens hold in common.
- Co-cultures are groups which live within the dominant culture, but draw some or all of their cultural identity from their membership in other cultural groups that are not dominant.

Because of the shared meaning system developed through our culture, our culture affects our ability to communicate:

- Intracultural communication is the exchange of meaningful messages between members of the same cultural group.
- Intercultural communication is the exchange of cultural information between people with significantly different cultures.

**Cultural Norms and Values**

Some characteristics of a culture may be easy to identify. We can easily deduce that certain people may belong to a specific cultural group by the language that they speak, the clothing that they wear, the way they style their hair, or the artifacts which they wear on their bodies or place in their personal space. For example, when people meet Shimon, they are apt to judge from his sidecurls, his yarmulke, and his black clothes that he is a Hassidic Jew. Other more important cultural differences, however, are less apparent. Geert Hofstede (1980) identifies four major dimensions of culture which affect communication: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity-femininity. Each of these dimensions operate on the cultural level to influence communication through the formation of norms and rules. They operate on the individual level to form individual values. Hofstede defines a value as “a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others” (p. 19).
Do you consider yourself Inuit or Canadians first? For many Inuit, this is an easy question to answer. Of course they are Inuit first, after all, their ancestors were Inuit before there was a Canada. Canada is only 134 years old, whereas the Inuit homeland is perhaps 20,000 years old. But is that the right answer today? Is the answer as simple as that? Is that the only answer?

As President of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, I am frequently asked to speak at universities and management cross-cultural courses, along with my fellow Aboriginal leaders. When asked this apparently important question, the audience usually asks the Indians first; knowing the answer they will get, and they are never disappointed—“We are Indians first and foremost” and sometimes “Canadianism” doesn’t even come into the picture. Then the questioner gives me a look that says “Okay, Mr. Inuit, are you really that different?” and asks politely, “and you Mr. Kusugak, do Inuit see themselves as Inuit first or as Canadians first?” Well, I answer, I know I have always thought those two sentiments were one and the same. After all, during our many meetings with other Inuit from countries such as Denmark, the United States or Russia, we have always been Canadian Inuit.

The difference asked of course is culturally relevant to Qablunaaq (non-Inuit). Just this morning I received an e-mail asking “Were the Inuit matrilineal or patrilineal, matriarchal or patriarchal?” As I read this question, I realize that there appears to be a need to identify differences, to see if Inuit are “them” or “us.” Are you like us or not?

If I answer like my Indian friends, they will leave me alone. But life is not so simple, so I hesitate to answer likewise. This hesitancy makes me think that I should answer that Inuit are Canadians first; but that answer will solicit a further question—“why do Inuit think that?” and to answer “because” simply won’t do.

To answer this question I had to draw from my culture and family traditions. My first-born daughter Aliisa just got married to a fine young fellow named Cedric. Traditionally, and tradition continues today, Cedric is my ningauk, not my son-in-law, as the word son-in-law suggests “losing a daughter and gaining a son.” Ningauk means that, now that she is married, I will never love my Aliisa any less and in no way am I losing her. Ningauk reinforces the fact that we are adding Cedric to our family, and that we are also adding Cedric’s family to our family. Inuit traditional society law also dictates that I must put my ningauk on a pedestal above my Aliisa. Cedric’s parents must do the same for Aliisa. This is to ensure that respective in-laws accept and love the one marrying into the family. The point being I will love my daughter always and I want her to be accepted with all her goodness and faults by her new family. My wife and I want her to be accepted by Cedric and his family, so we put Cedric first as Cedric’s family puts Aliisa first.

I tell you this story to say that it has everything to do with how I finally answered the question “are Inuit, Inuit first or Canadians first?” As Italian Canadians, Chinese Canadians and Jewish Canadians are proud of their ethnic background, so are Inuit. From our first contacts with settlers,
Individualism and Collectivism

Both individualism and collectivism are found in all cultures, but one dimension or the other tends to predominate in each culture. Individualistic cultures value the individual, while collectivist cultures value the group.

In an individualistic society, the individual’s goals are considered most important (Hofstede & Bond 1984), and people do not consider the interests of others, except perhaps those of their family, when they set goals: “people are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family only” (p. 419). Ties between individual people and others outside their family are apt to be numerous but weak in such a culture, and people are apt to be competitive.
In contrast, group goals are the priority in a collectivist society, and one group is likely to carefully consider the interests of another in setting its own goals: “people belong to ingroups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty” (p. 419). Collectivist societies are highly integrated, and maintaining co-operation and harmony are valued over competitiveness and personal achievement. Members of collectivist societies are likely to have many fewer relationships (Triandis, 1988), but the bonds within the groups to which they do belong (e.g., family, company, community) are likely to be much stronger, lasting sometimes through generations.

According to Hofstede (1997), the world’s most individualistic cultures are, in order, the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands, followed by other northern and western European countries. The most collectivist cultures are found in South and Central America, followed by those of East and Southeast Asia and Africa.

Whether a person comes from an individualist or collectivist culture affects communication in a number of ways (Kim & Wilson, 1994). Because individualist cultures tend to place a high value on clarity, directness, and assertiveness and to tolerate a high degree of conflict, members of such cultures are inclined to speak their mind and to expect others to do the same. If two people disagree, they will manage the conflict between them, using one of the conflict-management methods we discussed in Chapter 8. Collectivist cultures, in contrast, place a high value on not imposing on others and not hurting others’ feelings, and they value reticence over assertive behaviour. Members of such cultures are therefore more likely to express their meanings indirectly and tentatively and to go out of their way to prevent conflicts from arising. In Chapter 6, we distinguished high-context from low-context conversations. Low-context communication is the norm in individualistic cultures while members of collectivist cultures normally prefer high-context communication.

Wakiuru, Yuan, Phil, and Emily are students in a first-year business communication course. Wakiuru is an international student from Kenya, Yuan is a first-generation Chinese immigrant to Canada, and Phil and Emily are Canadians of English ancestry. The four are assigned to work collaboratively to develop a problem-solving report for a fictional music store that is experiencing an upsurge in shoplifting. For two years, Yuan worked part-time in a Vancouver bookstore that had to contend with a high incidence of shoplifting, so he suggests that the group might research the use of an electromagnetic security system, the method that his former employer found most effective in solving the problem. Without doing any research, Emily rejects the suggestion as being too technical and too expensive, suggesting that the group focus instead on video surveillance systems. Phil agrees. Though Yuan knows that video surveillance systems are ineffective in small shops where staff members are too busy to closely monitor customer behaviour, and Wakiuru, who knows of Yuan’s business experience, is more inclined to accept his judgment than Emily’s, both agree to focus on Emily’s approach to the problem. As products of collectivist cultures,
Wakiuru and Yuan place a higher value on maintaining group harmony than on promoting their solution. Phil and Emily, on the other hand, both products of individualist cultures, are likely to interpret Yuan’s *failure* to assert himself as a lack of confidence in his own idea.

**Uncertainty Avoidance**

Uncertainty avoidance, Hofstede’s second dimension of culture, measures the extent to which members of a society feel threatened by unpredictable situations and the lengths to which they will go to avoid them.

People who come from high uncertainty avoidance cultures have a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity “which expresses itself in higher levels of anxiety and energy release, greater need for formal rules and absolute truth, and less tolerance for people or groups with deviant ideas or behaviour” (Hofstede, 1979, p. 395). High uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to have clear norms and rules to govern every situation and to believe that there is danger in what is different (Hofstede, 1997). People in such cultures seek order and clear structure in relationships and organizations and place a high value on consensus.

In contrast, people from low uncertainty avoidance cultures are better able to cope with uncertain situations. They tend to be less anxious and more prepared to take risks. They welcome dissent and are inclined to be intrigued by people or situations that are different. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures are likely to have norms and rules that are less explicit and more flexible.

Uncertainty avoidance is highest in Japan, Greece, France, Chile, Guatemala, and other Mediterranean and Latin American countries (Hofstede, 1997). People in Scandinavian, northern European, and North American societies as well as in some Asian countries such as India and the Philippines tolerate a higher degree of uncertainty. As with the collectivist–individualist dimension, high uncertainty avoidance people and low uncertainty avoidance people exist in all cultures, but one type or the other tends to dominate in each culture.

High levels of uncertainty avoidance affect communication in two important ways. Firstly, because high uncertainty avoidance people are likely to experience a much higher degree of stress when faced with uncertain situations, their ability to interact with others is likely to be impaired by the feelings which they experience during such interactions. More importantly, however, as Sorrentino & Short observe (1986), high uncertainty avoidance people are likely to simply avoid thinking about, asking questions about, or researching topics that are unfamiliar to them because by doing so, they would expose themselves to uncertainty. In contrast, people with a high tolerance for uncertainty are frequently interested in reducing uncertainty by delving into such searches.

Motoki, an electronics vendor from Osaka, and Alexander, an import buyer from Scarborough, meet at an international trade show in Sydney, Australia. Through the course of conducting business, the men discover that they have several shared interests, including chess and opera, and they agree to go together...
to dinner and a performance of *La Traviata* at the Sydney Opera House that evening. During dinner, Alexander starts a conversation about his father’s military service in the Pacific during World War II and begins questioning Motoki about his family’s experience of the bombing and occupation of Japan at the end of the war. Uncomfortable with the subject to begin with, and unsure of Alexander’s feelings about it and where he might be going with the discussion, Motoki becomes increasingly anxious, makes several attempts to change the subject, and reduces his responses to mere nods. Finally, to avoid the possibility of a disagreeable confrontation on the subject, he excuses himself to make a phone call and leaves the table in the hope that Alexander will move on to another subject when he returns.

**Power Distance**

The power distance dimension focuses on how people of different status relate to one another in a culture. Hofstede (1984) defines power distance as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country accept that power is distributed unequally” (p. 419). Both high and low power distances exist in all cultures, but once again, one or the other tends to be dominant.

Cultures with a high power distance are hierarchical and authoritarian, with power and wealth concentrated in a small number of elite members of the society. In contrast, countries with low power distance tend to be egalitarian and democratic, with power and wealth distributed more widely among members of the population. High or low power distance in the upper ranks of a society is likely to be reflected in all other ranks. Thus, in a country with an authoritarian style of government, authoritarian control is likely to be displayed also in business and industry, in religion, in schools, and in the family. Members of high power distance cultures regard power and inequality as facts of life and regard their superiors or inferiors as being different from themselves. Members of low power distance cultures consider all citizens to be equal, regard power as something that is vested in the authorities by the public, and accept the exercise of power only when it is legitimate and justified according to whatever rules may apply.

High power distance is found, not surprisingly, in countries with authoritarian governments such as Malaysia, Guatemala, Venezuela, Singapore, and the Arab countries of the Middle East (Hofstede, 1997). Countries where the lowest power distances are found are Austria, Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, and Ireland, and most other northern hemisphere democracies, but countries where romance languages are spoken tend to show higher power distances than those where Germanic languages predominate.

Differences in the power distance dimension can have a profound effect on communication. Whether it be at home, at school, in the workplace, or in a public forum, members of low power distance cultures feel free to challenge authority and to offer their input for modifying or improving whatever decision

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**THINKING ABOUT . . .**

How much power should unelected authority figures such as parents, teachers, managers, and religious leaders be allowed to exercise in a democratic society? Do you think that the power of such authority figures is adequately controlled in Canada? If not, what additional controls should be put in place?
an authority figure has made. Authorities in low power distance cultures likewise generally expect to be challenged and do not consider it insubordinate of someone under their direction to offer opinions or suggestions. In contrast, a student, worker, or citizen in a high power distance culture would not likely challenge authority, because he or she would expect to be punished for doing so. Likewise, an authority figure in such a society would feel compelled to punish any challenge to his or her authority, both to save face and to maintain control.

Djavan, an exchange student from Brazil, was enjoying his studies in computer science at the University of New Brunswick, but he was becoming increasingly frustrated by an elective course in ethics that he was taking in the Department of Philosophy. The ethical problems that his professor assigned were important and thought-provoking, and the classroom discussions lively, but at the end of each session the professor simply summarized a variety of positions that could be taken in response to the case under consideration and the justification that could be offered for each. Djavan would not think of complaining to his professor, but he was certain that despite hours of extra work in the library, he was going to fail his philosophy exam. “Why oh why doesn’t he just tell us the right answers?” he wondered to himself.

**Masculinity and Femininity**

Hofstede’s analysis of cultural variables concludes with the masculine-feminine dimension, which attempts to measure how gender roles are distributed in a culture. A **masculine culture** is one in which gender roles are clearly distinct, and a **feminine culture** is one in which men and women may share the same roles. Masculinity and femininity exist in all cultures, but as with the other dimensions, one tends to be predominant in each culture.

Members of cultures high in masculinity (both women and men) place a high value on traditionally masculine traits such as performance, ambition, assertiveness, competitiveness, and power, and they are primarily concerned with material success. Members of cultures high in femininity (both women and men) place a high value on traditionally feminine traits such as service, nurturing, maintaining interpersonal relationships, and helping the disadvantaged, and they are primarily concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede, 1997). In masculine cultures, women are assigned the traditionally feminine roles, while in feminine cultures, both men and women are allowed to perform both traditionally masculine and feminine roles. In masculine cultures people value their jobs above all, and managers are expected to be decisive. In feminine cultures, people work only as a means of personal support, and managers are expected to be consensus builders.

Countries scoring the highest for masculinity include Japan, Austria, Italy, Mexico, and Ireland. Those scoring highest for femininity include Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Canada is near the centre of the scale, being slightly more masculine than feminine (see Figure 9.1).
The roles of men and women can vary greatly from one culture to another. Research shows that in terms of the masculinity-femininity dimension of culture, Canada is slightly more “masculine” than “feminine.”
Differences in the masculinity-femininity cultural dimension can have a significant effect on communication. People coming from a highly masculine culture tend to follow traditional cultural definitions of appropriate behaviour (Bern, 1993), while people from highly feminine cultures have a much wider variety of behaviours to choose from. People from a feminine culture are likely to perceive those from a masculine culture as old-fashioned or sexist, while those from a masculine culture are likely to harshly judge both men and women from a feminine culture for failing to play appropriate roles.

Suzie’s company, a Montréal marketer of international holiday packages, sends her to Vienna to negotiate a major ski vacation package contract with an Austrian hotel and resort chain. She is to meet the company’s sales director, Lukas Schechter, at his office. In the elevator of the Austrian company’s office building in Vienna, she is joined by a distinguished looking man in his fifties. As the elevator slowly ascends, the man makes several flattering comments about Suzie’s appearance and speaks to her condescendingly, suggesting that such “a pretty girl” must be on her way to meet one of the company’s executives for lunch. Offended by the man’s condescension, Suzie dismisses his advances brusquely. When the elevator stops at the twenty-fifth floor, she exits into a bright reception area, and to her annoyance, the man steps out behind her. “Guter morgen, Herr Schechter,” the receptionist says to her companion.

Barriers to Intercultural Communication

Now that we have developed an understanding of culture and the significant differences that can exist among different cultures, it is perhaps easier to understand how communication across cultures can be particularly difficult. In any communication context, we are likely to be faced with someone who differs from us with respect to some cultural norm or value, if not all. In encounters involving several participants, of course, the situation becomes immeasurably more complex, the likelihood of cultural conflicts among the various participants increasing geometrically.

Anxiety

François, an Acadian student from Shippagan, New Brunswick, was nervous. It was the first day of the fall term, and he was beginning to wonder whether his decision to attend an English university had been a good one. Sure, the other students in his residence had all been friendly during orientation week, but he had to admit that a lot of their jokes and banter had gone right over his head. “If I can’t understand tavern humour,” he asked himself, “how can I expect to understand calculus or chemistry or oceanography?” His palms were sweating by the time the professor strode into the lecture theatre.
François’s feelings are typical, and they represent one of the major barriers to intercultural communication: anxiety. Recognizing that we are different from everybody else or entering into a cultural milieu that is foreign to us causes most people to feel nervous: “What if I don’t understand?” “What if I say the wrong thing?” “What if everybody laughs at me?” François, of course, is facing two cultural hurdles at once. Not only is he entering university, a foreign cultural milieu to a first-year student, but he is also immersing himself in what is, to him, a foreign language and society. When we are uncertain about whether we are going to be able to perform as we would like, it is natural to feel anxious, but that anxiety is likely to reduce our chances of communicating effectively.

**Assuming Similarity or Difference**

Iiro and Hanna strolled into the sauna of their Vancouver Hotel and began to chat casually about the sights that they had taken in that day. They did not really notice that the other guests quickly left as they sat down and were completely shocked a few minutes later when a police officer appeared at the door of the sauna and informed them that they were under arrest for public indecency.

Iiro and Hanna made a mistake that many people make when they cross into an unfamiliar cultural environment: they assumed that the norms that applied in their familiar situation matched those that applied in their new one. In Finland, their native country, it is common and unremarkable for men and women to be naked together in a sauna or swimming pool, but of course, different social conventions apply in downtown Vancouver.

It can be just as great a mistake to assume that everything about an unfamiliar culture will be different. For example, many men and women assume, following the lead of a few famous pop psychologists, that people of the opposite sex are different in every respect. As a result, when they are placed in a context dominated by people of the opposite sex, they plan not to understand anything.

In fact, some different norms will apply in almost any new cultural situation, but many others will likely be the same as those that we are familiar with. The wisest course is not to assume anything, but to be prepared to learn from any interaction we have with people of a different culture.

**Ethnocentrism**

Ethnocentrism is the belief that one’s own culture is superior to others. The stereotype of the American tourist, going about from place to place loudly commenting on how much better everything is “in America,” is the classic example of ethnocentric behaviour; however, Canadians’ we-would-never-behave-like-that attitude toward American tourists is also an example of ethnocentrism. Probably all people are guilty of some degree of ethnocentrism, but it is an
attitude we should strive to overcome as it can easily lead to prejudice and discrimination. Rooting it out requires a constant and conscious review of our own assessments of others.

Members of powerful cultures often seek to devalue less powerful cultures that they wish to manipulate or harm. For example, early European immigrants to Canada regarded the native people of the country as “savages”; German Nazis tried hard to convince themselves that Jews were “vermin”; gay-bashers excuse their crimes with the plea that “he was just a dirty fag”; and misogynists seek to denigrate women by referring to them as “bitches” or “hos.” Bosmajian (1983) refers to this practice of objectification as “the language of oppression.”

**TEST YOUR COMPETENCE**

**Ethnocentrism**

Working in a group of four or five students, label four sheets of paper as follows:

- In This Community
- In This Country
- In the World Today
- In History

How many examples ethnocentrism of each type can you identify? What are (or were) the consequences of ethnocentrism in each case? How can (or could) each case be overcome? Be prepared to share your answers with the class.

Many Muslims in Canada and other western countries have been the victims of stereotyping and prejudice in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S.
Stereotypes and Prejudice

Ethnocentric attitudes lead readily to stereotypes and prejudices. As we saw in Chapter 2, a stereotype is a simplified and standardized conception of the characteristics or expected behaviour of members of an identifiable group, and a prejudice is a preconceived judgment, belief, or opinion that a person holds without sufficient grounds. Recall that all stereotypes and prejudices (whether we like to think that they are complimentary to the subject or not) are inaccurate. Viewing people through such a distorted lens eliminates any possibility of getting to know them or forming real or meaningful relationships with them.

Incompatible Communication Codes

Zeke could not understand why those Chinese guys always sat together in the cafeteria. They were always fighting: screaming at each other and waving their arms. He had no idea what they were saying because he did not understand Mandarin, but he could tell that they were plenty steamed. He was always expecting a fight to break out.

Zeke was judging the conversation of the Chinese students based on their use of paralanguage and body movement. He could not understand the words they used, but he could imagine the types of angry tirades English speakers would be releasing if they raised their voices in the same way. Zeke did not understand that Mandarin is a tonal language: how the words are voiced affects their meaning, and that the great changes of pitch and volume that he overheard did not represent the expression of strong emotion, but only the expression of different meanings.

As we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, human beings communicate with one another through the use of two great codes: one verbal, the other nonverbal. People who speak different languages quickly comprehend their inability to communicate verbally, and almost invariably turn to some type of nonverbal signing in an effort to overcome the language barrier. As we have seen, however, there are significant differences in the use and meaning of nonverbal signs too. Some basic facial expressions and body movements are universal or nearly universal in their meaning, but to express ideas that are abstract or complex such simple signs are not enough. Differing verbal and nonverbal codes, then, can be a great impediment to intercultural communication. Anyone who has ever attempted to learn another language as an adult can attest to the frustration of having witty, intelligent, or beautiful things to say, but only the vocabulary of a young child with which to try to express them.

Incompatible Norms and Values

As we saw earlier in this chapter, people of all cultures base their communication behaviours on cultural norms and rules and on personal values based on those cultural norms and rules. Sometimes the norms and values of two people of different cultures conflict.
Jeff and Tabito have been buddies since elementary school. They’ve shared everything: school work, holidays, sports, camping trips. As they reach Grade 10, their interests are changing: they become interested in girls, and start going out in the evenings. One day Jeff tells Tabito that one of their classmates has offered to supply him with some pot, and that he wants Tabito to smoke it with him. Tabito simply refuses and will offer no explanation. Jeff is confused by Tabito’s behaviour; smoking a little bit of pot is no big deal, he reasons, everybody does it. What Jeff does not understand is that Tabito, coming from a Japanese family, has inherited the collectivist values of his parents. Being caught with drugs would bring great disgrace upon his whole family, and to him, the collectivist goal of maintaining the reputation of his family is more important than the personal goal of having fun with his friend.

Sylvana’s parents came from Italy, but she was born and educated in Canada. While a student at the University of British Columbia she meets Sergio, who only recently emigrated from Italy with his family. After they have dated for a year, Sergio asks Sylvana to marry him. His parents have offered to support them, he says, while he completes his engineering degree, and Sylvana can drop out of school and help his mother around the house because, as a housewife and mother, she will not need a degree anyway. Sylvana is outraged that Sergio has so little respect for her and breaks off their relationship. Sergio is confused. Coming from a strongly masculine culture, he can think of no greater display of respect for Sylvana than to offer to make her his wife and the mother of his children.

Intercultural Communication Competence

To achieve intercultural communication competence, we must learn to overcome the barriers that we have identified. Competent intercultural communicators are likely to have followed three steps: adopting the correct attitude, acquiring the correct knowledge, and developing specific skills.

Adopting the Correct Attitude

The right attitudes for intercultural communication are, according to Samovar and Porter (2003), “cultural-general,” because they allow a person to communicate with any other person regardless of his or her culture.

1. Tolerate ambiguity. Communicating with strangers creates uncertainty. As we saw in Chapter 8, one of the first things we do in beginning any relationship, even one with someone from our own culture, is to exchange information and indulge in benign self-disclosures in order to become better acquainted with the other person. People beginning intercultural relationships must be prepared to tolerate a much higher degree of uncertainty about the other person and to tolerate it for a much longer time. When interacting with someone of another culture, we are almost certain to be
unable to understand some messages, particularly if the other person speaks a different language, and some of our messages are likely to be misunderstood. If we go into the interaction with the knowledge that this difficulty is likely to occur and with the expectation that we will have to work much harder to make the conversation successful, we are much less apt to become frustrated or discouraged by the high level of uncertainty.

Canadians, coming from a highly individualistic (low-context) culture, are likely to find it particularly difficult to tolerate ambiguity. We are inclined to want everything spelled out in plain English and are not highly skilled at extracting meaning from the communication context. Patient practice is the best means of improving our ability to tolerate ambiguity.

2. Be open-minded. An open-minded person is someone who is willing to dispassionately receive the ideas and opinions of others. Open-minded people are aware of their own cultural values and recognize that other people’s values are different. They throw off ethnocentric attitudes, resisting the impulse to judge the values of other cultures in terms of those of their own. Open-minded people have also worked to free themselves from the bonds of prejudice, and are vigilant in attempting to recognize any tendency on their part to apply halo effects or stereotypes when meeting people of other cultures.

3. Be altruistic. Altruism is a display of genuine and unselfish concern for the welfare of others. The opposite of altruism is egocentricity, a selfish interest in one’s own needs or affairs to the exclusion of everything else. Egocentric people are self-centred, while altruistic people are other-centred. Altruistic communicators do not neglect their own information needs, but they recognize that for a conversation to be successful, both parties must be able to both contribute what they want and take what they need from the exchange. If one party’s understanding of the conversation is faulty, neither party can benefit from that exchange.

**Acquiring the Correct Knowledge**

In addition to these “culture-general” attitudes, intercultural communicators develop competence by acquiring “culture-specific” knowledge (Samovar & Porter, 2003)—that is, they must develop an understanding of the specific culture or cultures of the person or people that they wish to communicate with. Berger (1979) recommends three means of acquiring this culture-specific knowledge:

1. Observe passively. Passive observers study the communication behaviours that are used by members of the subject culture.

2. Employ active information-gathering strategies. Active strategies might include research into or individual study of the subject culture, taking courses to better understand the subject culture or language, or interviewing people with expertise in the subject culture.
3. Practise self-disclosure. By revealing personal information about ourselves to people from another culture, we create an opportunity for them to reciprocate. We could, for example, reveal the difficulties that we are having communicating with them and ask them for their views on how communication between us can be improved. A person thinking of using this approach to information gathering would have to consider, however, whether people from the subject cultural group are likely to react positively to such self-disclosure. As we saw in Chapter 7, self-disclosure is not always welcome in the early stages of a relationship, and the rules of appropriate self-disclosure vary greatly from one culture to another. If the self-disclosure embarrassed or offended the other person, it would be counterproductive.

Developing Specific Skills

The skills required to communicate in intercultural contexts also tend to be culture-specific:

1. Learn how and to whom to show respect. Everyone we communicate with deserves the respect owing to another human being. However, many cultures have rules which specify who is entitled to receive displays of respect and how the respect should be displayed. In most Asian countries, for example, elderly people are respected. In the Mi’kmaq First Nation, on the other hand, elders—not just elderly people, but those who are wise and have gained recognition for the things that they have done—are entitled to respect. In German business culture, elaborate rules of etiquette determine who should be addressed first, who should be introduced first, who should initiate a handshake, and the title that should be used in addressing different types of people, depending on their social rank. Even in the dominant Canadian culture, despite our low power distance, certain signs of respect are due to people in positions of authority. Knowing whom to acknowledge and how to acknowledge him or her is essential when entering any unfamiliar cultural context.

2. Know and use appropriate conversation-directing behaviour. In Chapter 6, we reviewed the importance of using and recognizing conversation-directing behaviour in our day-to-day conversations. The same necessity occurs in intercultural contexts, of course, but the rules are very likely to differ. Familiarizing ourselves with the conversational norms of a different culture before interacting with people of that culture is essential if we want to communicate effectively.

3. Know and use appropriate (active) listening skills. As we saw in Chapter 5, empathizing, questioning, and paraphrasing are effective means of achieving understanding. Clarifying a speaker’s meaning through paraphrase or questioning is an effective strategy for reducing uncertainty in any context. The accepted attending behaviour is not the same in all cultures,
however. As you recall, maintaining eye contact with a speaker is in our cul-
ture a sign of receptiveness and respect. Many Asian cultures, however, con-
sider eye contact, especially with an elderly person, to be rude and
disrespectful.

4. Know and practise appropriate relational behaviours. In Chapters 6, 7, and 8, we reviewed rules and skills of conversation, and guidelines for disclosing feelings and opinions, giving positive and negative feedback, starting and developing relationships, and managing conflict. All of those guidelines are culture-specific. What is considered appropriate and effective in our culture may be regarded as boorish and incompetent in another. If we plan to com-
municate with people from another culture, we should find out what norms of communication behaviour apply in that culture, identify the specific skills that we need and lack, and practise them until we are sure that we have mastered them.

What Would You Do?
A QUESTION OF ETHICS

Tyler, Young-Ja, Margeaux, and Madhukar were sitting around Margeaux’s dining-room table working on a group marketing project. It was 2:00 a.m. They had been working since 6:00 p.m. and still had several hours’ work remaining.

“Oh, the misery,” groaned Tyler, pretending to slit his own throat with an Exacto knife. “If I never see another photo of a Highliner fish burger it will be too soon. Why didn’t we choose a more interesting product?”

“I think it had something to do with someone wanting to promote a healthy alterna-
tive to greasy hamburgers,” Young-Ja replied sarcastically.

“Right,” said Tyler, “I don’t know what I could have been thinking. Speaking of greasy hamburgers, is anyone else starving? Anybody want to order a pizza or something?”

“No one will deliver up here this late,” Margeaux replied, “but I have a quiche that I could heat up.”

“Fancy,” Tyler quipped.

“You wish,” Margeaux said. “It came out of a box.”

“Sure, that sounds great, thanks,” Young-Ja said. “I’m hungry too.”

“It doesn’t have any meat in it, does it?” asked Madhukar. “I don’t eat meat.”

“Nope, it’s a cheese and spinach quiche,” Margeaux said.

Tyler and Margeaux went off to the kitchen to prepare the food. Tyler took the quiche, still in its box, from the fridge. “Oh, oh,” he said. “My roommate is a vegetarian, and he won’t buy this brand because they have lard in the crust. Better warn Madhukar. He’s a Hindu, so I imagine it’s pretty important to him.”

“Shhh!” said Margeaux, “I don’t have anything else to offer him, and he’ll never know the difference anyway. Just pretend you didn’t notice that.”

“Okay,” Tyler said. “It’s your kitchen.”

1. What exactly are Margeaux’s ethical obliga-
tions to Madhukar in this situation? Why?
2. Does the fact that Tyler is not the host relieve him of all ethical responsibility in this case?
A culture is a group’s shared collective meaning system through which the group’s collective values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and thoughts are understood. Culture and communication are closely connected, the former having a profound effect on the latter. Our cultural identity is the part of our self-concept that is based on our membership in a cultural group that we consider important. Intracultural communication is the exchange of meaningful messages among members of the same cultural group. Intercultural communication is the exchange of cultural information between people with significantly different cultures. When such an exchange causes discomfort in a person, he or she is said to have experienced culture shock.

A dominant culture is the shared collective meaning system that reflects the collective values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and thoughts of the dominant group in a society. Co-cultures are groups that live within the dominant culture, but draw some or all of their cultural identity from membership in other groups. Major contributors to co-cultures in Canada are gender, language, colour or race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, social class, and age.

Four cultural dimensions affect intercultural communication: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity-femininity. Barriers to effective intercultural communication include anxiety, assuming similarity or difference, ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudice, incompatible communication codes, and incompatible norms and values. To develop intercultural communication competence, we should learn to tolerate ambiguity, be open-minded, and be altruistic. We can acquire knowledge of other cultures’ approach to communication by observing passively, employing information-gathering strategies, or practising self-disclosure. Useful skills for interpersonal communication that are specific to a culture are knowing how and to whom to show respect, knowing the appropriate use of conversation-directing behaviour, knowing how to listen, and knowing and practising appropriate relational behaviours.

Glossary

Review the following key terms:

**altruism** (111) — genuine and unselfish concern for the welfare of others.

**co-cultures** (111) — groups which live within the dominant culture, but draw some or all of their cultural identity from their membership in other cultural groups that are not dominant.

**collectivist society** (111) — a culture which places highest value on group satisfaction and achieving group goals. In collectivist cultures, people belong to ingroups which look after them in exchange for loyalty
cultural identity (111) — the part of our self-concept that is based on our membership in a cultural group that we consider important.

culture (111) — a group’s shared collective meaning system through which the group’s collective values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and thoughts are understood.

culture shock (111) — the discomfort that a person involved in an intercultural encounter experiences when faced by an absence of shared meaning between him or her and the other person involved in the interaction.

dominant culture (111) — the shared collective meaning system which reflects the collective values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, and thoughts of the dominant group in a society.

eyocentricity (111) — a selfish interest in one’s own needs or affairs to the exclusion of everything else.

ethnicity (111) — a classification of people based on combinations of shared characteristics such as nationality, geographic origin, physical appearance, language, religion, and ancestral customs and traditions.

ethnocentrism (111) — the belief that one’s own culture is superior to others.

feminine culture (111) — a culture in which men and women may share the same roles

individualistic society (111) — a culture which places highest value on individual satisfaction and achieving the goals of the individual.

intercultural communication (111) — the exchange of cultural information between people with significantly different cultures.

intracultural communication (111) — the exchange of meaningful messages between members of the same cultural group.

masculine culture (111) — a culture in which gender roles are clearly distinct.

personal identity (111) — the part of our self-concept that is based on the characteristics that we perceive to be unique to us as individuals.

power distance (111) — the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country accept that power is distributed unequally.

religion (111) — a system of beliefs that is shared by a group and that supplies the group with an object (or objects) of devotion, a ritual of worship, and a code of ethics.

social class (111) — an indicator of a person’s position in a social hierarchy, as determined by income, education, occupation, and social habits.
social identity (111) — the part of our self concept that is determined by the groups to which we belong and the meanings we associate with those groups.

uncertainty avoidance dimension of culture (111) — the extent to which members of a society feel threatened by unpredictable situations and the lengths to which they will go to avoid them.

value (111) — a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others.
### Self-Review

**Interpersonal Communication from Chapters 6 to 9**

What kind of an interpersonal communicator are you? This analysis looks at specific behaviours that are characteristic of effective interpersonal communicators. On the line provided for each statement, indicate the response that best captures your behaviour:

1. In conversation, I am able to make relevant contributions without interrupting others. (Ch. 6)
2. When I talk, I try to provide information that satisfies others’ needs and keeps the conversation going. (Ch. 6)
3. I describe objectively to others my negative feelings about their behaviour toward me without withholding or blowing up. (Ch. 7)
4. I am quick to praise people for doing things well. (Ch. 7)
5. I criticize people for their mistakes only when they ask for criticism. (Ch. 7)
6. I am able to initiate conflict effectively. (Ch. 8)
7. I am able to respond to conflict effectively. (Ch. 8)
8. I am able to maintain a correct attitude for effective intercultural communication. (Ch 9)
9. I use effective strategies to understand the communication behaviour of people of other cultures. (Ch 9)
10. I attempt to develop specific skills to aid in communication with people of other cultures. (Ch 9)

Based on your responses, select the interpersonal communication behaviour that you would most like to change. Write a communication improvement plan similar to the sample in Chapter 1 (page ##). If you would like verification of your self-review before you write a contract, have a friend or a co-worker complete this same analysis for you.